

Sunday, December 28, 2014

The Holy Family

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

(Sirach 3:2-7,12-14; Psalm 128:1-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:22-40)

Becoming Holy Faith-Filled Families, *Reflecting God's Love to One Another*

My son, take care of your father. (Sirach 3:12)

Have you heard of the “sandwich generation?” It doesn’t have to do with food; it’s the situation many adults find themselves in, sandwiched between children and aging parents who need their care. In fact, a 2013 study found that in the United States, one in seven middle-aged adults provide financial support to their parents and their children, and almost three times that amount provide emotional support.

So how does God make us holy in the midst of these pressures? Don’t forget, our relationship with God, though personal, is meant to be lived out in community and not just individually. And the first and most important community is the family! It’s precisely through the ups and downs of family life that God forms his character in us. It’s a give-and-take; sometimes it’s our turn to give, and other times to receive.

If you’re on the receiving end, let people care for you! Chances are you’ve given much to your family over the years. Remember: as you receive, you are also giving a gift. You are giving them the chance to show their gratitude and to grow in becoming more like Christ. Taking care of your needs could be a pivotal experience in their relationship with God. It’s also a great way for you to grow in detachment and humility!

If you’re being called to give more, try to see in each needy family member the Christ child himself. How would you love him? What would you give to him? Believe that in loving and serving your family, you are loving and serving Jesus—and that he will bless you deeply for it.

On this feast day, God wants us to know that we can all become holy families. Through his grace, your family can become more of a living reflection of his love and life. Your actions in caring for each other and receiving that care will actually enfold his love in the world.

“Father, pour out your grace and make every family a living icon of your love.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the first reading, the book of Sirach teaches us of our responsibilities to our father and mother, with special focus on our fathers -- and the rewards that go along with honoring them (e.g., forgiveness of sins, answered prayers, length of days, and delightful children). How do you (or did you) stack up against the responsibilities described in the first reading?
2. In what way has your relationship with your earthly father helped or hindered your relationship with your Heavenly Father, and your experience of his great love for you? If it has hindered your relationship, what steps can you take to change this?
3. The responsorial psalm tells of the blessings for those who “fear” the Lord? What does “fear of the Lord” mean in your life? What are the positive and negative sides of this fear?
4. The second reading presents the authentic atmosphere of a Christian family where kindness, love, mutual understanding, prayer, thanksgiving and joy in the Holy Spirit should be present. Which of these elements is the Lord asking you to bring more deeply into your home environment?
5. In the second reading, St. Paul also reminds us that forgiveness is a gift we have received from the Lord, and “that as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.” This means we must give this gift to others. To whom is the Lord asking you to give the gift of forgiveness to?
6. The Gospel reading describes the events surrounding the Holy Family’s trip to Jerusalem with Jesus “to present him to the Lord.” Trying to relate our own lives to the Holy Family’s life is a challenge. Theirs originated in crisis and prevailed through many challenges and hardships, including the final crisis—Jesus’ crucifixion. However, by looking to them as our example, we can find the strength to persevere, no matter what hardships come our way. What can you learn from the lives of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and how they lived as a holy, faith-filled family that you can apply to your own family?
7. The meditation ends with these words: “On this feast day, God wants us to know that we can all become holy families. Through his grace, your family can become more of a living reflection of his love and life. Your actions in caring for each other and receiving that care will actually enfold his love in the world.” Do you believe that you are called to be part of a faith-filled, holy family, no matter what your situation or what are the challenges of your life? What are one or two steps you can take to make your own family more faith-filled and holy?
8. Take some time now to pray that your family, and all Christian families, would receive the grace to reflect our heavenly Father’s love to one another and to others. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a member of the NSC Council and a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>), a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the Military, Prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>), for which he is currently a Trustee. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com].