

Sunday, December 27, 2015

The Holy Family

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

2nd Reading: Colossians 3:12-21

Responsorial: Psalm 128:1-5

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

The Holy Family, *Our Model of Faith and Trust and Love and Unity*

He went down with them ... and was obedient to them. (Luke 2:51)

Today is not a national celebration like France's Bastille Day. It's not a military holiday like Anzac Day in New Zealand and Australia. It's not a labor holiday like the ones celebrated in the United States, Canada, or Egypt. But it ought to be. Today is the feast of the Holy Family.

We like to think of the Holy Family as "perfect," full of joy and problem free, but that's not really the case. Theirs is the story of a woman suspected of adultery, a man anxiously planning a divorce, and a family forced to emigrate to a foreign land. It's the story of a couple learning how to cope with their son's unconventional behavior—something we read about in today's Gospel. It's also the sad story of a woman who first loses her husband and then watches as her only child is unjustly executed by the state.

Yes, this family was holy, but it was also very human—dealing with human issues on a daily basis, just like us. That means they know our family's ups and downs as well.

St. Ignatius of Loyola used to pray before a painting of the Holy Family. He liked to imagine himself joining them for dinner or working with Joseph and Jesus in the carpentry shop, asking the Holy Spirit to give him new insights as he did. Isn't this something each of us can do—especially as we think about their very human life together?

Here are some things to think about as you gaze at the Holy Family: first, your family is not ordinary in God's eyes. Every family is special to him. Every family receives his favor. Second, your family can make a difference in this world. Dream big, then try to do good for God. Third, it really is possible for your family to be a holy family. Just try to live in God's love, and it will happen.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, please pray for all families. Let us become more and more like you."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. The first reading addresses the “honor” and “respect” due our parents. If your parents are still alive, what practical steps can you take to demonstrate more honor and respect for them? Also, why do you think it is important to ask them to forgive you for any times that you fell short of giving them honor and respect? If your parents are not alive, you may still want to repent to God for those times. And, of course, to pray for them.
2. The Responsorial Psalm begins with these words: “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.” What do the words, “fear the Lord” mean to you? Why is it much more than just being afraid of God?
3. The Responsorial Psalm also describes the many blessings of fearing the Lord. How would you describe them?
4. In the Second Reading, St. Paul tells us that the authentic atmosphere of a profoundly Christian life is made up of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, thanksgiving, and above all, love. How can you foster these characteristics in a greater way in your family life or in your relationships with other family members?
5. In the Gospel, we see the Holy Family as a model of unity and love in spite of their anxious response to their difficult three-day separation from Jesus. We also see Jesus, in spite of being filled with the urgency to be in his Father’s House, nevertheless, living in whole-hearted obedience to Mary and Joseph. What about you? What are the “urgencies” of your life that can keep you from being more obedient to God’s plan? What are some steps you can take during your busy days to be more in tune with the Lord’s will and to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you?
6. The last paragraph of the meditation begins with these words: “Here are some things to think about as you gaze at the Holy Family: first, your family is not ordinary in God’s eyes. Every family is special to him. Every family receives his favor.” How would you describe the ways God might consider your family “special” in his eyes? In what ways have you and your family received God’s “favor”? What are some ways your family can pass this “favor” on to others and “make a difference in this world”?
7. Take some time now to consecrate your family to the Lord and ask Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to pray for all families that they would live in faith and trust and unity and love – as they were able to do. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, 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. He is also a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]