

Sunday, December 30, 2018

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

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

Responsorial: Psalm 128:1-5

2nd Reading: Colossians 3:12-21

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Reflecting God's Love and Care in Our Love and Care for Our Parents

Take care of your father when he is old. (Sirach 3:12)

Many of us are already living out Sirach's exhortation. In fact, statistics show that in many developed countries, 20 percent of the population is caring for ill, disabled, or aged family members. And they are spending an average of 20 hours per week doing it.

We read this passage from Sirach on the feast of the Holy Family because it speaks to all of our families in a surprising way. It tells us that caring for an elderly family member brings unexpected blessings: forgiveness of sins, spiritual treasures, joy, answered prayers, even long life. Yes, it can be a burden at times, but the blessings far outweigh the burden.

Taking care of our parents does a lot for us spiritually. We see God's self-giving love growing in us. As we walk with them in their later years, we find that we are also walking closer to the Lord. Our perspective on what's important shifts, and we, too, begin thinking more about our heavenly home.

Blessing might not be the first thing you think of though. The idea of being a caregiver can be scary. Financial concerns, emotional strain, and burnout are real issues. You might struggle to find time to recharge yourself, or have trouble avoiding sibling resentments.

But the same study referred to previously also shows that more than 80 percent of caregivers report that the experience is rewarding. They feel satisfaction from giving back to someone who sacrificed for them, they know they're providing quality care, and they feel increased meaning and purpose in life.

If you are currently caring for an elderly loved one, take heart! God is pleased by your efforts and is pouring out grace on you. If you are on the receiving end, know that you are a blessing to your loved ones. If you anticipate a time when you will need to do more for your parents, don't worry. Everything you do to honor and care for them will bless you.

"Lord, help me to honor and love my family."

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

Sunday, December 30, 2018

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading addresses how we are to treat to our parents: *God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them. When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother. Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children, and, when he prays, is heard. Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother.*
 - If your parents are still alive, what practical steps can you take to demonstrate more honor and respect for them? Also, are there any areas that you should ask them to forgive you for the times that you fell short of giving them honor and respect?
 - If your parents are not alive, why is it important to still repent to God for those times when your behavior did not reflect the words of this reading? And, why is it important to continue to pray for them?
 - How would you describe the graces we receive when we “honor,” “revere,” or “obey” our parents? In what ways have you experienced these graces?
2. The Responsorial Psalm begins with these words: *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; your children like olive plants around your table.*
 - What do the words, “fear the Lord” mean to you? Why is it much more than just being afraid of God?
 - How does the psalmist describe “the fruit” and blessings of fearing the Lord?
 - What are the fruits and blessings you have received from fearing the Lord?
3. The Second Reading opens with these words: *Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
 - In the reading, St. Paul describes what the authentic atmosphere of a profoundly Christian life consists of, namely, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness. Why do you think he ends this description with these words, *And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection*?
 - How can you foster these characteristics in a greater way in your own life, in your family life, or in your relationships with others?
4. In the Gospel reading, the Holy Family is a model of unity and love in spite of their “great anxiety” during their difficult three-day search for Jesus. The reading ends with these words: *He (Jesus) went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.*
 - In the reading, what are some lessons we can learn from the actions and responses of Mary and Jesus?
 - What are the “anxieties” in your own 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 during the day, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the first reading: *Take care of your father when he is old* (Sirach 3:12). It ends with these words: “If you are currently caring for an elderly loved one, take heart! God is pleased by your efforts and is pouring out grace on you. If you are on the receiving end, know that you are a blessing to your loved ones. If you anticipate a time when you will need to do more for your parents, don't worry. Everything you do to honor and care for them will bless you.”
 - What do these ending words of the meditation mean to you?
 - What are some ways you can put these words, and other words from the meditation, into practice?
 - How does it describe the fruits of doing so?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to honor and love your family, just as the Mary and Joseph were able to love and honor Jesus, Elizabeth, and all their family members. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Lord, help me to honor and love my family.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]