



Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph A December 29, 2019

Miscellaneous Reflections on the Feast of the Holy Family

The following are four miscellaneous reflections on family.

Reflection #1. *Happy families are involved with helping others.*

Sr. Sandra DeGidio, O.S. M., writes:

Rosemary Haughton, noted theologian and herself the mother of a large family, says, “Contrary to popular belief, the best marriages and the happiest families don’t happen because people concentrate, first of all, on the quality of their relationships, but rather when the couple and then the family as a whole is involved in something bigger.” That “something bigger” is the commandment of Christ to love and serve one another. “My family,” says Jesus, “hears God’s word and acts on it.”

Healthy families make a concerted effort to go beyond their cozy clan, to enlarge their focus to include the people around them in their communities and the world who are less fortunate. They involve themselves in parish outreach projects. They volunteer at local soup kitchens and contribute service to local community projects like Habitat For Humanity, shelters for the homeless or Food for the Hungry.

Healthy families who value service to others not only see the need to serve others, they find concrete ways to assist them. They strive to simplify their lives in order to share with those who have less. They weed out their closets and donate good used clothing to thrift shops or Goodwill without seeking to replace the clothing with new. They are open to others and generously hospitable. They find joy in welcoming strangers by sharing their homes and themselves with others, especially in times of disaster.

Reflection #2. *Good families all learn to deal with difficulties and challenges.*

Jay Cormier writes:

In his book, *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Elie Wiesel (famous survivor of Nazi war camps) recalls a terrible moment confronting his family. The war was coming to an end, but the deportation of the Jews continued. Elie—who was fifteen at the time—his parents, and three sisters faced deportation to the Nazi concentration camp at Birkenau. Maria, a Christian and the family’s housekeeper, begged the Wiesels to hide in her family’s cabin in the mountains. The family gathered at the kitchen table for a family meeting: Should they go with Maria or stay and take their chances? The family decided to stay. “A Jew must never be separated from his community,” Elie’s father said. “What happens to everyone else happens to us as well.”

Elie Wiesel writes of their decision: “My father was right. We wanted to stay together, like everyone else. Family unity is one of our important traditions, as the enemy well knew.... The strength of the family tie, which had contributed to the survival of our people for centuries, became a tool in its exterminator’s hands.”

Like the Wiesels, the family of Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus had to endure a great deal as well the scandal of Mary’s pregnancy, Mary’s giving birth far from home, their fleeing from Herod’s murderous wrath. Yet their love for one another and their trust in God kept their family together through the worst of times.

Every family experiences its share of difficult moments and challenges. Today, on this Sunday after Christmas, we celebrate “family”—that unique nucleus of society that nurtures and supports us throughout our journey on earth. This Christmas season, may we rediscover the special bond that transforms a household into a family—a family that is a harbor of forgiveness and understanding and a safe place of unconditional love, welcome, and acceptance.

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Reflection question:

What has been the hardest situation your family has had to deal with? How were you able to cope with it?

Prayer: Loving Father, in times of tension, bless our family with the hope of your consolation and forgiveness; in times of joy, bless us with a spirit of thankfulness, never letting us forget that you are Father of us all.

Reflection #3. How can a sense of Jesus' presence transform a family or community?

Patricia Sanchez writes:

On this, the feast of the Holy Family, the gathered assembly is invited to reflect, not only upon that holy threesome who have figured so importantly in our salvation history, but also upon all the other families that comprise the one universal family of humankind.

Unfortunately, and due to a variety of factors, the ties that bind us one to another within our global network of families have suffered a series of assaults over the past several decades. This is a fact that need not be argued; the evidence of relational weakness and even decay is obvious and this weakness affects every one of us to one degree or another. Rather than bemoan the fact and belabor the point, our attention might be better directed and our efforts better spent in trying to effect change, conversion and growth within the family unit. "If we can change the culture of our families," says Steve W. Vannoy (*The Ten Greatest Gifts I Give My Children*, Simon and Schuster, New York: 1994) "surely that change will radiate out to touch those around us." In this way, our society will be improved from the inside out, family by family. The following fable offers a powerful example of the contagious grace of change.

The membership of a once numerous order of monks dwindled over the years, until there were only five brothers left in what had been a thriving community. For years, people from the surrounding area had been drawn to the monastery in search of the learning and spiritual renewal they found there. Now, no one ever visited as the spirit of the place and its inhabitants seemed to be slowly dying.

One day, however, a rabbi happened by to visit. When he was about to leave, one of the brothers asked the rabbi if he had any advise on how to revitalize themselves and make their monastery a spiritual center once again. After a few moments, the rabbi replied, "The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you." Flabbergasted, the brothers replied, "The Messiah among us? Impossible!"

As the weeks passed, the brothers puzzled over the rabbi's startling revelation. If the Messiah were here, who would it be? Maybe, Brother Timothy . . . he's the abbot

and in his capacity as leader, he could surely be chosen to be the Messiah. . . .

It couldn't be Bro. Mark; he's always so argumentative, but, he's usually right. . . . Or maybe, it's Bro. Pius who tends the garden and the animals. He could probably nourish a troubled world if he were the Messiah.

Surely, it could be Bro. Dominic; he's studious, learned and familiar with all the great spiritual writers. It couldn't be Peter, could it? Certainly, the Messiah couldn't be the one who cleaned toilets, dirty laundry and scrubbed the pots and pans each day. Or, could it?

Since the monks were unable to determine which one of them was the Messiah, they began to treat one another as though each were the one. Moreover, just in case he himself might be the Messiah, each monk began to treat himself with new respect and to conduct himself with greater dignity.

Within a few weeks, the monastery's occasional visitors were awed by the love, goodness and revitalized spirituality they experienced. They returned again and again and brought new friends along. Soon, a few young men asked to be admitted to the order and the monastery thrived again.

Imagine the possibilities for growth and renewal if each family were to take to heart the rabbi's words, "The Messiah is one of you." How much more might spouses love and cherish one another How much more might parents value their children, protect them, teach them and lovingly attend to their needs How much more might children honor and appreciate their parents. If each member of every family were to reverence one another as the Messiah, i.e., as Jesus who is our Savior and brother, how much might that strengthen and secure those familial bonds that are the infrastructure, without which our society has no future.

Today, the love shared among the Holy Family offers us both a witness and challenge. To love one another as they did requires that we look beyond the faults and idiosyncrasies that annoy us in order to discover the Christ who lives in each of us. Such love requires that we replace nitpicking, nagging and criticism with wise counsel, humbly offered, and encouragement and praise, generously bestowed. Such was the love that became incarnate among us and which we reveled in celebrating at Christmas. Such is also the love that has brought us to the end of this year and will carry us through to the new millennium and beyond.

(Used with permission, *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary Years, A, B, C.* by Patricia Sanchez, - Sheed & Ward publisher (9-1-89.)

Reflection #4. God - A Divine Migrant

Fr. Daniel Groody writes:

Reflection: With Herod's armies on their donkey's tail and a target on their son's back, this new family gets off to a rough start! It would be a hard beginning for any family, let alone God's anointed Holy Family! Their privileged role in salvation history did not dispense them from the challenges, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities that are part of every human journey.

Though this story may be familiar to us, the underlying trials of this family should not be lightly glossed over. Instead of settling down, they are forcibly uprooted and flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's murderous rage. We can only imagine the many times Mary and Joseph must have thought, *Good God, if this son of ours is so special, why must we go through so much hardship?* As the drama unfolds, we can only wonder why God would allow his own family—and even his own self—to undergo such tribulation?

As we enter more deeply into this mystery, we realize that God in Jesus, not only leaves his homeland and enters our broken world as a “divine migrant,” but he and his family also become refugees! Matthew only gives us ten brief verses to describe this journey, but we know that coming out of Egypt, his story will align with Israel's own story. But this time the promise on the horizon is not only for release from physical bondage but freedom from slavery to sin and death on a journey that will lead to the road of salvation.

Meditation: Today there are more than sixty-five million people in our world like Mary, Joseph, and Jesus who are forcibly displaced from their homelands because of persecution, war, or violence. We can only imagine how the Holy Family felt when good-hearted people unsuspectingly helped them in their need and extended spontaneous gestures of support and kindness. We cannot do everything to relieve the pain of those on the move, but we can do something. How can I make a stranger feel welcome today, honor their dignity, or reach out to those near me who are living away from their homeland?

Prayer: *Lord, without knowing the road ahead, the Holy Family learned how to trust you one step at a time as they navigated their way through the challenges of life. Guide me in your goodness, even when I do not know the way ahead or how you are leading me.*

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For Trust And Confidence In God

**My God, I want to have confidence in your love,
but so many things seem to hold me back:
past wounds, past hurts, past betrayals, past
sins—mine and others.**

**Open my eyes. Open my heart.
Enable me to take the leap of faith
that is needed now.**

**Holiness isn't a matter of starting to love you
some time in the future, or even tomorrow.**

**I don't have to wait until I become a better
person, more worthy, more virtuous.**

**It's a matter of trusting in your mercy today,
just as I am.**

**You showed this to the saints; show me, too,
and give me a spirit of great confidence.**

**I ask this through your beloved Son,
our merciful Saviour. Amen.**

Elizabeth Ruth Obbard

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

**Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.**

**Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.**

**Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.**

**Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.**

**Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.**

Amen.

St. Augustine

For more beautiful prayers, see Treasury of Prayers on the list of my writings on our website.

Have a blessed week,

