

# FROM THE PASTOR'S



## Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph December 30, 2007 A

### STORIES AND REFLECTIONS ON FAMILY ON THIS FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

The following are a miscellaneous series of reflections, stories and questions on today's readings and on family life. The first three reflections are by Alice Camille.

*First Reading: Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14*

**Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them; he stores up riches who reveres his mother.**

Recently I encountered an endearing child in a department store who was so courteous to the service people that she seemed like a tiny adult. Then I saw her interact with her mother, who treated the girl with the same gentleness and respect. It was obvious at what school the child had learned her lessons. Respect for the dignity of another may seem like a small thing, but it's a vanishing trait in our culture. Generations of television have saturated us with the "ranking" dynamic: everybody in TV families tries to get one-up on spouses, children, parents, and friends.

Putting people down or making a cutting remark at someone else's expense has been modeled to us as the way family members talk to one another. If we want that to change, we have to start small by respecting the smallest members of the family. Respect is learned before it's earned.

#### Reflection Questions

Who has been your teacher when it comes to respecting the older and vulnerable members of society?

*Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-21*

**Put on, as God's chosen ones, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.**

Paul calls love "the bond of perfection." But he sees it as wrapping paper around a whole group of virtuous behaviors that combine to make love real and measurable. We might use this group as a checklist for our present behavior, or as a recommendation for upcoming New Year's resolutions. Do we feel

compassion for all who suffer? Do we show kindness to those around us—regardless of how they may treat us? Do we put ourselves first, or last, on a regular basis? Is gentleness what people have come to expect from us? Do we practice patience, or do we give free rein to irritation and rage? Do we readily forgive, or nurse and rehearse the injuries others have dealt us? We can't wrap our lives with love if these virtues are not found within.

#### Reflection Questions

Of the seven above named virtues, which is the easiest and most difficult for you to practice? Which might become your next character building one?

*Third Reading: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23*

**The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you."**

Joseph couldn't be expected to raise his child and tend his family in an environment of danger and hostility like the one Herod's reign created. A holy family must be nurtured and sustained in an atmosphere of love and security. If that meant becoming refugees in a foreign land, so be it. Today, millions of families around the world have been forced to make the same choice because of hostile governments, crumbling economies, and the lack of freedom to pursue their own beliefs and values. In this land of freedom and opportunity, we have the chance to welcome these families or to share our goods and support with them as they make their way to a better future. It would have been tragic if Joseph had taken his family all the way to Egypt, only to find the doors barred against him.

In another of her reflections on this reading, Alice Camille writes:

*What makes this family holy is their attentiveness to God's word, in a visitation by an angel, in a dream, always willing to move in the direction that God prompts. They were not a model family living a perfect existence. They were a real family who faced real emergencies and tests to their lives. And from the start, they were ready to follow the will of their Lord.*

### Reflection Questions

- We have millions of undocumented families in our country. Some see them as illegal aliens and breakers of the law that need to be sent home. Others see them as brothers and sisters that always need to be treated with respect, after all, the Holy Family may have been illegal aliens while they lived in Egypt. Where do you stand on this issue? To what extent does your stance reflect the gospel?
- In your opinion, what makes a family holy? How do you seek to contribute to making your family a holy family?

### Other reflections on the Family

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.

Reflecting on today’s feast, 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.

**Meditation:** 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.*

Have a blessed week,

