



## The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph December 30, 2012 C

### LOVE WILL GET US HOME

Scripture scholar, Alice Camille, shares the following reflections on today's three readings. She takes one verse from the reading and offers a reflection question for us to think about.

#### FIRST READING

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

*The one who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother.*

My mom is first to declare that she's not a perfect woman. But she was and is the perfect mother for me. Meanwhile, Dad and I had a more contentious relationship: we buried the hatchet but kept small knives handy, just in case. Even so, the love between us remained the bottom line. Honoring our parents doesn't mean drawing a fake halo around our memories of these people, who were human beings before they were ever mother and father to us. It doesn't mean stifling the truth about their shortcomings (and ours!) or the inevitable limitations of the relationship. Honor for parents is like saluting the flag or keeping your Catholic ID card in your wallet: it doesn't suggest that everything done in the name of country or church is beyond question. Honor is an acknowledgment of the inescapable debt we owe to others that we are here at all. Despite rumors to the contrary, there's no such thing as a self-made man or woman. We are who we are because of those who went before us. If we want to be more than this, well, that's up to us.

**Reflection Question:** *To whom do you owe the best of who you are: family, teachers, mentors, friends? Find ways to give thanks.*

#### SECOND READING

**Colossians 3:12-21**

*And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.*

Love will get us home. In a true sense, love will make our home a place worthy of the name. Love will also take us where we want to go and most of all, help us to arrive at a satisfying self. No matter who you live with—in a large community, a nuclear family, or a studio apartment with a spider plant—you've got to live with

yourself. It that's a tough assignment, that's the place to begin to learn how to love. To read the manual on this, get yourself a Bible and look at the first chapter of Genesis and the ever-popular John 3:16, and everything in between.

"Love is the bond of perfection," says Colossians. It doesn't say love will make your relationships perfect, much less make us perfect people to engage those relationships. Love fills in the cracks and gaps and chasms between folks who sincerely seek to live in its light. Love means the hurt can stop hurting someday, the shortcomings will sprout planks sturdy enough to walk across, forgiveness is possible and even likely. Love is the only spirit that can make the world a home for all of us.

**Reflection Question:** *Which relationships aren't working yet? How can love help?*

#### GOSPEL

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

*"Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt...."*

Love is the spirit that bound the man Joseph to his God, and then to a woman already primed with life that wasn't, technically speaking, his concern. Love gave Joseph the courage to assume responsibility for the mother and child, despite social prohibitions, disapproval, and even danger. Love ferried this improbable little family first to faraway Egypt, and then back to Nazareth in an attempt to resume what we might call normal life. Fat chance of that. This family unit, conceived in the mind of God, would never be typical in any way. And for that we can all be grateful.

Love made the Holy Family possible. Love is the only thing that makes family possible, period. You can have a houseful of people, but no one mistakes proximity for belonging. Yet with love, distances as broad as Egypt, as wide as eternity, as unfathomable as Virgin Birth, can't tear a family apart. Love will never fail to get us home. It's our down payment on a return ticket, no matter how far the journey takes us.

**Reflection Question:** *How can love liberate us to take every wild adventure and scale every obstacle?*

#### LET US PRAY....

*Loving God, in the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ,*

*the fullness of your compassion became radiant in our world. Help us to walk by the light of your love as the people united to you through him, with him, and in him. Amen.*

## **Losing Jesus**

Imagine losing Jesus.

You work hard to provide for your family, but your work takes you away too many days and nights, and you lose Jesus.

You become distracted by all the demands placed on you; when you are finally able to look up, you lose Jesus.

You try to walk Jesus' path, you want to live his Gospel—but you cut too many corners, you go along to get along one too many times, you take too many moral and ethical shortcuts, and you lose Jesus.

You assume that your position is the right one—because it works for you. But by the time you realize that your position is not right but convenient, safe but not just, good for you but bad for the common good, you lose Jesus.

You experience a separation too great, a betrayal too painful, a grief too dark. You lose Jesus.

God does not seem to hear you, so you stop praying.

Church becomes an empty cavern, so you disengage.

The darkness and cold of winter has gripped your spirit, so you fill the void in your soul any way you can—if only to forget for the moment.

You lose Jesus.

We know the anxiety and terror Mary and Joseph felt.

What is Jesus?

But the reality is that while we may lose Jesus, Jesus is not lost to us.

He is there in our temples, traveling in our caravans, dwelling with our families.

All we have to do is look and we will find him.

[Suggested by Lauren F. Winner in *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis.*]

**In the promise of Emmanuel—"God with us"—God comes to make his dwelling in our midst in the person of Jesus. Jesus remains with us even when he seems most distant and farthest away, when he is nowhere to be found. He is with us in the love and compassion of family and friends, in the forgiveness we receive and give, in the generosity and healing we make**

**happen even in the simplest and most hidden ways. With the blessed assurance of his constant presence, let us seek out Jesus in every moment and experience and relationship of the New Year.**

## **The parable of the geese**

One Christmas Eve, a snowstorm was raging. A woman pleaded with her husband to join her in going to the Christmas Eve service in the village. But he said no. Not very religious and cynical of Christmas, he said he would just sit by the fire.

He sat in his great chair and dozed off, until he was awakened by three loud thumps on the window. He looked out into the snow and saw three geese hopping about, looking stunned. They had lost their way in the storm; they were looking for a place to find warmth when the wind hurled them into the window.

The man put on his coat and ran out to the barn. He opened the barn door and turned on the light in hopes that the geese would find their way in. But the birds were too scared or hurt or confused and kept hopping farther and farther away. Desperate to help them, the man thought, *If only I were one of them, then they would trust me and I could lead them to safety.*

And then he heard the church bells in the village. And he realized what Christmas was about: God had become one of us, to lead us to safety.

**The Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard told this story to explain the Incarnation—God becoming human for us. Here, in the Christ Child, the sacred is not some abstract concept of the theological theory: the love of God has become real to us in this birth; the Lord God has descended from the heavens to become one of us in order to show us how we might become like him. Our God knows that our lives are filled with disappointment, pain and despair; he has lived through the storms and crises we all live through; he has given us hope in our world by promising us life in his world. The challenge of Christmas is to continue to make that love incarnate in our own lives and the lives of those we love.**

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Wishing you a Most Blessed New Year,

