

## Homily of the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Year A, 2025

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Today's feast is of utmost importance to all of us since we all belong to families; and the family is the first and the greatest institution God created. No doubt, we are passing through difficult times whereby many families are fractured, hurting, and disordered in one way or another. Since families are the foundations and the constituents of societies, fractured, hurting, and disordered families mean fractured, hurting, and disordered societies. Therefore, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is a model for all families.

Being a holy family did not mean that everything was well and smooth for them. It was a lowly family with many ups and downs. Mary's pregnancy brought a troubling situation for both Mary and Joseph. However, they accepted the situation when each of them was ministered to by the angel of the Lord. Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). As for Joseph, "When he awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded and took his wife into his home" (Matthew 1:24-25). Joseph became Jesus' foster father. He played the role exceptionally well. May God bless all good foster parents and all foster carers. We know that there are horrible foster parents and foster carers. We hear many gruesome stories.

Mary gave birth to Jesus in a very difficult circumstance. After a long journey on foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census, a distance of about 100 miles (161 kilometers), there was no inn. They went to a shed on a farm where Mary gave birth to Jesus. It was not recorded that any nurse or midwife was available to help. We can only imagine how tough it was for the two of them, all alone.

During the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Simeon prophesied to Mary that a sword would pierce her heart. A sword pierced Mary's heart when the family fled to Egypt to save Jesus from being murdered by Herod. Today's gospel tells us the story. One other good thing about their escape to Africa is that Africa also became central in salvation history. A sword pierced her heart when Jesus got separated from her and Joseph after the feast of Passover in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple after searching for him for three days. A sword pierced Mary's heart when she witnessed Jesus carrying the cross, his crucifixion, his death, and his burial. As we can see, the Holy Family was not spared from earthly troubles.

Therefore, we have so much to learn from the Holy Family that can help us to keep our families from falling apart. Pope Paul VI describes the Holy Family as a school of Nazareth where we learn true science of life and the higher wisdom of divine truth. We pray to draw courage and wisdom from the Holy Family's experience as we journey through our family's ups and downs.

The first reading reminds us that, "God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority over her [children]." Parents must not lose this God-given authority. Parents must not allow governments, social media, and gadgets to snatch their children from them. Parents must not give in to children's manipulations. They are experts at that. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound to the heart of a youth, but the rod of discipline will drive it out." And Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod hates the child, but whoever loves will apply discipline." We are seeing what the society is becoming as the society sees discipline as abuse and hurting children, and so we no longer discipline them. One obvious result of this is that we have a generation that is spiritually hollow, unable to see meaning in hard work and perseverance, and incapable of prevailing in hardship. Jesus grew under his parents and became strong, filled with wisdom; and God's favor rested upon him (Luke 2:40). "Jesus grew under his parents" means that Jesus grew under the discipline of his parents.

The first reading contains blessings for children who honor their parents and who take care of their parents in their old age. However, Sirach 3:16 warns children who disrespect their parents and abandon them parents in their old age: “Those who neglect their father are like blasphemers; those who provoke their mother are accursed by their Creator”. On the other hand, the second reading challenges parents not to maltreat their children so that they may not become discouraged (Colossians 3:21). Everyone has an important part to play.

There is no perfect family. Turning on one another and violence to one another make matters worse. For this reason, the second reading encourages us on how to cope with family imperfections to avoid disorderliness, fights, breakdowns, and disintegrations. The reading says, “Put on ... heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. ... And over all these, put on love.... And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, ... 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...” (Colossians 3:12-17). We can see, here, that St. Paul also encourages families to pray together. “A family that prays together stays together.”

Our reflection today goes beyond our biological families. It extends to other families we belong to such as church family, religious family, business family, groups, associations, and so on.

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph pray for our families. Amen.

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