

Homily For the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Year C

St. Peter's 8:00 AM/9:30 AM Masses - December 26, 2021

1 Samuel 1:20-28 "When Hannah had weaned him, she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh."

Psalms 84 "Blessed are those who live in your house, O Lord, ever singing your praise."

1 John 3:1-2,21-24 "Whoever obeys his commandments abides in him, and he abides in them."

Luke 2:41-52 "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? Then he went and was obedient."

All In A Family

Introduction

So many ancient prophecies of Emmanuel. God is with us. Everything that has happened in history has been pointing towards the fulfilment of the greatest promise of all, a saviour of his people. Along the way, there have been hints of glorious light, visible but not quite fully seen. But the promise has also continued sometimes in the thickest darkness where there has seemed to be no light at all. Then, suddenly, mysteriously, the one holy God acts decisively. In what way? The birth of a child into a family. The Lamb of God begins in swaddling clothes in a manger. God's saving actions now depend on the unfolding of ordinary, day to day family life.

Meaning of Family

Today we call the feast of the Holy Family. We know that to be made up of Joseph, Mary and, of course, the child Jesus. There is something about that family that gives meaning to the whole idea of family. Families come in all shapes and sizes, but not everything is a family. If it was, then that would be a useless term, a meaningless definition. If a word or concept can mean anything at all, then it really means nothing. In today's culture, the effort to redefine the family has with it that very risk.

For a very long time, the family was seen as the foundation of society. Healthy families mean healthy societies. One of the ways we can know that this is true is because of the attack on family that has been going on for some time in our

culture. No enemy ever attacks what is unimportant. Attacks are always aimed at the strength of an opposition. We have proof of how important the family is because that is the focus of the attack by our enemy, which is the enemy of God, which is the forces of evil, which is led by Satan, the devil, who prowls around seeking the ruin of families and souls.

Just one weapon of the attack on family is technology. It's wonderful what we have been able to accomplish with our technology. Most of us would not want to do without it. One of the problems is that it always wants us to do updates. When those updates don't work anymore, that piece of technology is obsolete. Contemporary culture wants us to think in that way. It wants us to update not just our culture and our technology, but also our understanding of family. Change your ideas or become obsolete is the cry of that philosophy.

Our Families

In my family growing up, this was one of those years we kids did not like. Going to church on Christmas was ok because when we got home after 8:00 AM mass, it was time for presents and breakfast and just the best time in the world. The problem was next morning when mom got us up to go to church for the second day in a row. I remember one of us asking whether the Pope ever had to go to mass two days in a row. Of course, he did, and does. That's what you do when you love Jesus so much that you want to be there with all the other people who love him like that.

There are many kinds of relationships. But family has a particular kind of identity which no other relationships have. The specific purpose of family is to participate in the bringing about and caring for new life. That's the basics. Other relationships can be positive and wonderful, but family is the environment where children learn and grow to become what God has made them for.

We might say that someone is like family to me. This tells us that there is a kind of nurturing relationship that has the characteristics of a family. So that just proves the importance of that institution which God has made.

Many families we know of, maybe even our own, have wounded relationships and perhaps don't fulfil what they can be. That's to be expected. We are a broken people and our relationships, even in families, are often going to experience brokenness. But, unlike technology that doesn't work anymore, we don't throw it out. We turn it over to God and cry out to him from the depths of our hearts: Do not abandon us, O Lord. Heal our hearts.

Queen Elizabeth, in her Christmas message gave a beautiful tribute to her husband, Prince Philip, after his death this year. Now the royal family has its own brokenness, but the Queen sees something in her family that is a reflection of the birth of the Christ child.

Hanna's Family

Hanna tells us something about family. She prayed her heart out for a child. Many couples these days experience the heartache of wanting a child but it doesn't happen. But their desire itself is holy and is life giving. Sometimes, they adopt. Sometimes they refocus their family hopes on other ways to nurture life.

Hanna is one of the greatest women of salvation history, because she recognizes her child as a gift from God, the result of God listening to her cry. Because of this, she does something none of us would want to do. She gives the child back to God. That child is Samuel. Samuel is the prophet who holds the moral compass for the whole nation, who anoints the first kings of Israel, including King David.

Hanna is a light in the darkness, who points forward to Mary, who will give her child back to God, in fact to the whole world. Today, we are reluctant to give our sons and daughters to God. But, even in our own time, there have been mothers proud to do this. I was at a major ordination event in Quebec City. There were 12 men being ordained to the priesthood. Two of them were brothers. The tradition at an ordination is that a mother or father helps put on the vestments of the newly ordained. A thousand people watched the most beautiful moment of a mother dressing her two sons in their vestments. When they were tiny, she had put on their clothes. Now, she was dressing them for their service to God and the Church. Many of us had tears as we recognized this great sacrifice of a mother.

The Holy Family

Jesus was born in the most messy of fashions. Families are messy and God comes to us in that same way. The Holy Family shows us that all families have challenges and struggles.

Kids want to know about his childhood. But all we have is this one event, when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. However they understood his divinity, they were human parents trying to be mother and father.

There are so many strange things going on in this event in the life of the Holy Family. Each of them is meant to teach us something. In a way, we are in the same school of holiness as Mary and Joseph. They had an excellent relationship with their son. See how they trusted him so much that they didn't worry if he wasn't right there when they headed back to Nazareth. But then they had the anxiety all parents would feel when they realized he was gone. Imagine a day's journey back to Jerusalem with that anxiety. Then three days of looking for him. Note how this represents the three days Jesus spent in the darkness of the tomb while everyone thought God's plan had ended in disaster.

The story takes a strange turn. Jesus is in the temple. Mary says what any parent would: Why have you done this to us? Jesus answer tells us something that we must listen to carefully. This was a moment that his parents had prepared him for, this ministry, of teaching the nature of God to others. They have to give him up to his higher calling. They can't hold on to him. Mary says, your father and I have been looking for you. Jesus says, didn't you know I must be in my father's house? Earthly father. Heavenly father. All Mary can do is treasure this revelation in her heart as she learns of the higher calling of a mother and father. Jesus has just said thank you for preparing him for this moment when he would be about the business of doing his father's will. The Holy Family has done what God asked of it.

The Family of God

The Holy Family shows us that all families have challenges and struggles. It is also an important sign and reminder of the need for leaders of families to turn to God when the things of complex modern life happen in our families.

I think we would all recognize that we don't have the level of holiness of THE Holy Family. Maybe we are not in the running for Holy Family of the Year. But we are only asked to be obedient to the task that is already in front of us.

Call To Action

Because of the Holy Family, you and I now know that God loves us more than we can imagine, and more than I can love myself. This is because we are part of the family of God, no matter what has happened in our earthly families. Jesus is Emmanuel when we don't think anyone is with us. Jesus is our hope, no matter whether there seems little reason to hope. Someone said: I always believed in God. I didn't know that he believed in me. That's what we learn in God's family.

Mary and Joseph's Son has already taken care of the hardest part of family life. He has paved the way to heaven with the sacrifice of his own blood and has gone before us to conquer the dragons and demons we face. Our task now - the invitation put out there for us - is to join his family as sons and daughters. We do this by how we open the gift of our baptism to receive its grace. We do this by committing ourselves to embrace Mary as our comforter and nurturer, and Joseph as an earthly father who teaches his children faithful obedience to our heavenly Father. We do this by going to the house of the heavenly Father, from whom all families take their name. Let us go to the house of the Lord together as the family of God.

Key Verses Today

Entrance Antiphon: *The shepherds went in haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in a manger.*

Collect: *O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family; graciously grant that we may imitate them in practising the virtues of family life, and so delight one day in eternal rewards.*

Samuel: *Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord." Hannah said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him to the presence of the Lord, for all time." When she had weaned him, she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, and they brought the child to Eli. She said, "As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord for this child." Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.*

Psalm: *Blessed are those who live in your house, O Lord, ever singing your praise. Blessed are those whose strength is in you. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer. Look on the face of your anointed.*

1 John: *Beloved, we are God's children now. What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever obeys his commandments abides in him, and he abides in them.*

Luke: *Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual. When they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. They started to look for him. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. His parents were astonished and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand. Then he went with them and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in favour with God and man."*