

## **Holy Family 12/30/18**

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Col 3:12-17 (short); Lk 2:41-52

Family life is important to peace in our own lives, it is essential to the building of the Church, and it is vital to the stability of our society. Yet, sometimes these people we are closest to by blood or marriage can be some of the more challenging people to deal with. We can have mixed feeling of love, frustration, passion, and even anger. This weird mixture of feelings was brilliantly stated by a friend of mine. About 10 years ago he was having some frustrated conversation with her teenaged son, and after he sullenly left the room she turned to me and said “how can you loves something so much ... and still want to kill it”? I spent part of Christmas this year at their house and both are still alive - and there was no tension between them. Time passed and the strength of their bond overrode the things that happened those years ago.

We have all had times as kids when our parents got under our skin, and as parents there are times when kids frustrate you. It is like the story in the Gospel today. The Holy Family is on a trip - and Jesus goes missing. It's interesting what Mary says when they find him: *Son, why have you done this to us?* They were worried, they were frantically searching for three days. She doesn't say “son why have you done this thing” - but why have you done this to us. We can sometimes forget that when we do things on our own that we may think are ok, we can affect our loved ones in ways we don't understand. The young man I told you about didn't think that his attitude would hurt his mother and father, and probably thought they deserved it. But unlike him, Jesus responds to Mary's frustrated question with another question: *Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* Don't think that Jesus said this in a disrespectful or snotty way, just perhaps underestimating the level of anxiety he had created in Mary and Joseph or trying to tell them not to be so worried. But they were worried, because they loved him. You'll notice that Jesus gives them no backtalk and although he is God made human - and can kinda do what he wants - he went with them and *was obedient to them*.

This is a great example of family life and of Christian charity. Not just leaning on what may be your rights, not just saying “I am so and so” or “I am of such and such an age”, or “I am the one in this argument who is in the right” - but being willing to show family love and respect despite all that. Jesus does this, he is God's son - as he makes clear by calling the temple his Father's house - he could say “I really don't need to listen to you, I'll come back when I am

ready,” but he goes back with them. Scripture tells us *they did not understand what he said to them* - but he doesn't turn like an angry teen and say “you don't understand,” he simply lets it go and has compassion for their worry and confusion and comes with them.

We can get too worked up about what are our rights, what we are entitled to, what we deserve to have, how we deserve to be treated. But love demands that we act like Jesus who placed the feelings of his family and the family unity over what he may have said he was entitled to. We heard in the first reading: *Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them. When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother.* In another place we hear *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.*<sup>1</sup> We are called to follow the example of the Holy Family and honor our family members, revere them, and assist them, not provoke them. This is a thing that this reading tells us is pleasing to the Lord, and also has a larger effect in the family. One line from this reading also says: *he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother* - and this points to a great truth. Your efforts at honor, kindness, respect, and patience with one member of the family helps to create a calm and level of love in the family that effects others - and likewise your difficulties with one member affect the peace of others as well.

The family is a training ground; but training for what? This is the bigger picture of the Lord's message. We are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are all children of one Father in heaven, we are all bound to each other and are called to love each other using the same standards that so sensibly apply to a family. Paul was constantly making that point to his little church communities. Listen to the second reading: *Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.* We are called to follow Jesus in displaying love in our families, and we are called to treat others in the larger family of the church as our brothers and sisters. Although this means that we will sometimes have to “let the other one win,” we will sometimes have to care for and show love someone when we don't feel we have to, we might have to put our own needs after someone else's - this is the path to being more like the God who forgives us, and brings us closer to a larger communal experience of family love that is modeled today by the Holy Family.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 6:4