

December 29, 2024, Feast of The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
Theme: Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, A Model For Us All

During this Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They're a perfect model for Holy Family that the holy Mother Church would like us, her beloved children, to look up to as a model of the holy family we should all aspire to be.

In the first reading, we are presented with the family of Samuel, Hannah, and Elkanah. Hannah, who was barren, prayed to God that if God should bless her with a son, she would give him back to God for his service. In today's first reading, Hannah did exactly as she promised God she would do. Samuel grew up and became a great prophet, a man of God, and a great judge in Israel. Do we also give thanks to God for blessing us with our family? Do we also share His blessings with Him and others in our community like Hannah and her family did?

Luke's Gospel reading today presents us with the experience of the Holy Family that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had in Jerusalem. They went to an annual Jewish Passover pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. In the Jewish culture, the twelfth year of age marks the beginning of the transition into adulthood for a Jewish male child. This might explain why his parents thought Jesus is a young man and they do not need to strictly monitor him like a child. Unfortunately, there was miscommunication. Mary and Joseph did not know Jesus was staying behind in the temple, Jerusalem, to do his heavenly Father's work. As they were going back home, they realized a day later that their beloved son, Jesus was not with the crowd. Luke told us they had a three-day journey back to Jerusalem only to find him sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. Luke said when his parents saw him, they were astonished. His beloved mother Mary questioned him why he made them worry about him. Listen to what Jesus said to his beloved mother and foster father: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" I wonder if you were the parents of Jesus, how would have reacted to your son's response?

Fellow parishioners, this 'miscommunication/misunderstanding' did not break up this holy family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Luke told us Jesus went down with them to their hometown, Nazareth, and was obedient to them. One of the challenges that breaks up a family is lack of dialogue and communication. Let us take sometime today to reflect on the life of this Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They have much to offer us to make our families also holy. My dear people of God, when we talk about the holy family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, many of us, if not all, think that this family is immune from the ups and downs of human families. The family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, is a model of holy family for us because of their deep faith in God and their profound love that prevailed in their family. Joseph and Mary were great, responsible parents, and Jesus was an obedient child. Even though Jesus is God, the Son, he learned to obey his earthly parents as Scripture tells us. For instance, St. Paul explains the obedience and humility of Jesus so beautifully: "Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even on a cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

It is true that we choose friends and not family, but I truly believe that God did not make a mistake with your family. Your family is God's gift to you. There may be some painful moments in our family but unfortunately, these are part of normal family life. It is how we deal with our human struggles that will make our family holy or not. As you may know very well, those we truly love are those who may 'hurt' us the most.

We're blessed to have our biological family and also church family. We experience joy but also at times, sadness. It is part of human life. We have to learn to forgive and to love one another as Jesus, Mary, and Joseph did in their family, the Holy Family.

The second reading reminds us that the greatest sign of God's love for us is the gift of his beloved Son, Jesus. Like Jesus who has a double identity, namely, Son of Mary and Joseph, and also Son of God, we also are blessed with a double identity--children of our parents and also children of God. This implies our human family must mirror the holy family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

On this Sunday, December 29, 2024, our holy Father, Pope Francis has launched the Jubilee Year of Hope, 2025, with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope." Today, our bishop, the Most Rev. Mark Brennan, will celebrate this special Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Wheeling, and his Vicar General, the Very Rev. John Rice, will be the main celebrate at the co-cathedral in Charleston.

Happy and blessed Feast of Holy Family to you all!