

HOLY FAMILY (2017/18 - B)

On the Sunday after Christmas, we always celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. That's the name we give to the little family formed by Saint Joseph, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Christ Child.

We call them "The Holy Family" because that indeed is what they are. The Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and God is holy because there is no evil in Him at all. He is holiness itself.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is also holy. She was preserved free from Original Sin by a special grace from the very moment of her conception. Furthermore, the Church has consistently taught that throughout her life, she never committed any actual sins.

Finally, there is Saint Joseph whom the Scriptures call a "just man." He carried out his role as husband to Mary and as foster-father to Jesus with great faithfulness and love.

For these reasons, we call the family formed by Saint Joseph, the Blessed Virgin Mary and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Family. Also for these reasons, the Church presents the members of the Holy Family to us as models and examples for us to follow.

So first, we are all children and as such we can follow the example of Jesus who was obedient to His parents when He was a child and who continued to be respectful of them and to care for them when He was an adult. You might recall that even when He was dying on the cross He made provisions for Saint John to care for His Mother Mary.

Those who are husbands and fathers can follow the example of Saint Joseph who was faithful in his role as husband and as foster-father to Jesus. As head of his family, he cared for and protected the Blessed Virgin and the Baby Jesus. When King Herod sought to kill the Christ Child, Saint Joseph defended his family by taking the Child and His mother Mary to Egypt out of the reach of Herod's soldiers. Then when Herod died, Saint Joseph brought his family back to Nazareth where he worked as a carpenter, providing for them and making sure that the religious laws were followed in his home.

Those who are wives and mothers can follow the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary who was faithful in her role as wife and mother. She cared for her family in a womanly way, lovingly sacrificing for her Son and her husband. Obedient to the will of God in all things, she was always patient and kind.

If we follow the example of the members of the Holy Family, each of us according to our own state in life, whether as children, as husbands or wives, as fathers or mothers, we too will become holy and our actions will be pleasing to God, and we will merit eternal life.

Just so we are clear, let me point out one more thing here. The Catholic Church says that a man and woman united in marriage together with their children form a family. [See The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2202).]

This means that the foundation of a family is always true marriage, that is, marriage between one man and one woman. It is then, with the exchange of vows, when a new family begins. Later, if and when children are born, they will become members of that family.

Those of us who are single (such as myself) are not a family. Rather, we come from families and are members of those families. Single people have not established their own new families and will not do so unless and until they marry.

Now let change the subject here for a moment. It's not that hard for us to get used to things, especially when those things are difficult or even impossible to change.

For example, we who live in Minnesota are used to cold weather in the winter and mosquitos in the summer. We also know that if you live here, you will just have to put up with these things because you can't change them. So if you don't like the cold or the mosquitos, about the only alternative you have is to move somewhere else.

Here's another example, a personal one about how we get used to things. I grew up in Bloomington not far from the international airport. We had planes flying over our house all the time; some flew so low they would even rattle the windows, but we just got used to it. When visitors came over and a plane flew by, they would all stop and look up, but we didn't pay any attention. We just kept on doing what we were doing because we were used to the planes.

So my point is that we can become used to and accepting of lots of things, and most of the time it's because they can't be changed (like winter or mosquitos). Or, if they can be changed, it's very difficult, and so don't bother trying to change them.

So here is something that pertains to marriage and family life that we have all become used to, but should never, ever have become used to, and that is the nearly absolute and complete destruction of Christian marriage. In fact, unless you are at least 50 years old, you won't have any experiential knowledge of a world in which most families were intact and the husband and wife stayed together and raised their children. That kind of world is long gone.

Instead, we live in a world where people of all ages live together without marriage and without commitment and without trust and without love. We live in a world where those who do marry are not necessarily planning to have any children at all. We live in a world where promiscuity and pornography and infidelity are accepted as normal behavior.

Also, with regard to these things and with regard to marriage, our world has a pagan mentality, and we have become used to this and have come to accept it as normal. Even though we are Catholic Christians, we now behave as if these things don't matter, but they do. In fact, they matter a great deal, and here's why.

First, these things matter because living in ways that God does not intend for us to live doesn't work. If you try to live under water, you will die because you don't have gills. If you sit in a fire, you will be severely burned because your body can't withstand that kind of heat.

Similarly, when people's lives aren't built around intact families, their lives are much more difficult, and their children are almost always hurt in some way. And that's a fact, and we all know it.

Second, these things matter because when we live in ways that God does not intend, we sin, and in the case of people who live together without marriage or who have embraced the pagan morals of our age, these sins are mortal and those who commit them will end up in hell.

So, let's never get used to the idea that these things are okay. They are not.

OK, so what can we do about this? Can we change things? Yes!

The way our culture treats marriage and family life is not like winter or mosquitos. That's because how we view marriage and family life is something we can control and something we can change. It's not impossible for us to change things for the better if we set our minds to it.

After many years, and many people complaining and joining together to fight airplane noise, the procedures for landings and takeoffs at the international airport were changed and the noise was cut down considerably. We can do the same with marriage and family life one person at a time, but we have to start with ourselves.

So here's what we need to do first. We need to stop throwing up our hands like helpless babies. We need to stop saying that's just the way the world is now and there's nothing we can do about it. Or worse, just going along with things and saying there's really no problem.

That means we need to have a change in attitude and firmly decide to hold our ground. That means when someone dear to us decides to move in, we need to tell them how disappointed we are with them. We need to have a conversation with them and explain to them how this will not lead to love or faithfulness or happiness or to love, and we also need to tell them that what they are doing is displeasing to God and a serious sin.

On the other hand, we also need to be proactive. So don't wait for when your children are grown up or when they leave home for college. Instead, guard your children and your grandchildren from danger. Set down your expectations for them when they are young. Tell them about the goodness of marriage. Tell them you expect that they wait for marriage. Tell them to pray for the grace to be pure and chaste. Tell them you will not tolerate them moving in together. Tell them marriage is for love and for life. Help them develop a strong, personal relationship with Jesus and Mary and their patron saint and their guardian angel.

Also, realize that they will not hear these things anywhere else except at Church and from you. No one else is going to say these things to them so that means you must.

We don't have to accept the way things are. We can change things one person at a time. So let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. Let's strive to live as holy families by following the example of the Holy Family. Amen.