

Homily on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Families can be born into and they can be made.

On the Feast of the Holy Family, we commemorate Jesus, Mary, and Joseph going to Jerusalem for the Passover. At first traveling together as a family on pilgrimage, the narrative abruptly shifts when their child goes missing. Imagine the strife in suddenly realizing your son or daughter was lost in a throng of people, and not knowing where to find them. Then after three days of frantic searching you find them at church of all places, where they tell you that you should have known they were with their real parents (Lk 2:49). Even though Mary and Joseph knew that they are the parents of the Holy Family, hearing those words must have really hurt.

United with these parents whom Christ chose to obey, we revere this mysterious Family as our prototype in faith. Their relational love and steadfastness in responding to the will of God is unsurpassable, and though only Christ himself among them can be worshipped, Mary and Joseph are great intercessors. We admire their faith and obedience, and how they endured together through these and so many other hardships. Notice that suffering together is a significant theme, one from which not even the Holy Family is exempt.

Let us qualify, however, that we are not to create hardship, but to persevere through it together when it happens. With the Prince of Peace as guide, families should always strive for peace and gentleness with one another. I hope that all of us have loving families, and that we really want to be together throughout the Christmas season. I hope that in doing so we know holiness, that God will draw near to us, and that we know what

it's like to fit in with a core group with whom we are always at ease, and always at home. This is often how it is with families of *origin*.

However, families can be both *born* into and *made*. Because of this, I would now like to address those of us who have, for a variety of reasons, made families of our own *choosing*. This too is real life. Sometimes it's necessary to forge meaningful friendships outside of the ordinary family relationships, where family is found among others like ourselves. We find each other. There are so many of us, and we have something in common with the Holy Family. Like them, there is something different about our family dynamic. Of course we worship Jesus and reverence his Family and I'm not suggesting otherwise, it's just that there are perceivable aspects about the Holy Family that can create certain impressions we relate to in our own ways.

As poor, religious, ethnic minorities with a complicated parenthood in Roman Empire-occupied first century Palestine, the Holy Family was a group of outsiders that did not fit in to mainstream society. In the church in the twenty-first century in the United States, many of us feel like outsiders too. We might not know who our biological parents are. Maybe someone tried to make us feel like we're the wrong color, or from the wrong country, or that we speak the wrong language. Maybe we've been marginalized because of sexual orientation. Maybe in general we just don't fit in. For all these and any variety of reasons, we might not know who our people of origin even are, and have reached out to fellow outsiders because we all want to belong with someone.

Of course not all of the ways we differ can be directly relatable to how the Holy Family or any other family lived, but we do know that the Holy Family is made of outsiders. These poor, religious, ethnic minorities are as much of a prototype for us as

any other family, and we should all know that we have a place at the table. When we consider that the Holy Family was composed of outsiders, and how through their chosen love became ultimate *insiders* not only to one another but the entire Catholic Church, they give us faith, hope, and reasons to believe in love.

I like to think that the Feast of the Holy Family stands for all types of families, whether of origin or choosing. Our church is Catholic, and our sacramental bonds include all people who can properly receive them. It doesn't matter where you come from or how you got here. Just rest in the presence of God for a little while, and know that you have a place in the church and with the people in your life. You don't have to be alone; you can make a family, even a holy family (though with a small "h").

This begins with Christ, and whatever we make is what he makes in us. He forms us in Word and Sacrament, so that through baptism we are caught up in the marriage with Christ and the church. Because of this, we grow into ourselves as members of Christ's body, and gradually form relationships. Some of these transcend themselves, becoming family. Some family relationships transcend themselves, becoming friendship. Families can be born into and they can be made, so let us pray that Christ will help us treasure and share the value of family, however he truly provides it for us.