

Holy Family - B
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14;
Colossians 3:12-17;
Luke 2:22, 39-40
Little Flower - 12/31/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We actually know very little about the life of the Holy Family. The Gospels only tell us the story of Jesus' birth and the finding of the child Jesus in the temple when he was twelve years old. However, as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, the Church calls us to model our families and our communities after the Holy Family. Since we know so little about the life of the Holy Family, the Church chooses readings that give us important insights into authentic family values.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians is often chosen as a wedding reading. The virtues or values Paul lists at the beginning of this reading are important qualities in any marriage or family: *"heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another...And over all these....love..."* However, there can be no love without respect. Therefore, these virtues or values all presume respect for one another within a family. Respect requires us to cherish each other as other than ourselves, to cherish each other's uniqueness.

In a family, it is very important that both parents and children respect each other. Parents often mistakenly believe that children think the same as they do but that their feelings are different. Actually the reverse is true: parents and children think very differently, but their feelings are the same. For example, both parents and children are easily hurt by unkind words and actions. Likewise, children and teenagers need to realize that their parents are, first of all, people with feelings like theirs before they are parents.

Today's reading from Sirach reminds us of the important role of parents in the lives of their children: *"For the LORD sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons."* As most of us know, the relationship between parents and children typically becomes more problematic during adolescence as teenagers push for more freedom and independence. This creates tension between parents and teenagers. However, if dealt with constructively, the tension is healthy, and the right place for teenagers to be is somewhere in the middle of the tension.

The second part of today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians refers to faith. When families and communities put God and faith at their center of their lives, they will be strong families and communities. The lack of faith and the lack of formation of faith in children, I would argue, is one of the greatest contributors to the multiple problems of our society today.

Today's Gospel tells the story of Jesus' presentation in the temple. Mary and Joseph were not just Jewish believers. They practiced their religion. When we baptize infants, we pray for their parents "as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith." Today, as fewer and fewer people actively practice their faith, parents are not handing on their faith to their children. Parents should ask themselves three questions. How do we live and practice our faith at home? Do we attend weekly Sunday Mass and insist our children attend Mass with us? How well do we provide for their formal religious education?

My brothers and sisters, the goal of parents should be that what was said of Jesus in today's Gospel will be said of their children: *"The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."* Many years ago, I read an article that suggested that many parents are more concerned with making their children happy than teaching them how to cope. If we want our children to be strong, we need to teach them how to cope. Second, we should want our children to become wise, i.e., to see as God sees or, in everyday language, to see the big picture. Finally, we should want our children to live ethical moral lives, which will only happen if parents teach and model the ways of God to their children.