

Holy Family - B
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14;
Colossians 3:12-21;
Luke 2:22-40
Little Flower - 12/28/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Today's feast invites us to reflect on the meaning of family.

While I was in Rome in the early 1970's, Little Flower took a brief survey of parishioners. One question asked parishioners what their greatest spiritual need was. Everyone was surprised at the responses. By a large majority, the number one **spiritual** need of Little Flower parishioners in the early 1970's was family values.

Therefore, we should not be surprised that Pope Francis, recognizing the challenges families face today and the Church's need to minister to families, has called two synods to address ministry to families. The theme of the recently completed synod was "The pastoral challenges of the family in the context of [the new] evangelization." What made this synod unique was the Pope's challenge to the Synod fathers to speak boldly but to listen humbly. Pope Francis wants the Church to respond compassionately to all families.

In the Old Testament, Abraham and Sarah, husband and wife, put God first in their lives. In the reading from Genesis, they trusted God. This was so true that in the reading from Hebrews, we are told that Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac to do God's will. In today's Gospel, Mary and Joseph fulfilled the precept of the law of the Lord to present their first-born child to the Lord.

I wonder if families today would not be a lot healthier and a lot stronger if families really did put God first in our lives. For example, how many of our homes have Catholic religious symbols evident? How many of our families pray together at home? How many of our families make Sunday Eucharist a number one priority? How many of our families make major family decisions only after praying to discern God's will? How many of our families consciously strive to do God's will in all things?

The final verse of the Gospel is significant: "*The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*" Like every child, Jesus needed his parents to enable him to grow into the best version of himself. As I mentioned last Sunday, we had the funerals of two long-time parishioners this past week. When I met with Mary Helen Arvin's family, the best compliment the children paid her and Norb was that they were always consistent. Children need consistency and stability in their lives. The old adage remains true: "Children learn what they live and live what they learn."

My brothers and sisters, as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, we should not just focus on our immediate or extended families. Today's feast also reminds us that we are all part of the human family. If God is the father of us all, then we are brothers and sisters of one another and should live as brothers and sisters should. To live as brothers and sisters of one another, we have to share a commitment to justice and peace for all people. The alternate opening prayer for today's feast in the former Sacramentary captures the feast well:

Father in heaven, creator of all, you ordered the earth to bring forth life and crowned its goodness by creating the human family. In history's moment when all was ready, you sent your Son to dwell in time, obedient to the laws of life in our world. Teach us the sanctity of human love, show us the value of family life, and help us to live in peace with all people that we may share in your life for ever. We ask this through Christ our Lord.