

Holy Family  
I Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28;  
I John 3:1-2, 21-24;  
Luke 2:41-52  
Little Flower - 12/30/12

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. This feast reminds us of the importance of family in our lives and in the lives of our children.

All of us can identify with Mary and Joseph in today's Gospel. In the world in which we live, most parents are frightened almost to death at the thought of their child going missing. If you have ever been around a parent whose young child has wandered away for even a moment, you have probably seen the panic on the parent's face. We can only imagine the feelings of Mary and Joseph when Jesus went missing for three days. Most parents love their children more than their own lives.

In today's second reading, St. John suggests that God's commandments are very simple—faith and love: *“we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us.”* These are the two most important lessons parents can teach their children. For this to happen, faith has to be taught and lived in the home. Families need to have religious symbols in their home. For example, a couple recently sent me a picture of their child-friendly crib set. From an early age, children need to hear the stories of Jesus from their parents. As they grow older, they need to hear the Scriptures read at home. Individual and family prayer needs to be taught and modeled. Sunday Eucharist needs to be a priority in the life of the family.

Second, children need to be taught to love. The lessons of love are found throughout the Gospels. The infancy stories of the Gospels are stories of Mary and Joseph's parental love for Jesus. *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* [Mt. 22:39] is Jesus' second great commandment. Jesus spells out the practical implications of this in the Golden Rule: *“Do to others as you would have them do to you”* [Lk. 6:31]. Some of Jesus' parables exemplify the meaning of Christian love. For example, in the parable of the Last Judgment, we are warned that we will be judged by our practical love for those who are least among us. Finally, in John's Gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus raised the bar for our love: *“love another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends”* [15:12-13]. In other words, parents need to model self-revealing, self-giving, self-sacrificing love.

Like Hannah in the Old Testament, when we had our children baptized, we dedicated them to the Lord. The final words of today's Gospel suggest the goal of Christian parenting: *“And Jesus advanced (in) wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”* The measuring stick for parents is not primarily to raise children who will be wise, popular, and successful according to the standards of our society and culture but children who will be wise and find favor in God's eyes. When St. John wrote, *“... we shall be like him,”* he was suggesting that growing in wisdom and favor before God is to become like Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, although I have referred to parents in this homily, in some sense everything I have said applies to all of us because all of us influence children in greater or lesser ways. Second, today so much is written about the breakdown of the family. It is certainly true that families are struggling today on so many different levels. Therefore, it seems to me that we should all support and encourage laws and policies that support families. What is at stake is our children's future in this life as well as their and our own eternal salvation.