

Holy Family - C
I Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28;
I John 3:1-2, 21-24;
Luke 2:41-52
Little Flower - 12/30/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Today, then, is a wonderful time for us to reflect on family. Although family has many meanings, today's readings focus on families with children. However, there are lessons for all of us in these readings.

The story of Samuel in today's first reading reminds us that every child is a gift from God no matter the circumstances of the child's conception or family. Therefore, every child should inspire gratitude and be respected, cherished, loved, and nurtured. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, there were several miraculous births. However, the truth is that the birth of every baby is a miracle. As is true of all the miraculous births in the Bible, the birth of every baby is a sign of God's presence, power, and activity in human history, and every baby born has a unique vocation from God.

With God, parents are co-creators of their children. Therefore, like Hannah, they need to see themselves as stewards of their children. Parents represent God to their children. Therefore, parents are accountable to God for how they raise their children. Likewise, children need to recognize that their parents, however imperfect they may be, are God's gifts to them. Therefore, it is important that children give their parents the respect and love their parents deserve.

Because every child is a gift from God and a miracle, all of us should be concerned for the welfare of all children throughout the world. We should want every child to have adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and opportunity. Each of us should do our part, however small, to improve the quality of life of children in our country and our world. Today's second reading reminds us that we are all equally children of God.

Today's second reading reminds us of two principal, but often forgotten, responsibilities of parents. St. John wrote, "*And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us.*" "Parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith." Parents hand on their faith, first, by practicing their faith as a family and, second, by providing their children with quality religious education. Likewise, they teach their children to love by loving. "Children learn what they live, and live what they learn."

Today's Gospel tells the story of the finding of the Child Jesus in the temple, the only story of Jesus' childhood in the Gospels. As I have mentioned the last few weeks, families are complicated and messy. Parenting is probably the most difficult job on earth. One of the principal tasks of adolescence is for the young person to become his or her own person. Therefore, during adolescence there will always be tension between parents and children. This tension is a good thing. If parents simply allow their children to do as they want, their children will probably make major mistakes. On the other hand, if children do not test limits, they will still be living at home at the age of 40, which is not a good thing. The challenge is for parents and teenagers to learn how to resolve this tension constructively.

My brothers and sisters, the word *family* has many meanings today beyond the traditional family of two parents and their children. For example, there is a saying that friends are the family we choose for ourselves. Also, communities are often referred to as families, and we are all part of the human family. A recent episode of *Criminal Minds* ended with a quote by Richard Bach about family: "The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life." We should all strive to deepen the bonds of respect and joy in each other's life in all the families of which we are part.