

Holy Family - B
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14;
Colossians 3:12-17;
Luke 2:22-40
Little Flower - 12/27/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Because of the pandemic, most of us have had a different experience of family this year. With all the closures, most families have spent more time together. Many people have seen this as a blessing. Being together more, they have talked more and done more things together as a family. On the other hand, forced isolation is stressful, especially if someone has lost a job or the children struggle with e-learning.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Although we know very little about what life was like in the Holy Family, the Church proposes the Holy Family as the ideal for our families. The readings for today highlight various family values.

If I were to summarize the reading from Sirach in a word, *respect* would be that word. Lack of respect is a major problem in marriages and families: husbands and wives who do not respect each other and children and parents who do not respect each other. Family members lack respect for each other when they do not value each other's thoughts and feelings. By looks and words, parents often discount their children's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, teaching their children not to trust themselves. Children and especially adolescents often forget that their parents are people with feelings just like theirs. To respect another person is to cherish his or her otherness. It is clear from the reading that respect is important at all ages.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians suggests the values that would make a family almost ideal if they were lived faithfully. Families, however, are inherently messy. No two people are ever perfectly compatible. Even more, no three or four people are perfectly compatible. Family members have different personalities, talents, limitations, and interests. They have their own thoughts, feelings, ideas, values, and experiences. For marriages and families to work, it seems to me four things are important. Family members, both adults and children, have to be willing to live with imperfection. Family members have to respect each other, i.e., cherish each other. Family members need to communicate. They especially need to learn how to resolve disagreements and problems constructively. Finally, faith and religion need to be important values for the entire family.

Today's Gospel illustrates the importance of faith and religion in the life of the Holy Family: *"When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord."* Advice columnist Ann Landers in her ten commandments for raising delinquents suggested that parents not give their children any faith or religious upbringing, allowing them to choose for themselves as adults. Of course, she added that parents should not be surprised when their children choose nothing. Today's Gospel demonstrates that the Holy Family faithfully lived the Jewish religion. In the past, as Catholics, we sometimes emphasized religion over faith. Today we often emphasize personal faith over religion. Both are not only important but essential. The Christianity of Jesus is a Christianity of community. In families where there are different religions, it is especially important that they work to develop a shared faith.

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.