

Homily: Feast of the Holy Family: 2023: Cycle B: Gen 15:1-6; Ps 105; Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Lk 2:22-40.

“The Holy Family as the model for Catholic Family Life”

1. We as a Church are still celebrating the Christmas mystery, during this Holy Octave or 8 days of Christmas. Today the Church calls us to ponder deeply the fact that **Jesus**, the eternal Son of God, who became a little baby to save us from our sins, learned to love in a human way in the midst of a family: the Holy Family. What a profound and awesome mystery! This shows us the dignity of human family life in God’s eyes, and how we need to reflect upon this, and put into practice the virtues of the Holy Family, especially in our times when family life is so fragile and under attack in so many ways. **We as individuals truly learn to love or not love to a great degree from the example, we get in our family life.** Is our family life a reflection of Heaven or Hell? Or the reality is most families are mixed bag - it’s kind of a Purgatorial experience growing up and living in our families. The Holy Family calls us to raise the bar and do better in living a life of holiness in our families. The family, of mother and father and children, rightly has been called the “**domestic Church**” by the Second Vatican Council. **In essence as the family unit goes, so does the Church at large.** When family life is healthy and vibrant, the larger Church tends to be healthy and vibrant. When the family unit is limping along, so is the Church at large (Archbishop Chaput on). **Witness the decline** in vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the last few decades which corresponds to the breakdown of the Christian family in so many quarters: *with the rise in divorce, the contraceptive mentality, and the ever-increasing social acceptance of homosexual behavior and so called “gay marriage”*. These problems are not a coincidence, as solid social scientists point out. We need a renewal of Catholic family life, and the Holy Family can show us the way! Please read the infancy narratives (Matthew and Luke, chapters 1-2) and meditate on the holy lessons contained there: *obedience, listening to God in the depth of our hearts, praying, being open to God’s will, etc.*

2. **What a beautiful recipe for holiness and happiness!** Truly if we don't learn about the Lord Jesus and our Catholic faith in our families, it is going to be very difficult to be a devout Catholic in our world today. Those of us who are parents and grandparents and godparents - how are we doing in this regard? *Are we teaching our children **daily** about Jesus, about the saints, about the holy doctrines of our Faith? Are we reading Bible stories to them, showing them good videos about Jesus and the Catholic faith and getting them good holy books to read - to learn what the Lord expects of us as His followers* (see the **Ignatius Press** catalog online if you need any ideas in this regard: www.ignatius.com). Also check out our Parish lending library – for good books for adults and children alike. *Are we praying together as a family on a daily basis? Are we coming to Mass as a family?* **Remember parents you are the primary teachers of your children in the ways of the Catholic Faith.** What is taught at Mass by the priest or in CCD or Catholic school is simply a supplement to what you teach - **never a substitute!**
3. The Gospel reading today teaches us a valuable lesson: we need to consecrate our children to God, like Mary and Joseph did for the baby Jesus in the Temple. We need to be primarily concerned with: **what is God's will for my child's life?** *Not my will, but your will be done O' Lord!* Maybe the Lord wants them to be a priest or a religious: are we open to that possibility? Would we be thrilled if God called one of our children to a life of sacred service? Or would we flip out, and say NO WAY! Ultimately what should the primary goal for our children be? **To help them get to Heaven!** The best way to begin this process is to **consecrate them to the Lord** when they are little, to say in essence, “*I give my child to you, Lord, do with him or her, what You will.*” And are we open to having more children - if we are married and of child bearing age - or have we given in to the world's contraception/sterilization mentality- which puts serious limits on the gift of having children or eliminates the possibility, often in the name of having more “freedom” and financial and social comfort? **The true reason contraception is an objectively serious sin because it is a deliberate exclusion of God from the most intimate and sacred part of married life.** Remember the Church doesn't

say you have to have as many children as possible; no, we are called to responsible parenthood, but also to be generous with God: if we need to space the gift of children out for serious economic, social, psychological or health reasons, then we need to learn about the Church's teaching on natural family planning (NFP) - (see: www.learnnfponline.com) - and practice it as it cooperates with God's procreative plan and includes Him in the process. The statistics show the truth of Church teaching in that married couples who practice NFP have a less than 3% divorce rate vs. the over 50% divorce rate of couples who don't follow Church teaching. And if we have fallen short of this teaching, we need to confess it in the Sacrament of Penance and resolve to change this aspect of our life - with the help of God's mercy and strengthening grace. Remember the Lord in His kindness will always give us the necessary grace to live His teaching in this area or any other – if we are willing to try, and He will always pick us up again if we fall and express our sorrow and resolve to do better. I'm here to help you too as your Pastor. *Let us pray that the Lord will strengthen our families with His holy love and enable us to grow in mutual respect and self-giving love, so they can be a reflection here on earth of the Holy family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph and ultimately of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for all eternity.* May God bless you today and throughout the New Year 2024 .✚