

## Homily - Holy Family Sunday - December 31, 2017

You know this fact much better than I do because you have to face this reality more often than I do. Here it is: You can choose your friends, but you cannot choose your family! Those simple words describe most of the drama that we face in life. If we couldn't talk about our family members and their imperfections would we have much to talk about?

Perhaps we spend too much time speaking about the perfect family or imagining the perfect family or wishing that our family embodied the characteristics of the perfect family. But, what exactly is the perfect family? Today, a few days after Christmas we come to church to celebrate the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Notice that we say the Holy Family, not the perfect family. We say that the Holy Family models family life. We do not say that all was perfect in the Holy Family.

Let's look at the situation. Certainly, financial wealth was not part of the family. When your child is born in a stable, you clearly have no money or influence. I doubt if there was a baby shower before Jesus was born. Probably, Jesus' toys were items from his father's shop or little doodads found around a home.

Mary and Joseph were faithful about the observances of the Jewish law and made sure that they performed all the requirements both for them and for their son. They saw the home as the environment in which their child was to learn the family and faith traditions. They believed, and rightly so, that raising their son meant raising him in the actual practice, the doing of the faith, not merely talking about the faith or treating it like some ancient relic.

As a family, they socialized with other like-minded families because they saw the strength of their convictions being multiplied through association with like-minded people.

From a practical point of view, the Holy Family had its ups and downs. I am sure that Mary had to clean the home, scrub dishes, wash diapers just like any other mother. Joseph had to work, had to provide financial support. The family had to flee to avoid Herod's persecution. And Jesus seemed to get a little feisty when parents reprimanded him for getting lost in the temple area.

The Holy Family flourished in what we would call today less than standard surroundings. Probably their key to success from a human point

of view was their realization: this is who we are, this is what we have, this is where we are.

What can we learn from this Holy Family? Parental supervision, guidance, and clear direction are essential. Mary and Joseph knew their responsibilities to each other and to their child. Jesus knew that he was responsible to his parents. Mary and Joseph parented. Families have adequately proven in our own day that reversing the roles of parents and children is like trying to move forward with the transmission in reverse. This responsibility to parent and to build the family extends to social time, education, activities, recreation, and religion. Parents need to be leaders in all of these areas. More and more activities for children are creeping into families, and many of these activities have made it difficult to focus on family life. In fact, some families' lives now focus on the activities, rather than the activities focusing on the family. Because families had to rely on each other and on themselves, did we not have stronger families back in the day when there were fewer activities placing fewer demands on the lives of children and parents?

I have another question. When growing up, I wonder how many times Jesus said: "I don't feel like it." Children do a great disservice to the family when they say "I don't feel like it." What if parents said, we don't feel like cooking Christmas dinner this year? What if dad or mom said: "I don't feel like going to work this week. It will be unpaid time off. So, we won't be able to go on our summer trip this year." "I don't feel like it" really says "I don't care enough about the family to do ... whatever." Children should never say "I don't feel like it." Likewise, parents should never accept "I don't feel like it" as an excuse for not meeting family obligations and life responsibilities.

Was the Holy Family the perfect family? From a spiritual point of view, definitely. If we use human standards, who knows? We do know that they had their ups and downs, joys and sorrows, fears and dreams. Sometimes, you may not feel like it. When you feel that way, you know that doing whatever it is is the right thing. As we contemplate today the Holy Family, we pray for strong family life, family life in which life flourishes, family life in which faith grows and matures, family life where all act responsibly.