

Feast of the Holy Family

Reading I Sir 3:2-6, 12-14 **Reading II** Col 3:12-17 **Gospel**

Lk 2:41-52

I hope that all of you had a very blessed and safe Christmas Day. I hope also that the weather did not cause too much difficulty and that you were able to share, in some way, the day with friends and family.

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family. Every year right after Christmas, we celebrate this feast. There is a reason for this. It's easy to limit the "incarnation" to mean only that God took on a human body.

However, in Jesus, God unites himself to an entire human nature. He fully enters into human experience. And a part of that human experience, with more than its share of peaks and valleys, is family.

And as today's Gospel points out, there was still opportunity for tension, even in the Holiest of Families.

But just as Jesus sanctifies our humanity by becoming fully human, He sanctifies, He makes holy all families by willingly becoming a part of one.

Thus the family,

(whether it be what we have come to call traditional, or whether it is adoptive, single-parent, extended or any other form of family),

becomes an instrument of sanctification and growth in holiness.

I was raised in a home that was Irish-Roman-Catholic, and that was considered one word. And while I never really spoke about it, I was encouraged to consider the priesthood. My imagination told me that the seminary is where I would go if I wanted to be truly holy.

Marriage and family life seemed a barrier, an obstacle to true sanctification. I judged that the people closest to me in my family were proof of that.

Today's feast of the Holy Family shows how far off-base I was. It reminds us, as Vatican II teaches, that all human beings are called to the heights of holiness.

That all states in life, including child, sibling, spouse and parent, offer abundant opportunities to grow in faith, hope, and love. That the nitty-gritty and sometimes, just plain difficult parts of family life can be a road to profound personal transformation and communion with God.

The creator of the universe spent most of his human life as a craftsman and all of His time as a Son. He worked with his dad in the family business and eventually took it over. Can anyone here relate to that?

Mary, the holiest of all creatures, spent most of her time, cooking, and cleaning and mending. Is there anyone here that has had days when you felt like that is all you do?

The secret to holiness is not to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things with extraordinary love and gratitude.

I wasn't called to the priesthood, but to married life and to raising a family.

That doesn't mean I didn't go to seminary.

The word seminary means "seedbed." It is a greenhouse where, in a sheltered environment, vocations can develop until they can not just survive in the real world, but bear fruit there.

So the family is the original seminary. In its soil is sown the call to share in Christ's holiness and mission. Ironically, tending to the seedlings causes the parent to grow as well. So family, in God's plan, is a community where everyone has growing to do.

I will be the first to admit, I am far from perfect. I lack in many ways as a spouse and a father, as a son and as a brother. However, a few years back I did win the title of World's Greatest Grandpa and I have the tee-shirt and ball cap to prove it.

But I'll also admit that the opportunities for growth in holiness, are present everyday to me, and to all of us, as members of a family.

How many times before the end of today will we have the opportunity to practice the virtues of patience, compassion or forgiveness? What about humility, kindness and, oh yes, the one that's easy to forget, thankfulness?

How many times within the past few days alone have we messed up the opportunities to practice those virtues?

There is another grace to family. There is always a chance to reconcile our differences. Even if someone in our family has passed on, we have the opportunity to mend those differences with other family members, to not allow the negative of the past to carry on any further into the future.

Another aspect of family is our Faith. A twelve year-old Jesus would not have been in the Temple had Mary and Joseph not taken Him there.

We share it, we pass it on, not only by attending Mass, not only by means of education like CCD, but by living it in the everyday small things like diapers, dishes, homework and hard work.

How many generations of faith do we have in this community, this Parish Family?

How many more generations will there be?

I noticed in working through this homily that I couldn't seem to get away from using the word "opportunity" many times. In a very real sense, family can be seen and understood as "opportunity", a chance to grow in the richness of God's Grace and Beauty.

Every one of us is a person of dignity, a person of potential and being members of a family can help us to live in dignity and realize that potential.

However, much depends on how we respond to the many opportunities presented in those same families.

So to all of us, have a Blessed Feast Day, and may we continue in Christmas Joy.