

Holy Family A

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas, and it is good to see you all again..... so soon!

I have to admit that I was truly touched by the number of families that gathered for Christmas Mass. The Cathedral in Omaha was so big that I couldn't make out a lot of faces, but here the feel was very up close and personal. I like that!

Between Masses, Judy and I visited with Father Jose and his parents at the rectory where they had several Nativity Scenes on display, some plain and some more elaborate but each one was unique.

You might already know this, but the first Nativity Scene (well, not the *FIRST, that would have been the one when Jesus was born*), but the first *creche* or *manger* was designed by St. Francis of Assisi..

Here are a few details of the event.

In the year 1223, St. Francis, a deacon, was visiting the town of Greccio to celebrate Christmas. Greccio was a small town built on a mountainside overlooking a beautiful valley. St. Francis realized that the chapel of the Franciscan hermitage would be too small to hold the congregation for Midnight Mass. So he found a niche in the rock near the town square and set up the altar. However, this Midnight Mass would be very special, unlike any other Midnight Mass.

He brought hay, and cattle and donkeys, primarily with the hope of demonstrating the extreme humility and poverty that our Lord and Savior entered the world. He also wanted to accentuate the the extra-ordinary that took place among everything that was very ordinary. And it must have worked, as we maintain the tradition within our own families to this day.

There is probably not too much that is more ordinary than a group of shepherds and and their flocks.

Except maybe the family itself. Oh, Mary and Joseph and Jesus are the Holy Family, and we pay honor to them today, but we also honor and acknowledge all families, no matter their shape, look or demeanor, because all families are called to emulate this Holy Family.

It seems to me that the family is is both seminary and crucible. A place where the seeds of who we are, are planted and a place that tests us and helps form us into what we will become.

That was the beauty of what I witnessed here just two days ago.

Now, believe me, I know that none of our families are perfect. My own family of origin put the "D" in dysfunctional.

But for all that my family wasn't, it was, at the very least, well-intentioned and I was no saint to raise.

However, the question before us today is how do we as parents, as grand parents as children, no matter our age, attempt to become a a family that resembles the Holy Family before us in the manger scene?

Perhaps the answer lies within the ordinariness of our daily lives, but with an eye toward the extra-ordinary that takes place all around us.

Every day holds for us the mundane tasks that we need to do, whether it be working our jobs, going to school, doing the dishes or changing dirty diapers.

There is something that is extra-ordinary that can, and often does, take place in every activity.

Sometimes it can be hard to see. Often, we don't notice it, especially in the moment, but we might see it later. The satisfaction of a job well done, an improvement in our grades in math or the contentment of a clean and freshly diapered infant, witnessing our adult children raising fine children of their own.

Now, to be sure, the events of today's Gospel were well outside of the ordinary lives we experience - or were they? We might not have had magi bring us gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, be we have all seen the good that can come when we receive, or give, a generous gift.

Chances are pretty good that an evil pretender to the throne as never threatened our child with death, but doesn't most every parent try to keep their children from the evils of the world, even if the child doesn't appreciate it..... yet?

As Christians, we all live in exile of our true home.

The Church teaches that the family is the "domestic church", the place where the faith is passed on and our characters are formed. Keeping the Holy Family ever before us as an example can be very helpful to us, no matter if we are a child, and remember, each of us is a child of someone or a parent..... we are all saints in the making.

When I was a child in Catholic grade school, one of the first things I learned was to write in the upper corner of our homework or anything that we wrote or colored in, were the initials "JMJ", Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Maybe it is time to resurrect that tradition in our daily lives. A simple prayer, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph" may well be all that is needed to guide our decisions in relation to our family and loved ones. A simple prayer that might just help us to keep our attitudes straight and our feet on the right path. A simple prayer that might help us to see and appreciate the special in the ordinary.

May the Joy of Christmas remain with each one of you.