

Favorite Christmas Gifts as a child:

Drum set, stingray bike, chemistry set and a rock tumbler.

My overall favorite was the chemistry set, but with me a chemistry set was not a safe toy - at all. It doesn't take too much to graduate from making invisible ink to smoke bombs and amazingly large balls of fire. After the fire ball, I closed up the kit and never opened it again.

But in looking back. I think it was the rock tumbler that taught me the most about certain aspects of life.

The way they worked was like this: PICK UP BOX AND SHOW ROCKS

The tumbler would be run by a motor and the drum with rough rocks in it would slowly rotate. The rocks would bump and rub each other, and small bits of the rocks would break off. It was noisy as the drum was metal. It took a lot of time. It was dirty - you had to dump out the dust every once in a while. It was very mundane. You couldn't see what was going on. There were additives that could speed up the process, or slow it down. You would add a lubricant toward the end to make sure that the rocks didn't break up too much. Then you might add a polish.

I propose that a family and a rock tumbler are a lot alike. They can be loud or messy or at times boring. Each family member is the rough rock. Our first and second readings give a list of additives. Heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. Honor and respect for one another. Obedience, love and forgiveness.

And since all the members are all in the same box or tumbler, these things touch all of them. Wives obey, but so do children and husbands. Parents have patience for their children, and children are patient with their parents

and one another. Every person, just like every stone contributes to the process in the ways that their size and shape allows.

Now, in an ideal world, the family members going into the box would be ideal as well. One father, one mother and just the right number of children, whatever that is..

But we don't live in an ideal world, and we usually aren't in ideal tumblers with already perfect stones.

Families today look differently than they used to. We see single parents, childless couples, grandparents raising their grandchildren. We see divorced couples merging their families, and it doesn't always work out as well as the Brady bunch. Maybe Johnny has two mommies or no mommy and daddy at all. Though not what we would call traditional, they are families none the less.

What the Feast of the Holy Family does is to remind us that it is God that ordains the family as the fundamental unit of all civilizations while recognizing that even the ideal, while still a great challenge is still a possibility.

Scripture tells us that Jesus, God made flesh, was born of and taught by a pure and sinless woman and raised by a righteous man.

But it wasn't smooth sailing for this perfect family. From the Annunciation to the Crucifixion, it was a journey of trials.

They faced homelessness, they were refugees, impoverished, they lived under brutal Roman rule and at some point Joseph dies and Mary becomes a widow and a single mother.

Yet they are held up to us as The Holy Family.

Why? Was it simply because of who was in the family? Well, yes, but that isn't the only reason. No one here today is or ever can be Jesus, Mary or Joseph.

But what we can be, all of us, is holy by following their example.

Mary's humble fiat, her "yes" to God can be given to God from us as well.

God asked some pretty tough things of Joseph, like, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife" "Take your family to Egypt" and then "Leave Egypt and go back to your homeland" Joseph shows us that obedience, within the context of a loving relationship, is an act of love.

They lived an extraordinary faith. They loved God with their whole heart, soul and mind.

And we have that same faith laid out before us, and we find that the Sacraments, the Mass, the Scriptures and one another; family, friends and foes, are all in the same tumbler. Who and what we come in contact with eventually shapes us into who God intends for us to be. **REMOVE TWO SMOOTH ROCKS.** Smoother and shinier and a better person than what went into the box.

So that when God finally calls us forever out of the tumbler, PICK UP FUSHUGI

we will be radiant and perfect for all eternity.