

## Holy Family A 2013 Lessons from Family

Fr. Frank Schuster

Ah Christmas. We have just celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ and therefore it is appropriate that the following Sunday is the celebration of the Holy Family. And it has been a great year for my family. I measure a great year for family by the number of weddings and baptisms. And we have had both thanks be to God.

It was really great to celebrate Christmas with my brother John and his wife Mary. They have been married for several years now and this year we got to celebrate Christmas with their child, little 9 month old Jack. Of course, Jack was sick with a fever for his first Christmas. He had difficulty staying asleep and was crying a lot as is in the job description for babies to do. John and Mary were sleep deprived this Christmas taking turns attending to little Jack while certain family members were researching and reporting on every possible childhood disease known to mankind, just to be helpful. What if it is this? What if it is that? John and Mary took this in stride as everyone loves the little guy, and we all took turns trying to console him.

Uncle Frank thinks it was just a cold, but of course, what do I know? It is not like I am an expert on babies. I have a cat. Jack is doing much better now, thanks be to God. Even with this little drama going on, spending the days after Christmas with my family has made for one my best Christmas' ever. There is nothing like hanging out with family you love. And John and Mary say that Christmas is so much better with children around. I agree.

During a beach walk, I mentioned to John and Mary that they would be a better authority than me to preach on the Holy Family this weekend and asked them what advice I should give to my congregation. After they finished laughing, they proceeded with good thoughts. A family to remain holy has to be patient, go with the flow, make excellent friends to help you, value family, keep the faith, and so on. Our conversation turned to the three wise men and their gifts to the Holy Family. They suggested that the gold was a great gift. But instead of frankincense and myrrh, a casserole and bottle of wine would have been better.

And having a baby, as many of you know, is not easy. My brother said some of the advice you see on the web is better than others. For instance, he and Mary think the idea of trying to sleep when the baby is asleep simply isn't helpful advice for them. The better advice was along the lines of, "your life for the next two years will feel similar to a constant hangover. Don't worry, go with it, even try to enjoy it – it will get better." Another one was, "when you pick up a child hold them side-on. That way they can't kick you in the...well you get the idea." Another one was, "Love your baby a lot. Keep one end clean and the other fed. Everything else is optional." I am sure there is more to it than that.

Today, as we celebrate the feast day of the Holy Family, we celebrate Mary and Joseph welcoming a new baby into their lives. And even though the baby was the Son of God, it is good to remember that times were not easy for them. Our Gospel begins with the Magi departing and an angel warning Joseph to “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. King Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” I suspect that this was slightly more stressful than having to deal with a cold.

I mention this because sometimes we get the wrong idea that the Holy Family can't be a useful inspiration to our family because their lives on earth happened 2000 years ago in another country and culture. This couldn't be farther from the truth. When I think of what is important to my brother John and his wife, the values of patience, the value of friendships and family, the value of faith, and even the good bottle of wine from time to time, I am here to suggest to you, not a lot has changed in 2000 years.

We also get the wrong impression that Joseph and Mary can't be good role models for us because they were “saints”. Of course, as you have heard from me before, the definition of someone in heaven is “saint”. So who here wants to be a “saint”, raise your hand! If we are going to become saints, it is good to have role models to look up to. Joseph and Mary are not a bad place to start when it comes to role models because of their relationship to Jesus. And all three are as close to us as our prayers. When dads find themselves in a difficult moment, asking themselves what St. Joseph would do isn't a bad starting place. When moms find themselves in a difficult moment, asking themselves what Mary would do isn't a bad starting place.

St. Paul of course also offers practical advice in our second reading for families seeking to become holier families. And I was struck by how his advice was essentially the same advice my brother and his wife offered me. St. Paul says, “Put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...and whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Pretty good advice for families, don't you think? Amen? Whenever things start to get bumpy in family life, as inevitably happens, I think it is good to reread this passage from Colossians or perhaps 1 Corinthians 13 where St. Paul talks about love. You remember that one, don't you? Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not brood over injury. Love bears all things. Love endures all things. Love never fails.

You see, love is what kept the Holy Family together when they had to live as refugees in Egypt. Love is what helps parents take care of their child in the middle of the night, night after night. Love is what can help parents with their teenagers during rough patches. Love is what can help teenagers with their parents as well when blue skies turn grey. It is always good to remember that, news flash, families are not perfect all the time but neither are we. I think this is why God gives us our families, to help us on our way to salvation. Love is the key to this. And love begins with love incarnate, Jesus.

And so, the Sunday following Christmas, it is appropriate to celebrate the Holy Family and to celebrate our families, even with our warts and wrinkles. Just as Joseph and Mary welcomed Jesus into their lives, we are invited to welcome Jesus into our lives as well and share this gift with others. As we navigate through our lives, let's keep the baby Jesus warm and well fed in our hearts so that he may keep us warm and well fed by grace as well. Our gift to Jesus is our faith, hope and love. His gift to us is our eternal salvation. This all begins with our families, so let's keep them holy through Christ our Lord, amen.