

Holy Family “The Example of the Holy Family”

Fr. Frank Schuster

I found the article at the satirical newspaper “The Onion” which I thought was a good introduction to our celebration this weekend of the Holy Family. It is entitled...

“Relatives Gather from Across the Country to Stare into Screens Together”

The article continues...

Turning on the television while unpacking tablets, iPhones, and laptops from their suitcases, members of the McPherson family commuted from across the nation this holiday season for several straight days of staring into electronic screens while in the same room together, sources confirmed Friday.

28-year-old Andrew McPherson told reporters, “Nothing puts me in the Christmas spirit more than sitting down on the couch with my parents and siblings, turning on the TV, and then proceeding to either look at the screen or gaze down into my glowing tablet display for hours on end...It’s just great to get home for a while and spend some quality time not speaking a single word to my relatives, whether that’s by sipping hot cocoa with my sister while we both check our emails or by gathering the whole clan for a nice holiday meal where everyone is fixedly looking down at the text messages on their phones—’tis the season, you know?”

McPherson noted he was sad, however, that Grandpa Sam would not be there to stare into screens with them this year. *Source: [The Onion](#) (Edited for homily)*

I thought this fictitious article was funny, if for the only reason, I have been to enough restaurants where at the table next to me there would be some family with everyone looking at their smartphones while they ate. I have seen this from time to time with the younger people in my own family at our gatherings. And because I don’t want to sound “holier than thou”, when the priests gather to hear a speaker at priest days or wherever, the temptation to play solitaire is crushing.

It is true there are good uses for smartphones. When I was a kid I would get dropped off at the mall for the day to spend time with friends with a quarter in my pocket if I needed to use the pay phone. Nowadays, parents can text their kids and kids can text their parents at any time. That is really cool. I bet that would have come in handy in our Gospel reading today. Mary and Joseph were wondering where Jesus was. Instead of having to look around for him, they could have texted him instead. Jesus could have replied, “In my Father’s house...#Son of God”, and everything would have been fine. On the other hand, it must be said there is so much out there competing for our attention these days and the gizmos we have are addictive.

And so, it makes intuitive sense that we celebrate the Holy Family so soon after Christmas. When we ask the question what made the Holy Family “holy”, we would correctly attribute this to Jesus the Son of God, his mother Mary and step father Joseph, both saints. On the other hand, maybe they were the Holy Family in part because when Jesus came home from school and Joseph came home from work, Jesus, Mary and Joseph ate together, prayed together, and spent their evenings together without needing TV’s , smart phones and other electronic devices.

Of course, don’t get me wrong, I don’t see any problem of having these sources of entertainment around the home provided that there is balance with all of it, that there are times when these devices are turned off, such as at the dinner table, and at other times when the family can spend time together without all the distractions, maybe playing a board game or cards together instead of staring blankly at screens. Maybe even praying a decade of the Rosary together at a certain time each night, it is just a thought.

For St. Paul, he reminds us that holy families look like families that despite the frustrations that we all contend with from time to time nevertheless choose (that is the operating word here, “choose”) to be kind, humble, compassionate, gentle, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, over and over and over again! It looks like husbands, wives and children caring for each other more than they care about themselves. It looks like family members being interested in one another rather than ignoring one another by staring blankly into screens. I think the Gospel demonstrates a Holy Family wonderfully: a family that trusts in God and stays invested in each other, despite the dangers they face in life.

I believe we have a lot of holy families in our parish, I really do. I believe we have a lot of families that are doing their best to become holy families. Ask a Catholic priest what helps a family become a holy family, this priest anyway would point to the Eucharist. One way of looking at things: The Holy Family wouldn’t have been holy without the Christ’s real presence in their lives. In the Eucharist we have the opportunity to allow Christ into our hearts, to allow Christ to become part of our family, to allow Christ to be our motivation in our relationships with others.

We can’t minimize the importance of coming to Mass as a family, of praying together daily as a family, of spending quality time together as family even if this means turning off our devices from time to time. We need to allow Christ to be a part of our families. When we do this, we have adopted Jesus into our families. In a remarkable way, we remember that through our baptism we have become adopted into the Holy Family as well with Jesus as our brother and Mary as our mother in faith. This is why I believe heaven will be the ultimate family gathering.

And so, my friends, we can ask ourselves: what is one thing I can do today to help my family become a holier family? What are some of the decisions I need to make in my life that will bless my family as we make our journey through life? What is that one little thing that I can do today? It might be something as simple as turning off our devices for an hour or two each night so to make our families more important than the latest app or video game. In a parish such as ours, every family is called to be a holy family as we make our pilgrim journey to live forever in the source of all families, our loving God, who is Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.