

Holy Family 2025 “What a Holy Family Looks Like”

Bishop Frank Schuster

I always find it entertaining that the feast of the Holy Family is celebrated a week after Christmas. It is almost as if the Church knows that most of us have had a number of family gatherings these past several days and now it is time for us to remember what a Holy Family really looks like. Every family goes through some drama now and again, regardless of how well people get along. We all know that. The funny thing is, in my family, if there is ever any drama going on I usually hear about it two, three months later. I am always the last to know. In my family, it's like “Here comes the bishop, shhhh, be quiet”. I feel really blessed though that my family gets along for the most part when we get together but as a pastor I know that this is not always the case with everyone this time of year. And it must be said that some people have fractures in their families that are simply not fixable and old wounds can fester this time of year more so than others. This is why I think it is very good for us all to remember the Holy Family from time to time and ask for their intercession.

What does a holy family look like? For St. Paul, in our second reading, it looks like a family that is kind, humble, compassionate, gentle, and patient, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. Notice that Paul doesn't say that a holy family looks peaceful all the time. Families without frustrations do not exist. The Holy Family had their moments of drama too, like in the Gospel we have today of the Holy Family needing to flee to another country for their safety. And given current events, I would be remiss if I didn't say clearly that a lot of that still happens in our world today, as we all know and should be mindful of. This is why the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops voice support for migrants who show up in our country fleeing oppression or extreme poverty. The Holy Family were migrants on the flee. To be clear: We are not in favor of open borders. We are in favor common sense policies that secure the border to those who would do us harm while not lumping everyone in the same basket. Each case should be considered one by one. Each case deserves a hearing. We are dealing with human beings made in the image and likeness of God, not statistics. Hopefully none of us have to ever experience anything like so many of our migrant families experience today, of being torn apart, often without due process. However, it is true to say all families go through their moments of drama and frustration. Your family has its moments. My family has our moments. The Holy Family was not exempt from that kind of things either, and neither are we.

This is why I think the second reading from St. Paul is such good medicine, getting back to our feast day this weekend. Holy families look like families that, despite whatever the world throws at them, nevertheless choose (that is the operating word here, “choose”) to be kind, humble, compassionate, gentle, and patient, 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. We all know that families that put this into practice always fare better than families that don't. And St. Paul gives us these words of advice because it doesn't ever have to be too late for a family to adopt the virtues of kindness, humility, compassion, gentleness, patience, putting up with each other and learning how to forgive one another over and over again. It just simply begins with as many family members as possible

choosing this whether they feel like it or not and then over time this way of behaving with each other becomes more habitual and family relationships get better.

My friends, as we approach the New Year, it always seems good to ask ourselves: what is the one thing I can do today or perhaps this week to help my family become a holier family? What is the one thing I can do to help bless my family? Is it something as simple as remembering to say “please” and “thank you”? Honestly, I think sometimes family relationships get a lot better when we simply remember common courtesy. What is one thing I can do to help bless my family this week? Is it deciding to help with a simple chore or two now and again with a smile on my face instead of a frown? Again, these are behaviors we can choose if we really want to. Is it agreeing to have time during the day that is screen free, when the TV is off, smart phones and tablets put away, so we can spend more quality time together as family? Can we find a time to eat together as a family around the dinner table so to share more in each other’s lives? Can we find a time to pray with each other as a family? Can we take some of that time and pray for other families, especially those who are struggling or in harm’s way. In my experience, a family that knows how to pray together has much better chance of staying together. As a pastor who has worked with a lot of families, I can tell you that this is true.

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 celebrate together, we have the opportunity to welcome Jesus into our hearts and to allow him to become part of our family. In a remarkable way, through our baptism we have been adopted into the Holy Family with Jesus as our brother and Mary as our mother in faith. This is why I believe heaven will be the ultimate family gathering, as we reunite with all we love in the Body of Christ who have gone before us marked by the sign of faith.

Yes, my friends, the feast day of the Holy Family comes at a good time and invites us to consider, what is that one little thing that I can do today to help bless my family? In what way can I do my part to be kinder, more humble, compassionate, gentle, patient, bearing with others and being more forgiving of others in my family? In a parish such as ours, every family is important because our parish is a collection of families making our pilgrim journey together with other parishes in the communion of saints as one large Catholic family, called to live forever in the source of all families, in the life of our loving God, who is Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.