

So for the last Sunday of the year, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. Our readings talk about the importance of family and what we are to do for our family. How many families do we have here celebrating mass with us? How many kids are with your parents right now? Did you listen to what the first reading stressed? It was essentially a commentary on the fourth commandment which requires one to “Honor your father and your mother”. This reading from Sirach reminds children that they have a duty to honor their parents...even when it is difficult to do so. Notice that it doesn't identify an age for children in the commandment, it doesn't say that that duty to honor ends when a child becomes a parent of their own. Then, in Paul's letter to the Colossians, we are told to put on love and remain thankful of our relationships with one another. It is part of the “Household Code” to be compassionate, kind, humble, attentive, gentle and merciful...that we are to not provoke our children so that they don't become discouraged. Finally, in our Gospel reading, we are told about the actions of the Holy Family...a model family where both of the parents worked hard, helped each other, took care of their child, helping him grown in both human knowledge and as a Child of God.

So as children of God, what does all of this tell us to do? Well, I believe that one of the first things we need to do is define what we mean by family. It's obvious that we can see if from the standpoint of our biological family...but what about our extended family. And by extended family, I don't just mean grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. I mean our extended Christian family. I believe that we are also being called to look at them in the same way. Pope Francis talks about a story that he heard as a child, it was a story of a family with a mother, father, many children and a grandfather. The grandfather, suffering from Parkinson's illness, would drop food on the dining table, and smear it all over his face when he ate. His son considered it disgusting. Hence, one day he bought a small table and set it off to the side of the dining hall so the grandfather could eat, make a mess and not disturb the rest of the family. One day, the Pope said, the grandfather's son came home and found one of his sons playing with a piece of wood. “What are you making?” he asked his son. “A table,” the son replies. “Why?” the father asks. “It's for you, Dad, when you get old like grandpa, I am going to give you this table.” Ever since that day, the grandpa was given a prominent seat at the dining table and all the help he needed in eating by his son and daughter-in-law. Pope Francis said that the story had done him good throughout his life and that he keeps it in mind when he thinks of caring for others.

This is what we need to think about when we follow the example of the Holy Family. Although they had their issues during their time and I'm sure you've heard them before. Father talked last week about how Joseph was a stepfather. Then there's the fact that our mother Mary was a very young woman given an almost unimaginable responsibility of carrying our savior, they were living a hard life where Joseph was considering a divorce, they were going to have to flee for their lives and the lives of their child, Mary would witness the crucifixion of Jesus. All of these things describe a family that had its struggles...but the key is that they put their faith in God as they did so. Joseph stayed with Mary when he was told by the angel about her pregnancy, Mary stayed strong, even during the death of her son. In the midst of the trials and tribulations that this Holy Family had, they stayed faithful and strong in God. We should be encouraged to do the same. If you are not the perfect child, always honoring your parents at every moment or not the perfect parent, always doing the right thing...that's OK, as long as you keep moving towards God as a family. We should look towards God as individuals and as a family, we should care for all members of our family, both our biological and extended Christian family, we should know that as part of this extended holy family, we have rewards that are great awaiting us in heaven.

Know that as we go forward in this Christmas season, this lesson isn't confined to this time, our charity and love is meant to extend past this time of year. Just as the Holy Family is as relevant to us today as they were yesterday or a thousand years ago, so too is the example they give us. You are my brother...you are my sister...you are all my family, and living as our Holy Family shows us makes us a heavenly family; and that is a wonderful family to belong to as we start another year and continue in developing our relationship with each other and our God.

Deacon Corey Compton

December 31, 2017 - The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph