

## The Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph: Jesus, the Center of the Catholic Family

Today's Gospel reading presents the fifth joyful mystery of the Rosary, the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple. There are many things that we could consider. Here we have Jesus, representing the New Way, or, if you wish, the New Testament, presenting Himself to the teachers of the Old Way, or Old Testament. He is doing this in His Father's house, the Temple. Jesus is discussing scripture, the Word of God the Father. The Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, was receiving its authenticity from the New Testament, the Word of God become flesh.

Jesus' parents are panic struck, and rightly so. It was only twelve years earlier that Herod tried to kill Jesus. True, Herod was dead now, but perhaps some people still loyal to Herod had heard that there was an exceptional young boy in Jerusalem and had kidnaped Jesus. They were relieved when they found him after three days. Three days. The disciples of the Lord would be relieved when the third day Jesus rose from the dead.

Most important for today's feast, the Feast of the Holy Family is the conclusion of the reading: Jesus went back to Nazareth with his parents and was obedient to them, growing in wisdom, and age, and favor with the Father.

So let's look at the family, the Catholic family. For the Catholic family to function as God meant it to function, there must be certain fundamentals. The family must be centered on the real presence of God's love. This springs from a sacramental union of husband and wife. Sacramental union. Sadly, some people are more concerned with their wedding than they are with their marriage. They willing sacrifice the sacrament of matrimony for a sunset. But just as the secular celebration of Christmas quickly fades away on December 26<sup>th</sup>, a secular marriage will quickly fade into a simple remembrance of a wonderful party. What is needed, what is necessary for a real marriage, a Christian marriage, a Catholic marriage, is the presence of Jesus. The sacrament of matrimony is the union of Jesus Christ to the love of the husband and wife.

With Christ present in their marriage, the newly married couple joins the Lord in creating the Little Church. That's an expression that used to be popular in describing the Catholic Family. The Little Church exists as long as there is a sacramental union, even if the couple does not have children. If the husband and wife are blessed with children, then the children are brought up in the Little Church of their parents' marriage. That is why we baptize infants. They are baptized in the faith of their parents. People are not ready to think about marriage unless they are ready to think about having children and raising them for God. Those who think that they are too young to have children are too young to marry.

Parents have the responsibility of caring for their children in every aspect of their children's lives. They feed them, keep them clean, care for them when they are sick, help them to learn how to get along with other children, help them as their minds

develop, and in all ways protect them. The greatest responsibility that parents have, though, is to raise their children for God. They have to give their children the ability to become that unique reflection of God's presence He created them to be. Parents bring their children to Church and prepare them to celebrate the second two sacraments of initiation, communion and confirmation. They make sure their home is a Little Church by keeping all that would destroy that Church out of their home. This is a huge task considering the ability of evil to enter the home through the many ways that pornography attacks the home. Recently our parish joined parishes throughout our Diocese in what was called Safe Haven Sunday. On Safe Haven Sunday we do our best to provide additional tools to help our parents keep their Little Churches pure.

Parents also realize that the best way they can provide a Little Church for their children is by having an active prayer life within their homes. Family prayer time, from grace before meals to night prayers and even, possibly, hopefully, the family rosary are just some of the ways that families grow in their spiritual lives. Parents need to pray for their children even after they no longer are part of the children's bedtime prayers. A wonderful way to continue to nurture the presence of God in the Little Church is for parents to pray together every day for their children after the children grow up and move out.

Jesus was subject to his parents and obedient to them. He allowed them to fulfill their responsibility to care for him in all ways. Children need to be taught that the authority of their parents comes from God. The Fourth Commandment, Honor your Father and Mother, is rooted in the responsibility God gives parents to lead their children to be all they can be: physically, mentally, emotionally, and, most importantly, spiritually.

Jesus was the center of the Holy Family. Jesus must be the center of all our families.