

## Feast Of The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Sir ; Col ; Lk 2:28-40

December 26, 2021

Today's celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family is an opportunity for us to reflect on family life, our family's life. Family life is something Jesus shared with us, and like Jesus, we are all profoundly influenced by our families.

As we come to the end of this calendar year, various articles appear about the most important people and the most significant events of the past year. As we read these articles, we can probably agree with most of them, because these people and these events have probably affected us for better or worse in many ways.

But realistically, we are most deeply shaped mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, less by world events and leaders, than by the people in our families, and by family events such as births, marriages, illnesses and deaths. The family is the most important community to which we will ever belong.

Today's readings emphasize significant points about the family that has a serious impact on us: the family as bridge, as factory, and as a living cell.

The Book of Sirach speaks about human life as connected across generations. You and I (We) have responsibilities and relationships with the generations before us, as well as those after us. We frequently hear about our responsibility to the future, but seldom do we hear about our responsibility to those who have gone before us: to respect and care for our parents as they become older, weaker and burdened by the cares of old age and illness.

Sirach writes, *“My son, take care of your father and mother when they are old; grieve them not as long as they live, for kindness to a father and mother will not be forgotten ...”*

We are to be instruments of Christ’s love and care to them. The family is a community, a bridge that connects generations, and in which generations care for each other. The family is also a spiritual community, a community of faith. St. Paul writes to the Colossians of the virtues that hold a church or a family together: patience, forgiveness, and prayer. We need to learn what it means to be a Christian, and the family is where those lessons of life are started.

Families can also be likened to a factory. Factories are messy – lots of misplaced tools lie around, projects sit half-done – families are like that as well. They are not neat and clean places, because growing up and growing in the Lord are not parts of a neat and tidy process. The family is where we start to learn the virtues of patience, responsibility, cooperation, self-control and dealing with authority. The family, that first Christian community to which we all belong, is really the testing ground for how deep our discipleship really is.

The family is a real factory where the rough edges get smoothed, where shape and structure come into our lives, where we first start to learn what it means to follow Christ, and how far we still have to go. The family is where we learn how to grow in Jesus. That’s the wisdom of St. Paul on this Holy Family Sunday, the family as a factory of faith.

Today’s Gospel relates the story of Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the Temple for the feast of Passover.

When people come to church as a family, they are joining their family to the larger family of the Church.

We begin to see the Church's mission as our mission and the Church's concerns as our concerns. The life of the Church doesn't happen in the sky, but it takes place here on earth through the lives of individuals, and through the lives of families.

Each family is a living cell of the Body of Christ, a living cell of the larger family of the Church.

The family is the bridge that connects several generations, a factory of faith, and a living cell of the Body of Christ.

Sometimes families are scarred with problems that can burden people years later. People who come from families with difficulties know first-hand the wounds of the world and the reason why we need the teachings of Jesus to heal us and bring us back to God.

We lift all our families to the Lord in prayer to ask for healing, grace, and strength, because family life is not easy today.

Today we have a chance not simply to reflect on family life in general, but to make a decision on how **WE** can strengthen our own family's life in the coming year: how to make a stronger bridge that connects generations, a more effective factory of faith, and a vital, living cell of the Body of Christ.

That decision will **not** be made in Rome, or in Washington D.C., but in each individual home.