

# FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

December 27, 2020 B

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Father, help us to live as the Holy Family, united in faith, respect and love. Bring us to the joy and peace of your eternal home. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear today.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

## FIRST READING: Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3

When God calls Abraham, he promises that he will be the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:1-4). In today's reading, Abraham is wondering when God is going to fulfill his promise. In the midst of his doubt, God comes and reassures Abraham that he will be faithful to his promise. Then the reading jumps forward six chapters (Ch.21) where we read about God fulfilling his promise to Abraham and Sarah.

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM 105

The author is full of gratitude to God for his faithfulness to his covenant with the descendants of Abraham.

## SECOND READING: Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Abraham is held up as a man of outstanding faith, ready for adventure. God's call to Abraham means he has to leave family, home and business—and he does. It means he has to let go of the known and face the unknown—and he does.

The faith of Abraham's wife, Sarah, is also praised. Both she and her husband believe in what is humanly impossible: that they will conceive a child in their old age.

Verses 17-19 speak of Abraham's biggest test: God calls him to sacrifice his son. The story exhorts us to be ready to sacrifice what is dearest to us out of loyalty

to God. It has been said that when Abraham was going up the hill, Isaac belonged to him. But after he showed his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac belonged to God.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40

*As we listen to this First Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this Second Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

## GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40

Luke seeks to portray Jesus and his family as very faithful Jews, fulfilling two requirements of the law: purification of the mother after childbirth (Lev.12:1-8) and dedication of the first son to God (Ex.13:2, 12-16). The purification rite calls for a sacrifice. Mary and Joseph bring two pigeons, an offering of the poor. Within the presentation story, we encounter two older and very faithful Jews, Simeon and Anna, who testify to the true nature of the child. The aged saints represent the faithful *remnant* of Israel at her best: devout, obedient, constant in prayer and led by the Spirit at home and in the Temple, longing and hoping

for the fulfillment of God’s promises. They are the portrait of the Israel who *accepted* Jesus—in contrast to the Pharisees and Scribes who symbolize the Israel who *rejected* Jesus.

Also, for Luke, this story enables him to speak of the “*continuation theme*” between Judaism and Christianity. Simeon and Anna, two faithful Jews, recognize and welcome the new Messiah, the One who will be a revealing light to the Gentiles and the glory of their people, Israel. Simeon poetically speaks of the painful part of Jesus’ arrival on the scene. Jesus and his life will be a ‘sword of sorrow’ for Mary and a sign that many will reject. Thus, as Simeon and Anna recognize the good news of Jesus’ arrival, they also make the reader aware of the *cost* of accepting the Messiah. Simeon’s prophetic words about Jesus is confirmed by the elderly Anna. She gives thanks to God and witnesses about the child to all who have kept alive hope “for the deliverance of Israel.”

### FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. In the Gospel, Simeon says to Mary that a ‘sword of sorrow’ would pierce her heart because of Jesus. Can you name a ‘sword of sorrow’ that you have had to deal with, and what helped you carry that cross?
3. Who are the Simeons and Annas in your life, the prophetic speakers of God’s word and the prayer warriors?
4. As you look back to the family you grew up in, what was the faith atmosphere like?
5. What one word of wisdom can you offer to families today?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says so us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

### RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: If you have one or more family members to whom you are not speaking, pray for what you can do to bring about reconciliation. If some members of your family have disconnected from God and/or Church, pray often that God will turn their hearts back to him. If you know

someone who is experiencing ‘a sword of sorrow,’ reach out to that person.

### JOURNALING

*Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### PRAYING WITH THE WORD

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, Mary and Joseph, teach me how to nurture in my life and family the great love you had for each other. Mary, help me to deal with my own ‘sword of sorrows’ and to be a support to others who are experiencing a ‘sword of sorrow.’*

### CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

**Facilitator:** What are you grateful for? For what and for whom do you wish to pray?

### CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

#### *Prayer for Family Unity*

*Lord Jesus, with Mary and Joseph,  
you lived in a family.  
Teach me to appreciate the gift  
of being part of a family.  
Show me ever new ways  
of protecting and comforting those closest to me;  
and, each day, let me do something  
that will say ‘I love you’  
without speaking those words.  
Let me never part  
from any of my family in anger;  
prompt me always to turn back without delay  
to forgive and to be forgiven.  
Let me see your image in my family,  
in each of them, and in my larger family too,  
knowing that, in your kingdom,  
we will be truly one family,  
united by your sacrifice on the Cross.  
Amen.*