



- **13 Traits of a Healthy Family**
- **Mary's Pondering of Events Sets a Good Example for Us**
- **Jesus and His Jewish Family**

This weekend our Church celebrates the beautiful feast of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. If it was any other family, we might say Joseph, Mary and Jesus. On this feast of the Holy Family, we are invited to reflect on family.

About 25 years ago, Dolores Curran was very active nationally in Family Life Ministry as a speaker and writer. In 1985, Dolores wrote a bestselling book called *Traits of a Healthy Family*. A lot has happened in family life in the past 33 years: the breakdown of the family unity, the onset of social media, etc. But, I still believe the following 13 Traits of a Healthy Family make for a good discussion in families. I think both parents and children, especially tweens and teens, could have a great discussion on the following traits. See my reflection questions at the end of the article.

- 1) ***The healthy family has a strong sense of family.*** Even if the family members live 1,000 miles from home, they still work at staying in touch with each other. They do it through cards, telephone and visits.
- 2) ***Traditions and rituals abound in the healthy family.*** Ethnic, religious and family traditions and rituals are an important part of a healthy family. One of the most common quarrels of newlyweds arises when opposing Christmas traditions bump into each other. One of the preparation steps for marriage in our parish is the **Family of Origins Seminar**, in which engaged couples are helped to look at the rules, customs and traditions that govern their family.
- 3) ***The healthy family has control of the schedule.*** Many families today are ruled by the family calendar and Little League, Boy Scouts, piano lessons, etc. The healthy family refuses to allow such activities to divide the family. It evaluates each activity's impact on the overall good of the family.

4) ***The healthy family demands responsibility and respect from each member of the family.*** Each family member, regardless of age, is responsible for some family chores. The family is not just mom's or dad's responsibility - as it tends to be in the unhealthy family - but is **everyone's** responsibility. Respect is shown by never humiliating children or discussing their shortcomings in front of others.

5) ***The healthy family can cope with adversity as well as with success.*** Healthy families understand that failures are a part of life. They don't fall apart when a member of the family lets the family down; instead, they bond together to heal the hurt and problem.

6) ***The healthy family communicates well and develops good communication patterns.*** Members of the family know what is going on. They talk about successes and failures. They have a way of dealing with conflict. They are not afraid to seek outside help if they are failing to resolve their problems.

7) ***The healthy family spends time alone with other members of the family.*** We are not referring here to family meetings, but to times when a parent might spend with **one** of his/her children. This helps to develop a personal relationship within the family unit.

8) ***The healthy family develops a sense of humor and play.*** Play and humor can be a relief valve in family life. The family that rarely laughs together is in trouble. The unhealthy family tends to use humor destructively. Members laugh **at** rather than **with** each other.

9) ***The healthy family allows children their own era.*** Within reason, parents allow their children to have their own music, clothes, hair styles, language, e.g., words like "gross," etc.

10) ***The healthy family has a strong sense of trust.*** Healthy families don't get sucked in by the "you don't trust me" game. Children in a healthy family know that they can trust their parents to want and to do what is best for them.

11) ***The healthy family looks forward to teen years.*** Many families cope okay until the teen years. Then they become uncommunicative and lose trust. Parents hear their friends say, "Just wait until they're teenagers." This sets parents and teens up for conflict.

12) ***The healthy family permits each child to be the person God created him/her to be.*** Sickly families try to force kids to fit a particular mold, e.g., if athletics are high on the family priority list, every child must be an athlete, whether or not he/she wants to.

13) *The healthy family lets go.* Children in unhealthy families are never permitted to “leave” even when they are married. They are tied to their parents with obligation, dependency and guilt. Healthy parents let children go when they become adults and now are responsible for their own behavior, beliefs, careers and families.

#### Reflection questions for your family:

1. Which of the above traits spoke to you most?
2. Which of the above traits are operative in your family and which ones are not?
3. Which trait not operative would you like to be present?
4. Is there a healthy trait that Dolores Curran omitted?

### Mary's Pondering

Today's Gospel is the Fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary—the losing and finding of Jesus in the Temple. When Mary asks why he got lost, Jesus responds: “*Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?*”—a strange response from a twelve-year old. Towards the end of the Gospel, Luke tells us that “*Mary kept (or pondered) all these things in her heart.*” Mary has much to ponder: her miraculous conception of Jesus, the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, the flight into Egypt, Jesus' words to Mary in today's Gospel. Mary's prayerful pondering of all the strange events in her life helps her to make some sense of them. Concerning Mary's pondering, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*It's clear that Mary didn't immediately understand the meaning of what was happening to her and what God was asking of her. More than once we read in the Gospels that she was perplexed. That's how it always is, even for the saints. Profound experiences always begin with perplexity.*

*So what did Mary do? She kept the memory of these events in her heart and pondered them. Seeking to discern the meaning behind them. This pondering was not free from uncertainty and anxiety.*

*For instance, after the visit of the shepherds to the manger, St. Luke says that “Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (2:19).*

*There is another example in today's Gospel. At the end of the incident of the finding of Jesus in the Temple, St. Luke tells us that “Mary stored up all these things in her heart.”*

*Mary comes across as a silent, reflective person. All her life she pondered and prayed over how God dealt with her. This seems to have been for her a way of life.*

*When she doesn't understand, she ponders until she does.*

*And she pondered the painful events even more to discern the purpose of God in them. The incident in which Jesus got lost in Jerusalem was a painful one for her. Yet she stored it in her heart, and by so doing learned from it. In this way she acquired insight and wisdom.*

*This shows the importance of reflection. We never know at the time what is happening to us. It is only afterwards, perhaps long afterwards, that our eyes are opened and we begin to understand.*

*Only by reflecting can we come to understand our experiences. Reflection helps us to derive precious insights from our experiences. Emerson says, “Life lies behind us like a quarry from whence we get the tiles and copstones for the masonry of today.”*

*However, it is easy to recall pleasant experiences, but far from easy to recall painful experiences. We are tempted to suppress our painful memories. However, this doesn't mean they don't influence us. They can distil a poison into us.*

*We need to recall the painful experiences too. They too are worth treasuring. They can help us to grow in understanding, compassion, and wisdom.*

*Sadly, some people learn nothing from experience. But there are others for whom experience is their real school. Wisdom is not simply accumulating knowledge and facts. No one has become wise in a day or even in a year. Wisdom is the fruit of much pondering.*

*Parents need a lot of wisdom. What Mary learned from her praying and pondering she passed on to her child, who St. Luke tells us, “increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people.”*

*Jesus was taught, nourished, and formed by a wise woman who loved God with all her heart and soul. May we learn from her to keep the Lord's words in our hearts.*

(Used with permission granted by Dominican Publications, [www.dominicanpublications.com](http://www.dominicanpublications.com). New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies, by Flor McCarthy.)

I am grateful to all of you who sent me good wishes, kind words, goodies, etc., for Christmas. May 2019 be a good year for you personally and for our parish family.

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you will help them become what they are capable of becoming.

*When the heart is ready  
God will show the way.*

**“The unreflected life is not worth living.”**

**- Socrates**

The following reflection is by Denis McBride, an English Redemptorist priest.

### Jesus and his Jewish family

When it comes to thinking about Jesus, it is easy to forget that Jesus was brought up as a pious law-abiding member of the Jewish race. The Jewish religion was his religion; his God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the psalms would have been his prayers; his religious education would have been the experience of his people in history as we have it in the Old Testament.

Jesus was not an alien from outer space: he did not suddenly emerge from nowhere, but emerged from within the tradition of Judaism in first-century Palestine. He did not grow up by himself in the wilderness, but grew up within a family and within a particular neighborhood.

As the Gospel tells us today, Jesus was brought up in Nazareth by Mary and Joseph, and like a good Jewish son lived under their wisdom and authority. From them he would have his first experience of being loved, of being held, of being listened to, and of being nurtured. He was a member of the extended Jewish family which, unlike our nuclear family, includes every kind of kinship no matter how remote. And like every family, the Gospel also tells us that Jesus had his share of peculiar relatives and neighbours.

In his later life, in his teachings and compassionate outreach to people, Jesus will speak the word of God in a new way. But first, as a child he is brought up to inherit that word from his own tradition, to pray it, to be at home in the customs of his own people, and to honour the great festivals—like the feast of Passover, commemorating the liberation from bondage in Egypt, and the feast of Tabernacles, commemorating the dwelling of the Jews in the wilderness. Jesus grew up living and breathing the traditions of his own Jewish people. In a word, he belonged.

### Jesus and his Father

Of course when children grow up they have a way of branching out on their own. They want to be more than inheritors of a tradition; they want to make their own mark. They want to exercise not only the dog but their own initiative. Sometimes parents can feel utterly bewildered and hurt by the direction their children take in life: they cannot fathom why Mark, who has more than distinguished himself in physics at university, now wants to spend his time on the high seas catching fish. But all parents have to learn that their children are not born to be miniature reflections of themselves. Children are other people.

Later in his life when Jesus begins to formulate his own values and preach his own vision, he comes into open conflict with his own religious tradition. So the formula goes: "You have heard it said to you...but I say to you." Many Pharisees are deeply shocked to see Jesus breaking the law and encouraging his disciples to do the same. Why doesn't Jesus simply remain within the confines of his own religious tradition?

Jesus' neighbours refuse to believe that Jesus is anything more than the son of a local carpenter. Even Jesus' relatives come to believe that he is out of his mind when he brings home the kind of people that others are happy to leave on the junk heap. The relatives are frankly embarrassed and want to take charge of him. But Jesus takes his charge from somewhere else.

The adult Jesus has to face a conflict between two loyalties: loyalty to his Jewish family versus loyalty to his Father. Jesus is pulled in two directions—the way his family want him to go, and the way his Father wants him to go.

That conflict is foreshadowed in today's Gospel when the young Jesus of twelve years old is seen to opt for his Father's business, rather than go the way of his family. When that option is explained to Mary and Joseph, Luke tells us that they do not understand what he is talking about. But that conflict will emerge only later in the ministry: here it is foreshadowed, and Luke softens the scene when he says that Jesus lives under the authority of Mary and Joseph and grows in wisdom and stature.

### Jesus and his new family

At the centre of Jesus' family life and at the centre of his ministry is one irreplaceable person: God his Father. That relationship is for Jesus the most important of his life: ultimately, it is what gives him his direction and support and will sustain him in his passion and death. When Jesus comes to describe his own family in the Gospel, it is not a relationship of blood but a relationship of fidelity to the word of God: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

We are all asked, like Jesus, to centre our lives on the word of God. Whether we live alone or in a family, whether we have busloads of relatives or none, we can all be a member of Jesus' new family. There is only one qualification: to hear the word of God and do it. Because Jesus extended his family, today's feast really belongs to all of us. So take a good look around at the family!

(Used with permission granted by Denis McBride, CSSR, Seasons of the Word.)

### 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.

Have a blessed week and Happy New Year,

*Le Fanon*



tobin2@live.com