

## Bible Study

### Feast of the Holy Family, cycle A

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) “Lord Jesus, you are Emmanuel, God with us – in this very place, at this very time and for all eternity. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we reflect now upon your words of love in these Sacred Scriptures. We ask this in your name, for you are God, in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, always and for ever. Amen.”

#### **Focusing Questions**

1. What sort of family time did you have this week? Did any of it feel like holy time?
2. Share 1 way in which your family is truly a blessing to you?

#### **Commentary before the First Reading: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14**

The Book of Sirach (also called “Ecclesiasticus”) is one of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament. The author lived roughly 250 years before the birth of Jesus, and was a man who knew well the Jewish law, the Jewish priesthood and worship. He was also a keen observer of life. His carefully written book contains proverbs about many aspects of life, all to help the reader become a more faithful child of God – in this case, as part of a family.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Look up Exodus 20:12 and notice the promise attached to the Fourth Commandment. In what way does the Sirach’s advice echo the Fourth Commandment?
2. Does “honor” mean the same as “obey,” or does it extend beyond obedience?
3. What are the divine rewards for a person who honors his/her parents?
4. By speaking of the authority of both parents in the first sentence and by using a “parallel” literary style, common in Hebrew writing, what is Sirach saying about which parent has the greater authority?
5. State the point of verse 14 in your own words.
6. “Justice” simply means “the right thing to do for another.” What does this reading have to do with justice?

#### **Commentary before the Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-21**

The family is the basic social unit of society and of the Church, called the “domestic Church.” This reading is part of a longer instruction about the proper atmosphere in a Christian home of that era. Not only would the right atmosphere lead to a pleasant environment in which to live, but would also nourish the young Church. Worship still happened in houses at this time, not in public buildings. Therefore, happy homes nurtured harmony and peace in a faith-filled Church. Note: Saint Paul was a product of his culture and society. In our culture and our time, he would probably say that a wife should be supportive of her husband’s leadership in the home, rather than “subordinate” to him. The intent is the same, in this case.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Which verse reveals Saint Paul’s awareness that every family and every congregation experiences occasions when people say or do things that offend others?
2. Verses 12, 13, and 15 give reasons why harmonious conduct is proper. Can you state them?
3. To act or to pray “in the name of the Lord” means to do or to say exactly what Jesus himself would in that situation. How does one come to know what Jesus would want?
4. Even though Mediterranean society at the time was a patriarchal one in which the male was the definite leader, how do Saint Paul’s words point out that authority has boundaries, even in one’s home?
5. Identify the characteristics that Saint Paul lists here as being expected of us as disciples?

#### **Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23**

The Feast of the Holy Family was established by Pope Leo XIII in the late 1800’s, but was not inserted into the annual calendar of liturgical celebrations until 1921. Celebrating this aspect of Jesus’ life as a “feast” emphasizes the importance of the family and presents the Holy Family as an ideal toward which all human families should strive to imitate. Although the incident in this Gospel reading is hardly one of peace and harmony, it does relate the devotion of Mary and Joseph to each other and to the care of the Son of God entrusted to their care, even while being political refugees and immigrants.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. What do you admire most about Saint Joseph in this reading?
2. Why did King Herod the Great want to kill the Child Jesus?
3. Travel by night was extremely dangerous in those days; why would Joseph and Mary choose that?
4. There is a clear parallel to Jewish history in this reading; who else had moved to Egypt and then was “called” back to the Promised Land (Genesis 46 and Exodus 12)? Why would this have been an important connection for a Jewish Christian reading Saint Matthew’s Gospel account?
5. How many times in this story did an angel speak to Joseph in a dream? What does that tell us about Joseph?
6. Look at Luke 1:26 and Luke 2:4. Why did Joseph and Mary choose Nazareth as the place in which they would live after returning from Egypt?

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. In a general sense, how well does family life in the United States at this time live up to the standard set forth in these readings?
2. The Second Vatican Council spoke several times about the home as a “domestic church” in which we learn how to be members also of the universal Church. Discuss some of the aspects of Church (“being a good Christian”) that are ideally found in a Christian home too.
3. How closely does that mirror your experience of your childhood home as a domestic church?
4. Would you say that others would find a great deal of gratitude and mutual respect in your house?
5. Where do you find the greatest challenges to forming your home around the ideals set before us in these readings? What can you do about (some of) them?

### **Closing Prayer**

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, your home in Nazareth was marked by love, mutual respect, compassion, and faith. Strengthen our families to be more like yours in word and in action. Fill our families with your Holy Spirit of goodness, so that we might one day live forever as part of your heavenly family of faith and love, for you are One God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.