

Commentry to the Feast of the Holy Family



On Christmas morning the preacher spoke about reverence for all children. He referred to the many awful cases of child abuse reported in the media and said that all children should be revered like the Christ Child. As he spoke a little three year old girl detached herself from her parents and stood in the center isle of the church sending flying kisses in all directions. "I do not understand" said the preacher, "how anyone could treat with violence something so charming and beautiful and delicate as this little girl." Her father sitting on the nearby seat was as good and gentle and loving as any father could be. But he said under his breath, "often, I can!"

Across the isle Tony and Tessie looked a model couple. After a whirlwind courtship they had a grand wedding. But as they settled down to marriage they discovered how different they were in personality. Tessie used weakness to try to get her way. When things were going wrong she would cry, ask forgiveness, and try to patch things up. But Tony had learned to deal with life by facing problems aggressively. He despised anything that appeared to be weakness and saw no reason to make up after a quarrel. While appearances were maintained, there was now a ravine between them and anything like

intimate communication was a long forgotten memory.

These situations are just little windows that give us an idea of what family life is like. It is not a bed of roses - or if it is the thorns play as prominent a part as the flowers. Today, the Sunday following Christmas, the Church gives importance to all families by setting the Holy family of Nazareth before us as an example. It is not a pie in the sky sort of feast - say your prayers and all will be well. Instead, Mary is told by Simeon, "you yourself shall be pierced with a sword." The arena of marriage is not an easy one.

One of the greatest joys of my life has been listening to people, particularly married people, in different parts of the world who have shared on how the practice of meditation had helped them grow and be happy as a family. One of the first pitfalls of marriage is that of trying to change one's partner. Nagging makes one's partner dig in all the more and makes change less possible. When, however, one partner in a marriage begins to meditate this person begins to be more at home at his or her center. If there is more peace there, one's responses will also be more peace-full. If one's responses are more peace-full the other partner will have to be effected and so the level of tension in the relationship is reduced. As one meditates one becomes more aware of the violent reactions that come from the defensive ego and one can become able to replace them with more civil responses. As the level of tension in relationship goes down the level of intimacy rises. There will be more real sharing of thoughts and feelings and, when this happens, according to some couples, sexual union becomes a new kind of celebration.

It has been said that the best gift that parents can give their children is to love one another. So the improved relationship between spouses will have a spin off in the relationship with their children. If they can listen more sensitively to one another they will be able to listen more sensitively to their children, with subsequent benefits for all. Family life is about being "at home" for one another. But we cannot be at home for one another if we are alienated from ourselves - not at home with ourselves. This is becoming more and more of a problem in our world of working wives and high competition. There is less time to be together: then the skill of being together gets lost and there is a rush to fill up feelings of emptiness and alienation by work.

Meditation is a way of prayer in which by using a prayer word one tries to be still. This makes one be at home at one's own center. It makes it more possible to be at home with others. If practiced by family members it will help them to become more whole and more holy.

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