

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Dec 30th 2018

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

When I was a young wife and mother, I could never find the time to pray. Each day was so full and with each passing year our schedule as a family grew more demanding. How could I get the laundry done? Get to the grocery store? How could I find time to pray?

I finally realized that no one ever came into the laundry room, and the peace of that room was the perfect place to pray. As I sorted laundry, I prayed for each person in my family while folding pajamas, school uniform blouses and an endless number of socks. My prayers and my spirituality were shaped in that laundry room, and I still connect doing laundry with prayer.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, remembering how Jesus grew up in the normal busy-ness of family life, how he was shaped as a person by both Mary and Joseph.

Pope Francis wrote in his exhortation on family that the family is “where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another.” That very belonging to each other is what today’s readings are about.

In the first reading, Sirach entreates parents and children to love and honor each other. When one generation can no longer care for the other, he calls us to “take care of your father when he is old ... even if his mind fails, be considerate of him.” He adds the care we give for the elderly “will not be forgotten, firmly planted against the debt” of our own failings.

Our lives are complicated and families don’t always consist of two parents. But Paul’s letter to the Colossians offers all of us the tools we need to care for each other: heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. I can guess that Paul was intimately connected with family as he notes other important family skills, like “bearing with one another” which seems like an apt phrase on the harder days. When we share a home, we not only have to forgive each other, but to be aware that we need forgiveness from each other, prompted by the example of God’s deeply loving forgiveness for us all.

The Gospel is Luke’s story of a 12-year-old Jesus who did not rejoin the large family caravan after a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. A frightened Mary and Joseph found him there three days later, talking to the teachers.

At the end of that episode, Luke tells us that Jesus returned to Nazareth and was obedient to his parents. Pope Francis said that this story “contains a beautiful teaching about our families. A pilgrimage does not end when we arrive at our destination, but when we return home and resume our everyday lives.”

Our faith lives and our family lives converge in the most ordinary places. Sacred times happen around the kitchen table, putting our children to bed for the night, or perhaps if they are grown, in phone calls to catch up with each other’s lives. Jesus is present and joyful in the family traditions and rituals we have developed, in our prayers together before dinner, and even in special new customs we may have

created for our adult children and their families during the holidays.

The laundry room, the kitchen table, a casual stroll together around the neighborhood are all places to recognize God present and active and drawing us ever closer to God's own heart.

Loving Jesus, as we celebrate this Christmas season, please help me to recognize how very present you are in the simplest times. Whether I am alone or with my family, even in the most mundane situations, you are calling me to a deeper relationship with you and reminding me of your endless love for me in those moments.

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