

Feast of the Holy Family, C – December 30, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 830 words

On this Feast of the Holy Family we are given the gospel of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple. This scene has always been a perplexing one for me, inasmuch as it is also one of the “joyful” mysteries of the Rosary. While finding the Christ Child after having lost him on the way was surely a moment of great joy, yet that moment is prefaced by the distress and sorrow of Mary and Joseph as they searched, and is immediately followed by our Lord’s mysterious response: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”. For me, even if this scene is counted among the joyful mysteries, it seems, in a way, to be a sort of “bridge” to the sorrowful mysteries as well. There is joy: but there is also fear, sorrow; there is tension.

Well, isn’t family life also often a mixed reality? There are moments of intense joy: the birth of a child, that child’s reaching milestones, the purchase of a home, job promotions, retirement, and so forth. But there are many moments of fear and sorrow – and there can be so much tension besides. There are many things about the particular life of the Holy Family that we simply cannot relate to – experiences that we do not and will not ever share. But what we do hold in common are the feelings, the emotions, and hopefully, the virtues – especially the charity – that they had. The family is a society within society; it is like a cell with its own individual life, yet which fits in and contributes to the whole. The Holy Family is our model to follow.

For this reason, in the Collect of today’s Mass we prayed, “O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity...”. “In the bonds of charity”! See how they handled their troubles: Mary and Joseph lost Jesus along the way, yet they did not start bickering about whose fault it was, but set out to find him together. And when they found him, they did not accuse or reprimand, but asked a simple question. He gave them a mysterious, even difficult answer – one which our Blessed Mother would ponder in her heart. But then it said that he “went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them”.

Charity gives rise to harmony. Charity does not overlook problems, but it does enable us to choose the prudent way to handle them. Charity does not have all the answers, but it does help us to cope with the tension and mystery that we do often encounter. And since it involves seeking the good of the other, charity helps us to overcome selfishness and put others first – one of the keys to success in any family. In meditating upon the charity of the Holy Family, we can learn many valuable lessons for our own family life. And from there, we can make holy resolutions and seek new beginnings. Even if there has been much unholiness in the past in one’s family, the grace of God may always define the present and make a new path forward.

We will therefore ask, in the Prayer over the Gifts, that God may, “through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and Saint Joseph,... establish our families firmly in [his] grace and [his] peace.” Grace is God’s gift to us; and as I preached on Christmas, his peace is something that we cannot get through our own efforts. We truly need him to intervene in our individual lives and in our families, if his grace will indeed define our present and give us a path forward in peace. Our holy resolutions must therefore include a greater commitment to prayer, seeking those things that only God can give. This is the time of the year for making resolutions – and for carefully considering how we may effectively carry them out.

There is a prayer to the Holy Family that is especially beloved by the Irish; it is one of the earliest prayers that many learn, and one of the last that they say or hear others saying as they pass from this life to the next. It goes like this: “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: I give you my heart and my soul; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: assist me in my last agony; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: may I breathe forth my spirit in peace with you. Amen.” We may have many more days, months, and

years on this earth – but may our hearts and souls always be with the Holy Family, in peace. And when the time does come for us to leave the bonds of family life on this earth to go the Father's house, the great family of heaven, may they assist and guide us on our journey.