

Feast of the Holy Family, A – December 29, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 675 words

Our earthly families may well be holy or they might be rather dysfunctional; in any case, we each also belong to the family of God – first, through baptism; then, through our ongoing “yes” to his plan. In fact, Christ taught in one gospel passage that anyone who does the will of his Father is his kin – his “brother, sister, or mother”, as he put it.<sup>1</sup> As we reflect upon the Holy Family, then, we are invited to reflect upon our own very real – and important – place in it.

Thinking about doing God’s will, it is most common for us to consider Mary’s “yes” – her *fiat* – for it was through that “yes” that salvation dawned upon the human race. By her *fiat* she reversed the ancient disobedience of Eve; she made herself completely available to God and all that he willed for her and for us all. She gave herself to the Lord without reserve or condition. Rightly we should sing the praises of her “yes”, for it changed the entire course of history.

But both last Sunday and today, we also heard about Joseph’s “yes”. The angel came to Mary while she was awake and she responded affirmatively. Three times, however, an angel came to Joseph while he was asleep, and he promptly obeyed. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent we saw Joseph obeying the angel about taking Mary as his wife and naming their son Jesus. Today, we see how the angel twice directed him about shielding his family from persecution.

Joseph’s “yes” – or rather, his “yesses” – were also important to God; we could even say, essential. The Lord chose him deliberately to be the spouse of Mary and the foster-father of Christ. He was a just man; a holy man. He, in the flesh, was in some measure an image of the Father. Jesus would have learned in his humanity to imitate Joseph in so many ways – as sons naturally tend to imitate their fathers. Therefore, Joseph’s obedience to God was key.

But that obedience extended to Jesus also. St. Luke tells us in his gospel that Jesus “went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them... [he] increased in wisdom and stature and favor...”<sup>2</sup> As very God, Christ knew all things and at all times had power over all things. But he wanted to share in our condition completely. So he submitted himself in obedience to a father and a mother. In the Father’s plan for his great family, Christ’s “yes” was key, as well.

Our “yes”, then, is willed by God also; he has determined a unique place for each of us within his Holy Family. We were grafted onto that family tree through Baptism, and our ongoing “yes” assures that our graft remains alive – or, when we sin, our “yes” to repentance leads us back to life. “I am the vine, you are the branches”, Christ says in another place.<sup>3</sup> If we are part of his family then we are not inconsequential: all can and must bear fruit.

What are the ways that we have said “yes” to God? Certainly, there are the big ways for many: through marriage, diaconate, priesthood, religious life, job choice. But the Lord’s will is in the many smaller details, also. The Holy Family of Nazareth had a normal family life – so normal that the gospels omit to tell us about most of it. Nevertheless, it was willed by God – just as our normal, daily life is, also. What about our “yesses” in all the small matters?

The small things – the day-to-day: that is where we most often struggle. Sometimes we might wish for God’s will to be made manifest in a big way, like through the message of an angel – that could certainly make things easier! But we must not forget the hidden life of the Holy Family of Nazareth, that did not involve angels or great revelations. Our “yes” to God in all things, great and small, will save us and assure our place in his family both now and for eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 12:50.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:52.

<sup>3</sup> John 15:5.