

Feast of the Holy Family

December 30, 2007

Sirach 3:2 - 6, 12 - 14; Psalm 128; Colossians 3:12 - 21; Matthew 2:13 - 15, 19 - 23

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Holy Mother Church in her wisdom has placed the feast of the Holy Family on the first Sunday after Christmas.

The first reading from the Book of Sirach praises all those who honor their parents and sets before us as blessed those who reverence their father and mother. The passage from Colossians paints a glorious picture of Christian family life underlining the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness. All this prepares us for the Gospel story of Joseph, the protector, taking the Holy Family to Egypt. They live there as alien immigrants until it is safe to return to Israel.

This feast calls upon each of us to build our family units on the teachings and example of Jesus, or as it says in Colossians, “Let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body.” We all know what an enormous challenge it is to live in peace with those who are determined to be hostile. Indeed sometimes it seems impossible. Colossians seems to address this very difficulty when it says: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” This seems to demand not just a good deal of faith sharing but deep and prolonged prayer. Like every child we need to know how much we need Our Father. Perhaps that is why the Lord’s prayer became such an important part of the life of the early Church.

It is at this time of year when we gather around the Christmas creche that the Holy Spirit inspires us to live out our family virtues—to reach out to the lonely, to pull back into the warmth of the family forgiveness the renegade and the rebel, to lavish with gratitude those who have nourished and protected and guided us. It is up to all of us to build and rebuild the body of Christ – not just our own family members – but all who are called to be brothers and sisters in Christ.