

Feast of the Holy Family

Dec. 26, 2004

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

Preaching by: S. Frances Marie Henriques, O.P.

The feast of the Holy Family presents our civilization with a model of family life of which we are in desperate need. We can't pick up the newspaper without reading that the family is threatened in multiple ways. The advocacy for same-sex marriage is one huge threat, but there are many others: divorce, sexual license, cohabitation, adultery, child abuse, child crimes and violence, drugs and general moral decay. Civilization has been through this before when marriage, which is said to be the foundation of society, has been besieged. We need only remember early Roman civilization. Healthy marriages are the basis of strong families and a strong nation. Whenever we fail to protect moral principles, whenever we embrace aberrations as though they were virtues, civilization suffers and fails.

It is not easy to be a holy family, and it was not easy for Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Matthew's Gospel 2:13-15,19-23 tells us some of the difficulties they experienced: misunderstanding when Mary became pregnant, and when Jesus at the age of twelve remained behind teaching in the temple; displacement when traveling to Jerusalem for the census and when emigrating to Egypt after Jesus was born; rejection and hardship when traveling; fear from the threat of Herod and an uncertain future. Their love and respect for one another, their trust in God and faithfulness to Him made them a holy family. Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 talks about the honor due a father and mother's authority with the resulting blessings it brings the family and the individual. It atones for sin, gives credence to prayer, bestows peace and brings comfort.

It is not easy for us in our day and age to be a holy family because of the obstacles modern life presents and encourages: worldliness, competition, greed, ambition, too much money or lack of it, fast paced living. All these, if they became values, deteriorate our relationships and destroy family harmony. Colossians, 3:12-21 gives a remedy of virtues that build up family living and relationships: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, gratitude and over all these a love that supports and holds families together. It is possible to treat outsiders with more Christian charity than we do those with whom we live. Our challenge is to make our families the recipients of our best selves.

The mystery of Christmas and the Holy Family is revelation of the Trinity, Father Son, and Holy Spirit. God entered the human family through the humanization of the Second Person sent by the Father, but it was Father, Son and Holy Spirit who made Himself audible, visible and perceptible to the human senses in Jesus. The Father sent the Son and chose Mary, while the Holy Spirit breathed the love of God in sending the Son. This beautiful harmony and cohesiveness is our ideal. As we celebrate the work of the Trinity in the Holy Family we ask that we might grow in our appreciation of the family to which we belong, that we might be a positive influence in its growth and holiness, and that we might be assured of God's love and concern for our family life.