

Today, within the Octave of Christmas, we celebrate the great Feast of the Holy Family of St. Joseph, our Blessed Mother Mary, and Jesus their son, our Lord and Savior. And in the context of this great Feast, we hear in the Gospel today from St. Luke of a fascinating, mysterious event in the life of the Holy Family, an event that is absolutely unique to Luke's Gospel.

Ultimately, this whole story of the child Jesus being lost in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was 12 years old runs counter to the whole romantic notion that "the Holy Family never experienced suffering, problems, or challenges." I mean, Mary and Joseph lost their *12-year-old son for 3 days!* And not only did they lose their son, but they lost the Son of God! I mean can you imagine the worry and anxiety they must've felt?! Which is why you can understand Mary and Joseph's very human, parental reaction when they find Jesus in the Temple after three days, which must've been the longest three days of their lives: "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." To which of the Son of God

responds, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Now in responding like this, Jesus is not rebuking Mary and Joseph as if they had done something wrong. Rather Jesus is instructing them on how their parental role must be subordinate to the will of His divine Father and that His divine Sonship and obedience to His divine Father’s will must take precedence over His ties to His family. And yet, make no mistake, Jesus was *truly a human son of a human* family and his parents Mary and Joseph, *did* have an important part to play in His mission, as indicated in the subsequent context of this passage, where we’re told that Jesus submitted Himself to their leadership and honored them with the faithful obedience of a son.

Brothers and sisters, this entire, mysterious event in the life of the Holy Family, highlights the supremacy of God the Father’s will in each of our lives, and more specifically in each of our families. Indeed, Jesus reminds us in today’s Gospel that the Father’s will must come *first* in our lives *and* in the lives of our families. So that begs the question: What is the will of our Heavenly Father for each of our families?

Certainly the Father's will for our families is our holiness and therefore our salvation and eternal happiness with Him in Heaven. A family's holiness may be understood as their relationship with Christ that is then hopefully manifested in a life of love and virtue at home and in public. In fact, today's second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, is the perfect expression of God the Father's will for each of our families: "Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; *as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.*"

Brothers and sisters, what *is* "love"? For us as Catholics, "love" is not some fluffy puffy feeling that comes and goes with our moods. Rather "love" is a stable, enduring disposition of the will where one freely seeks the *authentic good* of another *purely for the sake of the other*. Love seeks that which is truly best for another—that which is truly helpful and beneficial to another spiritually, physically, and

emotionally. Love is totally devoid of selfishness. Rather, true love is totally selfless, pure, humble, sacrificial, and merciful.

In Pope St. John Paul II's beautiful apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, or "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World," which I **highly recommend** to *every* parent, grandparent, married couple, and engaged couple as required spiritual reading (you can find it through Google and read it for free on the Vatican's website)—in this beautiful document, the Polish saint writes, "...the family has the **mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love**, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His Bride."

Brothers and sisters, in creating our families, God has given us certain human beings to love and care for, saying, "this is who I'm calling you to love and care for in your daily life. This is who I'm calling you to sacrifice for, to witness the faith to through your words and actions. This is who **I** want to love and care for **through** you."

Brothers and sisters, obviously, **none** of our families is perfect, and **every** family has dysfunction, drama, and challenges—**every** family

experiences suffering to some degree, which is why all of our families *must be firmly rooted in Christ* and remain close to Him through prayer and the sacraments, so that He can strengthen, heal, sanctify and purify our families and make our families holy and living reflections of the unconditional divine love that the world is crying out for.

On this Feast of the Holy Family, which comes to us during the Christmas season when we spend so much beautiful time with our families, I think the Lord is inviting and challenging us to consider how our families can practically grow in the supreme virtue of love: Do I strive to help my family grow in faith, hope, love, and holiness? Do our families pray together? Do our families eat meals together? Or are we so scattered, divided, and isolated as individuals that we don't make time for each other anymore? Do I spend more time on my computer, my Ipad, or my cell phone than I do with my own family? Do I give my life more to technology and work than to my own family?

Do I spend quality time with my family, whether through recreation, vacations or trips, playing games, watching movies, etc.? Do I make time getting to know the members of my family through simple

conversation, listening to them, helping them, understanding their lives, their experiences, their struggles, etc.? Do I take the initiative and reach out to members of my family who may be scattered around the state, the country, or the world or do I ignore and neglect my family? Do I strive to be a peacemaker within my family? Do I love my family as I should?

Brothers and sisters, St. Teresa of Calcutta said, “If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.” So much wisdom, truth, and beauty to that statement. There’s no doubt in my mind that one of the most powerful and transformative forces in the world is a *family that loves each other*.

As we prepare to receive the Son of God in the Most Holy Eucharist—our Lord Jesus who was also the Son of Mary and Joseph, let us ask our Savior to protect, strengthen, heal, and sanctify our families. And in doing so, let us beg the Lord for the grace to love our families as we should, so that they may be living and beautiful reflections of His saving, merciful love.