

Homily

December 29, 2024

Feast of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary & Joseph

21:00 – 36:26

Well, last week we came here and we were in the single largest cold meat locker on the east side of Indianapolis. And today, it's a sauna. We'll figure out the balance eventually. (wiping his brow)

There is a movie. It's an old movie with Katherine Hepburn, Peter O'Toole and some other actors, known as "The Lion in Winter." It's about Henry II, his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine and their three sons: Jeffrey, Richard and John. Now, the king had banished Eleanor to France because he had other things on his plate and he wanted her out of the way.

Well, he invited her home for Christmas, somewhat reluctantly, but she came. And tumult is the best word to describe what went on in the house. I mean, Henry and Eleanor fought most of the time. Jeffrey was scheming because he was the oldest, knowing that he would succeed. Richard was the big, strong guy, who didn't quite understand life yet. And John, he was a wimp, not very bright. Guess who eventually became the king? John!

At a certain point, after the boys had fought, Eleanor had fought with Henry and Henry had left the room, Eleanor turns to the camera and says, "Well, what family doesn't have it's ups and downs?"

Now, there are a number of TV shows over the past 50 years about families. Right? For those of us who are really old, "Ozzie & Harriet." Remember that? "The Partridge Family." "All in the Family" – Now there's a family! Do you know any others that come to mind?

"Leave It to Beaver." "Dick VanDyke." "The Brady Bunch." "Father Knows Best." (Oh. You're old!) (Laughter) "The Simpsons." (Oy Veh!) "The Waltons." Any more? "The Andy Griffith Show." Yes! "Little House on the Prairie."

It's amazing how many TV shows, whether they're mild dramas or comedies, or a combination, are centered in families. You know why? Because there's always conflict in a family. And that's what drives drama and comedy, some conflict.

Why is it then, that we who celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family tend to think of them as the "perfect" family? Everything went just fine. Especially since the son was the Son of God. So he already had it all figured out, right? And Mary – you know she was visited by an angel. Before that, she was conceived immaculately. So conflict wasn't a part of her life. And Joseph, he was a dreamer, okay? But he was an obedient dreamer. He listened.

They must have had a fine time.

Oh, come on! Their life was full of stress and conflict. Not so much among themselves, but with their reality.

What makes them special? It's the same thing that makes those television families special. They had a love for each other and they found a way to work through the stresses. Even the Jeffersons figured that out. They found a way based in love and in hope and in the values that drive good relationships. Even Archie Bunker, in the later part of the show, after Edith had died, mellowed. No one thought that would happen. (Did you?)

This day when we recall the Holy Family, it's that they relied upon God. They listened. They found in their lives, in the midst of having to flee to Egypt, having to go to Bethlehem for a census and the baby is born in a stable. Having stinky shepherds come to visit. Then they're surprised by kings, Magi, coming to visit. Then they flee to Egypt and they come back to Nazareth.

And then, twelve years later, what happens? We heard it in the Gospel. The teenage boy – how many teenagers are here right now? Raise your hand. Okay.

The teenage boy stays behind because he's got an agenda. He wants to learn. But he's going to do it with strangers in the Temple. Right? Does he tell his parents? No. Are they upset? Yes. Do they realize they have a teenage boy on their hands? Yes!

What do you think was going through their minds for those three days that they were searching for him? Actually, four! Three days in Jerusalem and the one day they had to come back. **Where are you?**

Joe Mervilde, if you did that to your father and mother, what would happen? They'd call you on the phone. (laughter) And then what would happen? You'd answer. You must go to Cathedral. You're just hitting home – and – and – would your mother be upset? **Maybe?!** (more laughter).

You're a teenager, aren't you? (To the congregation, "Are you getting the drift of this?")

Think about it. If we did that to our parents, they would be ballistic. Now, my brother got lost in Sears once. (To his sister) Franny were you there when that happened? Okay. John got lost in Sears. I was so happy! (laughter) He was gone! I prayed that it would stay that way.

Now, mother and dad were not too happy about it. Then over the PA, "Would the parents of a blonde boy please come to..." But they even got through that.

The key to being family and holy is to let the Lord help you through the rough moments, the happy moments, to call upon him like Hannah did. Her promise she fulfilled to God by giving over her son to service in the Temple with Eli. Now, some of us might think that was abandonment. But she had made a promise. In that culture in that time, that promise was extremely important. "You gave me the gift. I return the gift."

And in the Second Reading, the commandment to love one another and to live out the virtues that are underlying how one is to live that love. That was spoken very clearly for us.

The question becomes, in the state of our family right now, whatever shape it is ---whether we're empty nesters, whether we're a widow, whether we've still got one or two hanging around, whether we're divorced, remarried, we've been single all our life: How are we living out the command to love each day? Caring for each other. Forgiving each other. Knowing we're going to have conflicts. No matter what, there are going to be moments totally out of our control. There are going to be moments when we're just sad. One of your children is struggling with something. One of your grandchildren is sick. I could go on and on. Or one of our children married someone and you're not quite sure.

Where is God for you in the midst of that? Where is God for any of us in the midst of our lives?

How we make God a partner in our family life. The family life truly becomes holy.

You know, I've written about resolutions and whether or not to make them. I express one of my resolutions in the Bulletin Letter. But it's not about family life. Perhaps one of our resolutions for this new year is to live the gift of the family we have, the best way we can. With God's presence each day, God's help, God's support and that of his people, the Church