

Homily for Holy Family Sunday, December 27, 2020:

God created us as both: individuals with our own dignity; and social beings. We first grasp that identity within Family. Family is the building block of relationships and society. From the basic unit of husband, wife, parents, and children - family extends to all relatives by blood, marriage, adoption and fostering. “Family” is used to describe that village of personal connections in our neighborhood, friendships, work, and communities that form around hobbies.

All is not perfect. Sometimes homes make due with broken and partial families. There are those who have experienced unhealthy families. Some people decide that a particular group of people may be “more” their family than those to whom that are related.

Yet, Family is the foundational place where people experience what it means to be an individual, and to be someone who is loved and who loves.

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This combination of individuality and community finds its fulfillment in our destiny to be with God. It is into this glorious, messy, world of family that God the Son took flesh. And just as in individual families – that glorious mess of God’s family sometimes seems more messy than glorious.

Still, that is where Christ put Himself. God’s desire to be close to us is so powerful that He uses the word Family to describe His relationship to His Chosen People, and Christ’s relationship to His Church.

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God made us for family. Family is made for God. Christ came to us in a family. Divinity shared fully in humanity, and therefore in family.

Today we celebrate the Feast of The Holy Family. We do not just “Observe” the Feast, we “Celebrate” it. God is the One who is Holy. All Holiness is found in relationship to God. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians are named sons and daughters of the Father, and brothers and sisters of Christ. We

are holy because in Christ we are members of God's family. That is something wonderful to celebrate.

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Specifically, we look to The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph today. We grow in what it means to be family by asking their help. And we learn much about what it means to be family by looking to them. Today, I share some of the words of a bishop in the United States, Bishop Mueggenborg, as he discusses one of the details of bringing Jesus, as an infant, to the Temple.

“In this passage we are told that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to “present him to the Lord.” The quotation from Exodus 13:2 does indeed state that the firstborn male child is to be consecrated to the Lord. In practice parents were able to “redeem” their child with a payment of five shekels so as to receive the child back as their own (Nm 3:47–48, 18:15–16). What is missing from this passage is the payment of the five shekels. Jesus remains consecrated to God and is not “redeemed” by His parents. Scripture scholars differ on whether or not the omission of the redemption payment is intentional by the Gospel writer and the possible significance of that omission. It certainly is consistent with the rest of the Gospel that Jesus’ life belongs to God the Father rather than to any earthly authority, including His own parents.

“In the Sacrament of Baptism we become consecrated to God as well and are established as a Temple of the Holy Spirit. We are also adopted into the Family of God, and because of that adopted status we can call God our “Father” in the midst of the Church. Following our Baptism, we are then “entrusted” to our parents to be raised — but always as a child of God. Once children have been consecrated to God in Baptism, our challenge is then to raise them according to the will of their Heavenly Father. By allowing Jesus to live His life in an unending consecration to God, Mary and Joseph are giving all Christian parents an inspirational example for their families as well. We belong to God before we belong to anyone else. Families who understand the significance of this enduring consecration to God will raise their children according to the values of the Gospel rather than the values of consumerism and secularism. These families will teach their children how to be children of God rather than children of the world.”

The Bishop ends by asking us to reflect on what it means for each of us that we are called to be first for the Lord, and how that is lived out – sometimes even as a struggle with values in the society that may not always be the same as the values of Christ. Christ, above all, desires all of us to be holy, and be a part of His Family.