

SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH
QUALITIES OF THE HOLY FAMILY

“He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with Him” (Lk. 2: 40).

Today is the last Sunday of the year 2020! What a year! Thanks be to God!

It is significant that immediately after the celebration of the Birth of Christ, we have the privilege of celebrating the gift of The Holy Family that stood tall against all odds to carry out the will of God, with utmost humility and obedience. This year has been one that will be unforgettable. The impact of COVID 19 has rippled immensely on every aspect of our lives. Family life is no exception. Experts agree that there have been over a 100% spike in the application for divorce during the months of total lockdown in the UK compared to the same period in previous years. With couples spending more time together at home, their differences have magnified and living together in relationships seem a dead-end (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201203-why-the-pandemic-is-causing-spikes-in-break-ups-and-divorces>; <https://blogs.staffs.ac.uk/law-policing-forensics/2020/10/29/an-increase-in-divorce-rates-across-the-uk-during-the-coronavirus-lockdown/>). Working from home and the children schooling from home has proved suffocating, coupled with the loss of jobs, financial stress and separation from friends and other family members. These have made family life almost unbearable in many homes. The above picture is true but not the complete picture. Some families have been able to forge better relationships during the COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown. Couples have been able to discover and accentuate the positive sides of each other; they have been able to communicate more frequently and sincerely; the children have had much more time with their parents and some bonds of friendship have developed over the time. Though separated by distance, many families are united in love as they reach out to one another through various media and offer empathy and (virtual) support.

Amid our present challenges, the Holy Family of Nazareth serves as a model of perseverance. We see in the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth, a family laden with its burdens. The story of Christmas, just celebrated, is still very fresh in our minds as we remember the Annunciation episode when Mary submitted to the message of the Angel, even without complete understanding but with total faith in God. Mary had only been betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child. To be pregnant at this stage was considered an abomination liable to death by stoning for alleged adultery. The husband being a “righteous man” wanted to divorce her in secret. But the Angel of the Lord appeared in a dream and told him to take Mary home as his wife for she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Again, without complete understanding, Joseph obeyed and did as the Angel had told him. With the assurance that God never forsakes His own. With obedience, respect and love, they avoided the imminent social and cultural axe that was dangling over the roof of their home. At the Birth of Jesus, there was “no room in the inn” and, therefore, the Child had to be born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid on a manger. Not long they had to flee to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill Him. In today’s Gospel, the joy of the presentation is soured by the news “... a sword will pierce your soul too.” We are familiar with the rest of the struggles of the Holy Family – Joseph died, leaving Mary a widow and Jesus without a father. You can imagine how difficult life could have been for them. When Jesus could have provided support to the mother, He went from place to place preaching the Good News, healing the sick, raising the dead and working miracles. Not long the tide of public opinion turned against Him and he was subjected to a mockery of a trial, convicted and nailed to a cross. Mary, was with Him all the way. If this sounds like a beautiful story, it is because we know the end.

We must know that the end would not have been if there were no sterling qualities displayed amid these adversities. Our families may be going through tough times and difficult challenges, but the example of that the Holy Family offers is that our situations are not unique to us – we are not the only ones going through this. Every family has its share of the burden. In the First Reading (Gen. 15: 1-6, 21: 1-3), we encounter the family of Abraham and Sarah, who were well on in years and remained childless even after the Lord had promised. Abraham answered God’s call, like Mary, but still had many obstacles to surmount.

The Holy Family stood firm and strong together to the end because, in the face of these challenges, they remained docile to divine guidance. Docility, akin to obedience, is a fruit or product of humility, the gift that opens us to accept our limitations and powerlessness, and enables us to surrender all things to God, Who empowers. Obedience presupposes the presence of faith because, without faith, obedience to God is impossible. The Holy Family had profound faith, which nurtured and nourished perseverance, with which they were able to patiently go through the rough paths that God set for them. Patience requires the ability to wait and endure in an uncomplaining manner. The Holy Family was a contemplative family that “treasured many things in their hearts.” We hear very little of Joseph, even though his span was not long but there were still opportunities he could have spoken more. However, he decided to remain silent. Mary was no less a quiet personality: living in wonder, amazement and trust. In silence, they were able to gain insight and understanding of the sublime messages from God guiding their parenting of the Incarnate Word. Sometimes we need the silence “to hear what the Lord God

has to say – a voice that speaks of peace.” That Joseph was willing to send Mary back in secret implies that he had already forgiven her. The message of the Angel acted like oil lubricating the wheels for the decision to send Mary home to be reversed. Forgiveness is integral in the family because wherever there is more than one person, there are bound to be differences, misunderstandings, hurts and tensions that require forgiveness to rebuild and grow. This is an inescapable fact. Families must rise to face it positively as St. Paul advises in the Second Reading (Colossians 3: 12-21): “Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you, now you must do the same.” Without forgiveness, there can be no growth, no journey, no love. The Holy Family was a loving and prayerful family that stayed connected and with God. This relationship made all the difficult tasks easy.

My dear friends, the reason for celebrating the Holy Family is to enable us to glean from their blessings the graces we need to withstand the storms of our time, to build and strengthen our families in faith, hope and love. We pray that our families may imitate the Holy Family in these qualities.