

Homily for Holy Family Sunday



If you know the artist/origin of this painting, please share the information.

Homily for Holy Family Sunday - December 28, 2008

Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:22, 39-40

It's still the Christmas season on the church calendar and the tree and decorations are probably still up in your home but the business and the busy-ness of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are in everyone's rear view mirror again, for another year.

With that experience behind us, let me pose a few questions:

*"Does Christmas bring out the best in your family – or the worst?
Does it bring out the best or the worst in the world around us?"*

Maybe it's that star over Bethlehem, shining so brightly that reveals both the best and the worst in our holiday households, in ourselves and in the world around us.

Christmas certainly draws families together with folks traveling home from distant places, but it also has a way of reminding us of the problems in our families: the estrangements, the grudges, the unsettled arguments

that divide us and keep us from being one.

And Christmas has a way of opening our hearts and our wallets to the poor, the needy, the homeless and the hungry; but it also highlights the great cultural divide that keeps the poor poor, and the rest of us, not poor – the balance of the year.

Christmas light shines brightly on the world's divisions, too - especially on the scourge of war.

What does it mean to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace while war is waged in so many places and more often than not, on the doorsteps of our poorest relatives in the global family?

On this feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, what might we pray for our worldwide family? and for our own families? and for our parish family?

As saturated with ancient cultural norms as today's first scripture was, the categories announced there offer an order of family behavior that should apply in every generation:

honor, authority, respect, prayer, reverence, obedience, care, kindness and consideration of others – all meant to establish a household of loving justice.

St. Paul offers a similar kind of "house order," calling us to "put on," a garment, a cloak of:

heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness of those who offend us, gratitude and, most important of all, a willingness to let Christ rule our hearts.

The qualities, the virtues, Sirach and Paul urge on us are often just the ones found lacking in our global family, in our own households, and in our parish family. To many, some of these words may sound passé, obsolete. These aren't necessarily the categories by which our culture judges success.

Where in our culture, in our family and parish stories do we find:

honor, authority, respect, prayer, reverence, obedience, care, kindness and consideration of others, justice, heartfelt compassion, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness of those who offend us, gratitude and a willingness to let Christ rule our hearts...

We might well ask if those virtues find a home in our own hearts

because if they don't find a home in our hearts,
how can we expect them to find a home in our homes? in our families?
in our relationships at work and in the neighborhood?
in our parish and in the world and how we view it?

As I speak about those virtues I know that a couple of them
stay in my mind and heart as things I need to look at, to work on.
Do some of them stay with you, too?
Might there be some good material here for us
as we consider making New Year's resolutions?

I don't think it will hurt us to hear them yet again, a third time:
honor, authority, respect, prayer, reverence, obedience,
care, kindness and consideration of others, justice,
heartfelt compassion, humility, gentleness, patience,
forgiveness of those who offend us, gratitude
and a willingness to let Christ rule our hearts...

The Eucharist we are about to celebrate and receive is nourishment
to grow those virtues in our hearts, in our households, in our parish,
in the world - and how we look at the world and shape it.
Pray with me that the Supper offered here,
at the table of our household of faith,
will feed us for living as the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph:
in peace with God and with one another.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*