

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (C)  
(1 Sam 1:20-22, 24-28 / Luke 2:41-52)  
29.12.2024

Dear brothers and sisters,

This celebration of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is not an opportunity for us to contemplate a perfect family, by which I mean a flawless family, a family without problems, a family in which everything would run smoothly. If this was the case, the example of such a family would not be much of a help to us. It would not be a viable model, or an ideal for us, because none of our families are perfect. All our families are broken families, more or less broken, but broken all the same in one way or another... For example, all parents want and try to do the best for their children, but none of them get everything right.

The Holy Family of Nazareth was everything but an ideal family, a family without problems. Just think of Mary who became pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she was married: this was not normal for her, nor for Joseph, far from it! Her pregnancy was a huge challenge for this young couple! Or just think of the fact that there was no place in Bethlehem for Mary to give birth to her child. Again we might think that, shortly after, the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's jealousy. (And let us not forget that there was no air planes at that time; people had to walk on unknown and dusty roads, carrying their luggage). Life for the family was complicated again when Jesus aged twelve escaped from his parents' care in Jerusalem and found refuge in the Temple among the Doctors of the Law. His parents could not understand the action of their young son at the time. It is clear that the Holy Family of Nazareth was a family like any one of our families. It was not without misunderstandings and difficulties of one sort or another.

So in what sense can we speak of the "Holy" family? The holiness of the Holy Family was to seek God's light in order to make its way through the many trials of life it encountered day by day, step by step, and to do so in accordance with God's own heart.

In the gospel passage we have just heard -the pilgrimage of the Holy family to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve- we see that each one was worrying for the other; each one was caring for the other. Mary and Joseph worried when they discovered that Jesus had disappeared! "See how worried your father and mother have been looking for you", Mary said to Jesus. Jesus' answer by way of explanation was not satisfying for his parents who did not understand. But after that we are told that "Jesus was living under the authority of his parents... The child increased in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and men". It is obvious that there was a caring atmosphere in the relationships of the Holy Family. Each one meant a lot to the others.

In our families, in our communities, do we worry about and care for one another? Are we concerned for one another? Or do we look only after our self, worrying about our self alone, caring just for our self, full stop? Who is at the centre of our lives? God? Others? Or our self?

We don't always understand God's way in our lives, or in the lives of others. In our families, in our communities, we don't always understand one another. But we are all called to respect one

another, to respect our legitimate differences. Like Mary, we are invited to “ponder” in our hearts all that we don’t understand, God’s mystery, the mystery of others, without forgetting our own mystery, and we are called to welcome God’s light day after day. On this front, patience is essential. It takes time for us to grow in mutual understanding.

A holy family is a place wherein the members obey one another, that is to say a place wherein we listen to each other. In many languages, listening and obedience are words which stem from the same semantic root. Mary and Joseph listened to one another. Both of them listened to Jesus. And Jesus listened to his parents.

Do we listen to each other as we should? Or do we do everything our way? (I allude here to that well-known song: “I did it my way”).

Jesus lived under the authority of Mary and Joseph. The authority of parents has for goal to help their children grow and become who they are. Jesus, under the authority of Mary and Joseph, increased in wisdom, in physical stature and in favour with God and men.

Does our authority over others help them grow in wisdom and in stature in their relationship with God and with others? Or does our authority try to make others like us?  
Does our authority clip the wings of others, robbing them of their personality?

As we pursue our celebration of Christmas, the mystery of God with us, let us ask the Lord for the grace to evangelize and make holy all our relationships with the members of our families and communities.