

## **Holy Family - B - 1**

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Col 3:12-21 (long); Lk 2:22,39-40 (short)

I remember walking out of church one Sunday when I was a teenager. My father turned to me and asked me if I had heard the reading. I asked him which one. He then quoted today's second reading: *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord.* I remember wondering if he had heard the next line: *Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.* Guess there was a little tension in those days, as happens in all our families. Many years later as he was in his final year of life I was given the great privilege of providing some care for him and learned the value of the wisdom we heard in the first reading: *My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives. ... revile him not all the days of his life; kindness to a father will not be forgotten.* God has set up an ideal for family life that is a model of the love God has for us, a model of the love that exists within the persons of the trinity, and a model of how we should treat each other as a "family of faith."

In the second reading, Paul is laying out guidelines for the life of the early Christian communities. He is speaking words that we all should hear today - words that remind us of how we should be striving to act towards one another. He says: *Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another - and later, over all these put on love.* In doing this we are imitating the Lord who, as Paul reminds us, has forgiven us and loves us faithfully - even when others may walk away. We all (myself included) fail in doing this at times, but we must keep trying. I am encouraged when I see families and other groups of persons working and succeeding in living this ideal - and in these groups I sense the presence of God. Jesus puts this up to us as something that is specifically Christian when he says: *This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* These words of Jesus, expanded on by Paul give us something that we all should be striving towards, even if it is sometimes difficult. Jesus does not want us to think that if it is difficult it is ok to walk away - because it is difficult is not a reason to give up and then just not be compassionate and loving to each other. In a Christian marriage and in Christian family life we learn to keep working at it even when it is difficult and we want to walk away. God's ideal of marriage that does not end until death - where the two have to constantly work to live out this ideal of love; God words in the readings

today about family life that remains faithful to each other even when members become difficult (like the older parent with a failing mind) - this attitude of remaining faithful in the family is the training ground to learn how to love others outside the family ... and ultimately share in the love of God.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. We celebrate a family that remained faithful to one another. Joseph didn't leave when it was difficult in the early days and he considered divorce, Mary remains faithful to the family and to her son - even to the point of supporting him through an event that crushed her heart: his death on the cross, and Jesus - we are told later in this same Gospel - *went down to Nazareth with [Mary and Joseph] and was obedient to them* - even though he was God come to earth. This little family which lived the ideal of family life is a model for us in how we relate to our own family ... and how we relate to others outside the family as well.

If we are to be one "family of faith" and call each other brothers and sisters - with God as our Father - then we have to live with the compassion towards each other, and the give and take, that helps a Christian family to stay together and grow together. When Paul tells wives to be submissive to their husbands that can ring strangely to our ears. But if we can look beyond his cultural situation and word choice of that time, we see that Paul gives everyone in the family a duty towards the others: wives towards husbands, husbands towards wives, children to parents, and parents to children. It is not about who obeys who at any given time (because certainly a husband loving his wife means that at times he will have to obey her wishes) - it is about the fact that all in the family have duties to each other in love. This same thing is true of our human family where we all have duties in love to our brothers and sisters in Christ. That love changes the whole way we relate to each other.

The final piece of Christian family life, the final thing that unites our families, the thing that binds our larger Christian family together, the thing that binds our parish family together - must be the placing of God central in our family life. Paul reminds us today: *And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* In the Gospel today the Holy Family gives us the example of their faithfulness to God. They are together in the temple to worship God, they give thanks to God, and they fulfill their duties to the Lord before they returned to their own town of Nazareth. Faithful to each other, and faithful to the Lord, the Holy Family shows us how to be families in our homes and also create the larger human family in love.