

[Readings: 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Psalm 23; Eph. 5:8-14; John 9:1-41]

There are a handful of songs that, when I hear them, I cannot sit still. If it's at a wedding reception, I have to get up and dance. If I'm in the car, I have to sway with the rhythm. One of those songs is "We Are Family," made popular in the 1980's by the group Sister Sledge. The secret of that family staying together is what they call their Golden Rule and their "family jewel." "Have faith in you and the things you do!"

The second fundamental principle of Christian stewardship is, after prayer, nurturing our "family" with time and love. We characterize Christian families as communities whose faith in Christ brings and keeps them together. A Christian family's existence makes sense only because Jesus and his Father are real for its family members. We believe that the Holy Spirit refreshes the faith that brings us closer to God and to each other in family life.

The term, "family" brings a rich dimension to our understanding of community life: whether the reality is that of two-parent families, single parent families, childless married couples, adoptive and foster families, couples whose children are grown and away from home, single and widowed persons in their extended family networks, blended families and men and women in religious communities. All of these constitute "family."

A sad reality is that for the first time in western civilization, the traditional family with the original husband and wife, father and mother and biological children is now less than 50%. They are now the minority, which means a new definition of family and new realities.

Families give us an identity in a community larger than our own personal lives and our work. Thinking of ourselves as members of a family can bring a deeper consciousness of a shared life of permanent commitment. This is especially helpful in a culture today which places less value on permanent commitments to others, especially in times of hardship. Likewise, families also may bring a deeper awareness of shared work in a culture that places more importance on the self and individual pursuits.

As members of a family community, Christians are called to exercise good stewardship by nurturing family relationships. Christian stewardship presumes a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation among family members. It presumes that the family will work at good communication, develop a sensitive imagination and foster loving spontaneity. Where does the need exist in your own family for forgiveness and reconciliation? Do you have good communication in your family? Do you provide a home that encourages imagination and spontaneity? These last three weeks of Lent might be a good time to do something about it.

Christian marriage is a dynamic sign of Christian stewardship because it gives witness to a public expression of deep, personal and spiritual commitment. The practice of authentic stewardship helps us to summon up a great deal of needed patience, effort, sacrifice and determination, especially during difficult times. Guided and strengthened by the exercise of faithful stewardship, marital love thrives in an atmosphere of freedom and trust, where each is allowed and encouraged to grow, to be more creative in their love, and to draw closer to God.

Married couples, how does this happen in your own marriage? When I ask couples celebrating a jubilee wedding anniversary, what is the secret to a good marriage, they say words like: patience, effort, sacrifice and determination. One couple even said "separate vacations!"

Parents exercise stewardship over the gifts of their children, remembering that they are micro-images of God to their children, and that they are, by word and example, the first teachers of the faith for their children. They give their children a genuine sense of trust and security, making their home a safe, welcome place, and giving them a sense of shared responsibility for the family's decisions. They take time to do things together with their children as a family, and they try to be sensitive to their children's own growing needs and skills.

Parents also allow their children to make choices too, and by letting them know that as stewards themselves, they are responsible and accountable. That there are consequences to the decisions they make.

Children, is this happening in your family? Do you feel safe and welcome? Do you share in the duties and responsibilities of home life?

We are the stewards of parents, especially aging parents, encouraging them to feel confident that we consider their lives not only meaningful but sacred.

The Christian family looks beyond its immediate circle to reach out in love to others who come into their lives, as much as is practical, rather than become selfishly absorbed in only their relationship. Stewardship also calls the family to be aware of the needs of their neighborhood, the poor and underprivileged in their area and the outside world. Stewardship encourages families to develop a Christian world-view. Could it be possible today and for the future that the Holy Spirit is working through Christian families to establish a more visible and conscious sign of Christ's presence in the world today?

In my last parish, a family of four – dad, mom, two sons – were the only family that went to church on Sunday in a subdivision of 100 homes. Only their car backed out of the driveway every Sunday to take them to Mass.

Indeed, the Christian family is a counter-cultural sign today. What family members face together rather than individually or alone, nurtures and even insures their commitment to the Lord and to one another. Our Mass Readings tie in the theme of family and God's plan in our lives. Our First Reading has a simple message. Don't judge by appearances. Looks are deceiving. Beware of First Impressions. We can be fooled by hidden agendas. Be honest in how you present yourself. How can I get beyond appearances when meeting and dealing with others? This is particularly difficult among family members, isn't it?

It is not hard to relate to our Second Reading. St. Paul slaps us into reality with his comments. He doesn't say, "Once you were IN the darkness." He says, "Once you WERE darkness." As if our very being was the core of evil. That our very existence was the reason for the darkness in our society and world.

But now, we are children of the light. Like sun-flowers, we turn and follow the sun -- better the SON, the Son of God -- in our daily actions and attitudes.

In today's Gospel, Jesus shows us who is really blind and who is not. The Pharisees are blind because they refuse to believe the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. The blind man's parents are blind because they refuse to admit that their son was blind from birth, less they be shunned by the

community for seeing a healing take place on the Sabbath. Only Jesus and the blind man can truly “see.” The healed blind man says, “I believe!” And Jesus pronounces everyone else blind in their sins.

Imagine for a moment, the most shameless acts you have ever committed. Not pretty. Now imagine them being projected on the walls of this church. To coin a phrase, "we would all just die" from embarrassment, wouldn't we? In Christ, in the confession of our sins, we rise with Christ and walk into the light -- freed and called to be faithful once more. We are freed from our guilt and shame. So, if you have not yet done so, get to confession! And become light for your family, for your family of faith, and for the human family of the world! AMEN!