



Bringing Home the Word

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (A)
December 29, 2019

The Formula for a Holy Family

By Mary Katharine Deeley

At our wedding, my husband and I promised to love and honor each other, to welcome children, and to welcome everyone they knew. Friends came and went, always finding a warm welcome and a bowl of fruit salad. It didn't matter that our house was small—our love was great. We grew together in the understanding that we couldn't do anything we wanted individually; we had to consider each other as we made major decisions.

It wasn't always convenient. Without the grace of God, we might have found

the promise difficult, but we submitted ourselves to God and each other—and found strength in the process. Thirty-plus years later, we're still growing deeper in love and in willingness to put the other first.

What makes for a holy family? We celebrate Mary, Joseph, and Jesus because they—individually and together—submitted their lives to God and grew closer to one another. Today, that's still the formula. It requires every item on Paul's list in Colossians: compassion, kindness, humility, and patience—with a good measure of gratitude and love thrown in.

Is it always easy? No. We will—occasionally, and sometimes suddenly—have to move, change jobs, or deal with emergencies. But the grace of family is a peculiar thing. It gets us through the rough times and makes us appreciate the easy ones.

We're part of God's family. The more we practice the fruits of love, the closer we come to the holiness and example of that First Family. +

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A Word from Pope Francis

Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod's implacable violence. This last was an experience that, sad to say, continues to afflict the many refugee families who in our day feel rejected and helpless.

—On Love in the Family (*Amoris Laetitia*),
March 19, 2016



Sunday Readings

Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Those who respect their father will live a long life; / those who obey the Lord honor their mother.

Colossians 3:12–21 or 3:12–17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- Do I strive to make home a welcoming refuge for family and friends?
- Do I reach out to support my extended family as well as my core family?

Honoring Our Parents

By Kathy Coffey

“Honor your father and mother.”

—Exodus 20:12

What nugget of wisdom does the Fourth Commandment teach us? Today some parents and children are estranged; others wish their parents were alive to honor them. But the following story shows how delightfully some children still honor their parents.

Jan celebrated her sixtieth birthday with friends, far from her children, who lived in five different states. “No gifts,” she had told her kids. “All I need are memories of you.” Then the postal service delivered a special box. Within it were sixty slips of paper on which Jan’s children had written sixty special memories. She read and cherished each one, mixing laughter and tears.

Why honor our parents? In the world of the Bible and in good homes today, parents provide images of trust, hope, and serenity that enable the young to face formidable obstacles. To their children they convey the message, spoken or unspoken, “You are loved. You are wonderful.”

All humans are constantly making the passage from the known to the unknown. Parents who have endured disappointment, even tragedy, can help their offspring travel that passage with dignity. “We’ve made mistakes,” they



say. “We’ve lost jobs, health, or our dearest loves. But it didn’t kill us. Something in people endures, continues to trust, and moves forward in confidence.”

Related Roles

Furthermore, parents are memory keepers. When their children hit snags, they remind them what

glorious people they are. And if humor, perspective, or packages from home can lighten the load, they give those, too.

The wisest parents honor their children in turn. They count on their children’s good sense to pilot them through difficulties, so they restrain the “free advice.” They clarify the boundaries of their role: providing safe harbors, but holding the ropes loosely. They encourage children to explore God’s beautiful world, not burdening them with unnecessary anxiety. They recognize the arenas where the young have more expertise, inviting them to shine there.

Many parents struggle with handing on their faith to a generation that seems unenthusiastic at best. There, too, honor comes in. Realizing that the gift of faith, no matter how important, can’t be coerced or controlled, parents can follow the advice of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Agonizing over her sons’ shenanigans, she once said, “What’s a mother to do but pray and dote, pray and dote?”

If the roles of parent and child seem too idealized, we need only look to Jesus and his mother for role models. (Unfortunately, Scripture records little of Jesus’ relationship with Joseph.)

Learning from Jesus and Mary

The wedding at Cana provides the perfect example of their honoring each other. Mary wisely tells Jesus of the need: “They have no wine.” Then she backs off. She trusts his instincts to resolve the crisis.

Despite his reservations (“My hour has not yet come”), Jesus in turn honors his mother. Whether he was responding to her, or to the couple’s dire need, we may never know. Despite the exhaustion and pain of his passion, Jesus continues to honor Mary, making sure even from the cross that his beloved disciple would continue to care for her (John 19:26–27).

In Jesus’ day, women with no son or husband for protection often became desperate beggars. Knowing that sad reality, Jesus makes sure that John will take her into his own home. Saint Ignatius imagined that the first appearance of Jesus after the resurrection, although not recorded in Scripture, must surely have been to Mary.

As parents and children who follow Jesus, we are called to do likewise. +



Lord, you teach me the importance of family life. Keep my family in peace and deepen my love, respect, and appreciation for all the members of my family.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 30–January 4

Monday, Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas: 1 Jn 2:12–17 / Lk 2:36–40

Tuesday, Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas: 1 Jn 2:18–21 / Jn 1:1–18

Wednesday, Solemnity of Mary: Nm 6:22–27 / Gal 4:4–7 / Lk 2:16–21

Thursday, Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen: 1 Jn 2:22–28 / Jn 1:19–28

Friday, Christmas Weekday: 1 Jn 2:29–3:6 / Jn 1:29–34

Saturday, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton: 1 Jn 3:7–10 / Jn 1:35–42