

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
December 26, 2021
“Family Responsibilities”

Sir 3:2-14
Col 3:12-17
Lk 2:41-52

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Probably the most important, basic element in any healthy culture or society is the family. To a large degree, the health and stability of families determine the future of any city or nation. Spouses who live with love and commitment have a tremendous influence on their children. And the manner in which parents rear and teach their children will have lasting effects for the future.

Unfortunately, there has been a terrible breakdown in American family life these last several years. This is evident in the way so many older teens and young adults have behaved in the past year or so, in the havoc they have perpetrated in some of our cities.

Sadly, the statistics show that:

41% of first marriages end in divorce or separation –

51% of all marriages do so as well –

59% of couples co-habit before marriage –

And co-habitation results in a higher divorce rate after marriage.

Furthermore, 25% of children live in single parent families – And these children are at risk for lower school achievement – more discipline problems – school suspension – less high school graduation – and more crime, incarceration, and substance abuse. Moreover, they are more likely to become single parents themselves!

Consequently, how can we change all this in a positive way for the future?

Fortunately, the scriptures for today provide us with insight and direction.

Paul’s Letter to the Colossians teaches us how spouses and everyone else should relate to one another and to all other people. He urges compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We must also bear with one another and forgive one another. Because everyone of these things is a sign of the love we must have for one another. Sadly, when spouses fail in these virtues, break-up is not far away.

Marriage is a vocation wherein a person joins him or her self to another in order to foster growth in themselves. But the growth doesn’t take place by trying to change the other spouse. Growth takes place when each spouse changes within on their own. They can do this because they are inspired, out of love, to be the best that they can be!

Consequently, nagging in any form can never be part of the marital equation – or of any other human friendship. Moreover, God doesn't nag! Instead, we must inspire the other. We must learn to treat all others as God treats us! We must let Jesus be our guide in all that we do. And we must stay the course! Most failed marriages are the result of one or both of the spouses giving up, lacking commitment, or being unfaithful. Of course, all of this affects the children involved!

The passage from Sirach teaches us how important it is to love and care for our parents as they grow older. Our parents brought us into life with God's help. Most were good parents, although they were flawed. But some failed – and failed in terrible ways – because of their own woundedness and sinfulness. Some have even abused some of us and caused us great harm. Nevertheless, we must still learn forgiveness for them, pray for them, and listen to God regarding our behavior toward them.

In the Gospel of Luke, we learn that Jesus came of age when he was 12 years old. At that time he indicated what his mission in life would be. It would be to do the Father's will in all things.

The loss of Jesus for those few days must have caused Mary and Joseph great anxiety. And his answer to Mary's question must have perplexed her, and Joseph as well. However, Jesus returned to Nazareth with them and lived as a dutiful son. He remained there for 18 years until the Holy Spirit called him into the desert and then to the Jordan River to begin his mission.

Brothers and Sisters, as adult disciples of Jesus, we must consider several things regarding the children in our care. How do we treat all children and what is our attitude and behavior toward them? Are we a blessing for them? Can we correct them with kindness? Have we the courage to let them make some mistakes and learn from them by not overly controlling their lives? Do we let them suffer the consequences of their behavior when things go wrong? Do we encourage their trust, so that they never fear telling the truth about their failures? And when they come to us with the truth, can we remain calm – and help them learn from the experience?

These are daunting questions. The answers mean that we take seriously our responsibility as mentors and guides for every child that God places before us.

So, on this special day, let us pray that God will always guide us in all our dealings with children and young people. Let us also pray that all spouses and parents become all that they must be. And for those who are without spouse or children, may we always behave in a godly way toward everyone in the human family of God!

Amen.

December 26, 2021

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