

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Holy Family Year B

Welcome to the Holy Family! Yes, Jesus Mary & Joseph; But potentially it is all of us! By our baptism, we are called sons and daughters of God. In Matthew 12:48-50, Jesus says, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?”stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ***For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.***” So the Holy Family is much larger than we imagine.

When I was a kid, one of the things I loved about our home nativity set, was sitting back and looking at the whole scene, panning out to the edges of the scene, it had the traditional musts: Baby in Jesus in center, Blessed Mother, St Joseph, but then the shepherds show up, then the wise men arrive. Looking at it from a distance, helped me see the extra players in the scene, and to realize that it was likely was more crowded than we imagine, more people there at times than we would at first think. I wonder first about the shepherds: like were any of their kids maybe with them in the fields (Were they themselves kids?) I was asked once about what animals were there, like barn creatures a cow, donkey, and of course sheep & goats with shepherds (I was specifically asked, about whether a dog was there or not- I thought ‘Well, can you imagine sheep without sheepdog?) But to keep imagining that fist nativity scene, we hear the shepherds ran over to villages, so I bet there was a lot of running back and forth from fields into the city for supplies or drinks, again what did they eat? (We don’t hear ever about sheep ‘chuckwagons’ like we do in western movies about horse or cattle herders?) The shepherds seem to go so easily into the towns to share the good news of the angels and newborn king, so I bet there was a good pipeline of people back and forth. And the same with the wise men when they arrive: If they were as wealthy as it sounds, then their little caravan would have had servants-support people to take care of camels, and provide protection because remember they are traveling with extravagant gifts. (If we keep with a western movie motif- imagine a far east Wells Fargo crew guarding the camel stagecoach?) So there are other figures in the Christmas story not pictured in most nativity scenes. I think ours at home also had a piper, maybe drummer boy- (think of David shepherd playing lyre, harp pipe to calm sheep?) I also bet maidens from the inn came by check on the new mom. So, I think our nativity scenes are only the main figures. But it is good to imagine the role and experience of all the extras-like a huge ‘All in, the Holy Family-it takes us all- here comes everybody” So how about the smaller figures in the Christmas

story (Who is tending Joseph's shop while he's gone?) or the palace workers of Herod, the wise men's families left at home, the confused family of Zechariah mentioned at John's circumcision. This imaginative exercise showing how much larger the Holy Family is, leads into the two figures highlighted in the gospel today- yes, Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus, but also ***Simeon and Anna***. They are great examples of the mundane, everyday necessity of living out holiness by taking up common repetitive tasks over and over. They give us a good meditation on what living in the Holy Family means. What was it like to go through what they did? I'd say just like the Holy Family of JMJ, there is a whole lot that they go through, that we overlook or don't think is important. Much like any family getting by in life, even Holy Family life involved a lot we don't hear about (or take for granted). We hear the highest points, but think of all the daily duties faithfully completed with no attention; the prayers of Mary, Joseph and Jesus at home, all of them sharing Jewish catechism with each other at the dinner table, going off to synagogue (Can you hear Mary say, "Yes Jesus, we go to synagogue every week." I say that because usually this is the time of year that every kid says to mom/dad, 'are we going to church again?') Or Jesus & Joseph in the wood workshop. Or Mary and Jesus going to the well for water. But that is family. There are the big occasions, but most of family life is the daily dish washing, picking up toys, moving towels and shoes around the house, helping make a bed. All of those small acts of love. And right along with these physical acts, how about all of those spiritual acts of loving support, like affirming and encouraging each other through life's hurts & disappointments, forgiving each other through the silly misunderstandings or offended feelings; all those small kind acts families love each other through too. So, that is Holy Family, managing life with each other, it's not without bumps and misgivings, and that is so important to realize. Sometimes we imagine the Holy Family so apart and differently that it actually obscures a true vision of them (of us). Just as a serene family portrait doesn't capture the inevitable tension, the give-take, and the tested patience, that comes with every family, even the Holy Family. (Case in point will be the losing-finding of Jesus in the temple that will happen later). And in family life, things we plan do not go always as we think they should (think of how many 'perfect' Christmases don't turn out perfect). But that brings us back to Simeon and Anna. Holy Families don't fall out of the sky perfect, they work at it day after day, they keep showing up faithfully with each other until grace-God Himself-arrives to show the light and see them through. Simeon and Anna today are so blessed; it finally happened! All their life's work,

prayer and keeping at it, is finally rewarded and acknowledged. Their eyes see the glory. So, after all of life's ups and downs, all the tiffs and frustrations of family and temple life, there is a greater glory and a greater reward waiting for a life of faithfulness and trust in God. Consider Simeon's whole life: How many days he showed up at the temple with no attention, doing his duty lighting candles, burning incense, helping visitors. I guess even tending to the plumbing or animal accidents that inevitably happened in the temple (remember all the animals that were brought for sacrifice!). But after all the ups and downs of daily boring tasks, one day it all comes together. He looks up and it is "mission accomplished" - "Job Well Done". What a sense of completion, I can't imagine his peaceful satisfaction knowing that he has fulfilled God's will for him. Simeon and Anna help us understand what makes a Holy Family holy. It is recognizing Christ and holding Christ as the center of the group. Jesus is the one who makes any group holy. The Holy Family is holy because of who shows up in it; Jesus himself; more than anything we do in our families, perfect or not, what makes our family holy is Jesus being part of it, Jesus being in it. Just as with our nativity scenes, having the baby as the central point, and all eyes looking at Him, Jesus must be the center of our family.