**FEAST OF HOLY FAMILY**

**THEME: JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH – THE FAMILY MODEL**

READINGS: Sirach 3:3-6, 12-14/ Colossians 3:12-21/ Luke 3:41-52

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The wisdom of the church fittingly places the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph within the week of the celebration of the birth of our Saviour. By so doing we are reminded of the **importance of the birth and growth of children in the context of marriage and family**: father (***man***, not woman), mother (***woman***, not man) and children. [The extended family is not forgotten, but that is not the focus of this homily.] We are also reminded of the **need for each member of the family to fully embrace his/her responsibilities for the mutual benefits** of all. In these and other areas of family life, Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Joseph are presented to us the ultimate model. I will just highlight a few points in this homily.

Though we do not have detail records of how Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Joseph lived together, there is no doubt that despite the challenges they faced, they experienced the joy and peace which come with living together in selfless love and care for one another. Could we make it a New Year resolution to show more selfless love and care towards other family members so God may bless our family with joy and peace throughout 2013?

Is it not very comforting and reassuring when one is in some kind of difficulty (e.g. sickness, loss of job) and other members of the family show genuine understanding, concern and support? After careful thought, prayers and aided by a dream, this is exactly what St. Joseph showed St. Mary whose conception he was initially confused about. Look at all the troubles St. Joseph had to go through for the expectant Mother Mary and the child Jesus, whose conception he was not responsible for! Joseph is indeed a great model for us to exhibit true understanding and selfless support for members of our families who may be in some kind of difficulty.

Is it not heart-warming when one feels most welcome at home or by the family even when they do not understand or agree with him/her on some issues? When St. Joseph and Mother Mary found the boy Jesus in the temple, they did not understand his reply to Mary’s question, and yet their response was that of a warm acceptance of him (gospel reading). This is a challenge to us: to make a child, parent or spouse accepted and cherished even when we do not understand his/her actions nor agree with him/her.

Is it not a joy for parents when their children are obedient? And Mother Mary and St. Joseph experienced this joy despite the challenges they faced as mere humans handling the Divine Child; for after finding him in the temple, he went with them home in ‘Nazareth and lived **under their authority**’ (Lk. 2:51). If he who is divine lived under the authority of mere human parents, then whatever higher status [as doctors, MDs, professors, presidents] we achieve in life, obedience to our parents should not disappear from our hearts. Here I would like each of other us to soberly reflect on the first reading:

The Lord honoured the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons.

Whoever honours his father atones for sins, and **whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure.** Whoever honours his father will be gladdened by his own children, and **when he prays he will be heard**. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother.

O son [daughter], help your father **in his old age**, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; **even if he is lacking in understanding**, show forbearance, in all your strength do not despise him. For **kindness to a father will not be forgotten**, and **against your sins it will be credited to you** (Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14).

Are our hearts not full of gratitude for our parents when, in retrospect, see the investments of ***time, treasure, toil and tears*** they made into our spiritual, moral, social and professional upbringing? Today, parents invest a lot towards the future social-professional standings of their children; how the Lord wishes that parents could invest, at least, that much towards the future spiritual-moral standings of their children. Parents should learn from St. Joseph and Mother Mary who gave the boy Jesus a spiritual upbringing not only by words but ***also by deeds***: ‘every year his parents used to go to [the temple in] Jerusalem for the feast’ (Lk. 2:41). [They faithfully made the over 200km Nazareth-Jerusalem-Nazareth journey by ancient means of transport.]

Finally, let us consider the fruits that the investments (of parents) and the good efforts of the children may yield. There is joy in the whole family when children make good progress in life: be it a spiritual, academic or career progress. The growing Jesus, the gospel reading concluded, ‘**increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people**’ (Lk. 2:52). And this certainly delighted his parents. Therefore, assisted by divine grace, let us all make good efforts to progress spiritually, socially, academically/professionally to the **glory of God** and to the **joy of our families**!

Have a Happy New Year with God’s blessings on your families, yourselves and your endeavours. Amen!