



Things to Ponder

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Holy Families

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

There are many reasons why Christmas is by far the most beautiful season of the year. It's a time for giving and receiving. It's a time for merriment and parties, a time for peace, and a time for memories of Christmases past which somehow are relived all over again.

But as happy as all these aspects of Christmas are, they are grounded in a mystery, too wonderful for words: the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We can truly celebrate because that one solitary life brought God so close to humankind and humankind so close to God, that the two have become one flesh. We can celebrate because that one solitary life has brought us so much to be happy about, and ever more happiness to hope for.

When we look at a baby we see the visible, tangible and physical proof of the depth of love that the parents share with each other. And so, in the Infant Jesus we see the visible, tangible and physical expression of just how deeply God loves us, a love so deep and lasting that He had to give that love flesh and blood so that all humankind could see and touch the wonder of God's love.

Every infant is entrusted to his parents, and so it was with Jesus. Parents have an incredible influence on their children. A child's values, his relationships with other people, his ability to love and to forgive, his vision of the world—all these are shaped in large part by his parents. That is the way it works for us, and that is the way it worked for Jesus.

We may read the best books and articles on the art of parenting. But, in the end, a child will reflect not what his parents know, but how they act, by what they consider to be right and wrong, by their love, compassion, forgiveness, generosity and faith. If we take Jesus' humanity seriously, then He learned how to love, to forgive, to be compassionate and generous from Mary and Joseph. If Jesus is the holiest human being ever to live, then He had to have learned that in a holy family.

But the Holy Family was not without struggle, misunderstandings and tension. What must Joseph have thought when he discovered that Mary was pregnant, and not by him? What shame Mary must have endured when her friends and neighbors learned

of her pregnancy prior to her marriage to Joseph.

Today's Gospel (Luke 2:41-52) gives us another example of the tension and difficulty within the Holy Family. Anyone who has ever lost a child, if only for a few moments in a grocery store or mall, can summon the fear that Jesus' parents must have experienced when they found that He had gone missing. What words may have passed between Joseph and Mary during the three anxiety-ridden days of their search for Jesus? Each could blame the other, since each thought that Jesus was in the care of the other. And when they find Jesus, He is not the least bit remorseful, and even chides them for getting so upset! These difficulties did not mar their holiness; rather, they deepened it.

Today's feast reminds us that each of our families is called to be a Holy Family. This does not mean that there are no tensions, misunderstandings or difficulties. They are the means by which we grow in holiness. In striving to be a good father as was Joseph, a good mother as was Mary, and a good son or daughter as was Jesus, we are on the road to become what we celebrate today: a Holy Family.

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St. Peter's on Capitol Hill, DC