

**Feast of the Holy Family**  
**December 30, 2017**

How I wish all of you could see what I see looking at this gathering of men and women, boys and girls, young and old as we worship our newborn King. I see our Christian family held together by our common faith and our uncommon devotion to each other in God's Church. In all honesty, I and we (Deacon Mark) see this every time we come together in this church. We speak and sing and listen, we ponder and reflect. We believe and know that we are God's children, brothers and sisters in whose lives the infant Christ is Savior and Lord.

Having said that, living in harmony and holiness in a family is no easy thing. When our family fails we feel like we have failed and we feel helpless. No one wants discord and dysfunction. Especially when it comes to something so basic and fundamental as our family. Yet, why is it so hard?

When two people get married it is a moment of greatest human joy and happiness. When two people get divorced it is at the extreme opposite of human experience. It is like a death. What has happened in between? And if people who love each other so much that they commit themselves to each other in marriage, build a home, have children, share the most intimate moments together, and then end up with such acrimony, how can we ever hope that we can get along with the North Korea or Syria or ISIS?

In all of these wars, including our family wars, it is the children who suffer most, by far. They are homeless refugees bounced around from home to home in joint custody, if that.

St. Paul says in the second reading, "Clothe yourselves with love that binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Every morning when we get up and get ready for the day, we select an item or items of clothing to wear. For some it's the work clothes of an engineer or trade. For others a business suit, a dress, a pair of slacks and a blouse, physician's scrubs or a mechanics jumpsuit. Some will put on a

uniform. The police officer, fire fighter, soldier, postal worker and others wear a uniform because their job demands it and we in the public expect it.

What Paul is saying is that we of faith are called to don the uniform that goes with being God's family. That uniform looks like compassion and feels like uncommon kindness. That uniform is humble and serves others in meekness and patience. That uniform is not easily insulted nor does it take offense when another speaks a hurtful word or acts in an unthoughtful way. That uniform, above all else, evokes the love of Jesus Christ who taught us we were to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. What if all of us tomorrow put on that uniform that says we are God's family in community?

“Clothe yourselves with love that binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Part of the problem, I think, is the flimsy notion of love that is prevalent in our society. Love is not a feeling. Feelings are fickle and they come and go like the wind. Love is much deeper than that. Love is fidelity, faithfulness, dedication, perseverance, all of this especially under the most difficult situations. Love is being there in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse. No exceptions. No excuses. That's true love.

That doesn't go to say that we enable the abuser or don't demand accountability. When we are hurt the temptation is great to give up on the other. Scandalously, our society supports the flimsy notion of love. If the feeling is gone, they say, you deserve better, throw the bum out.

Talking about our family the way Holy Scripture speaks of family sounds so Pollyanna and naïve. To live a faith filled, loving family life is no easy thing. It is very demanding. It takes all the strength we have and more. We cannot do it alone. It takes a village. It takes the grace of God.

Don't be discouraged about the shortcomings and disappointments in your family. In fact, that's what the message of Sacred Scripture is all about. It's not talking about the perfect family. It's talking about family life under the most difficult circumstances. It speaks about hope when there

seems to be no hope. This is not wishful thinking or pie-in-the-sky daydreaming. This is the gospel. This is the Truth. This is the Word of God.

When your family life seems to have lost its luster, know that you are not alone. It was in the dark, in the cold and the danger that our Lord was born on this earth. It was for this reason that he came, that we not lose heart or give up on those we love.

Take this opportunity to look around and identify the resources and support that is there for you and your family. It is worth every ounce of strength you have. Let this good news of the gospel sink deep into your soul. Reflect on it and ponder it and muse over the outlandish truth that is given you. May it invigorate your inner life and galvanize your commitment and determination to deeper dedication and fidelity in your family.

### **A Prayer for Family**

Heavenly Father, Please shine your light upon my family. Give us strength to overcome all of the difficulties that we are dealing with now and protect us against any and all problems we may encounter in the future. Help us to savor the beauty and goodness of our family. O Lord, please bring us together as we are meant to be. May the love that binds us only grow stronger as we fulfill the vocation that you have blessed us with.

Grant my family forgiveness for any sins we have committed. May we also forgive one another Lord, as it is sometimes difficult to do.

Bless us Lord, In your name I pray, Amen