



This life-size bronze artwork of the Holy Family is located on the meditation path at the Shrine of our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse. It illustrates Joseph and the boy Jesus in the carpenter shop with a cross as Mary, in the background, looks on in horror. (The three images in the background from left to right are: Cardinal Burke, my dad, Robert Swing, and my mother Lucille Swing)

Feast of the Holy Family December 30, 2018

Today is the feast of the holy family and by extension is a celebration of your family. Your family, no matter how broken or cohesive, no matter how functional or dysfunctional, your family is a holy family. It is in your family where you first experience life. It is in your family where you first experience love. It is in your family where you first experience God. All of us come from a family. It is the building block, the fundamental structure, of society. As the family goes, so goes the world.

In today's gospel we hear of a typical family situation. The precocious 12-year-old Jesus is lost for three days. One can only imagine the anguish that Mary and Joseph must have felt in searching for their son. What parent has not felt at least a hint of that feeling when their child cannot be accounted for? How much greater the anguish if the child has run away, or made decisions they were much too young to make, with consequences that may last the rest of their lives?

There is a natural tension between parents and child. The child is curious and adventurous and wants independence. The parents strive to protect the child and teach the child in the ways of the world so that there will be less chance for harm and hurt.

There is a natural tension between husband and wife as they seek to find their way in the world. By its very nature family relationships need healing, forgiveness, understanding, and all the give and take that comes before them every minute of the day. The way the struggle is worked out sets the tone for the rest of our lives.

I always tell engaged couples that a good sign of how well you will get along is how well you get along with your parents right now. A major problem in all of this is that there is so little support for family life. When things get tough and it is very hurtful the popular notion is to get out of the house, get away from it all, and try and start over.

This never works. The Styrofoam cup notion of family, that we can just throw it away and get another, is a myth. Fidelity is at the core of it all. Faithful to each other

in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, for richer, for poorer, until death do we part. This is no easy task. We cannot do it alone. It takes a village. We need to support one another.

There are wonderful resources for helping families enrich their lives. Go to our diocesan website <http://diolc.org/marriage/> or take advantage of a beautiful program entitled, Given: Unveiling the Mystery of Marriage. It is a one day retreat for married and engaged couples to be held in Marshfield on Saturday, January 12th. You can register by going to: <http://diolc.org/marriage/marriage-enrichment/>.

It is very easy to romanticize the holy family. In doing so we sell ourselves short. We then think that our family is remote and unrelated. Jesus was an only child so he didn't have to fight with his brothers and sisters. It looks like Mary and Joseph never disagreed never worried about finances and never had fears for the safety of their child. We need to bring our own experiences to today's gospel and not sanitize it to fit our pious presumptions about the holy family.

Your family is a holy family. It is where God resides. The end of the gospel says Jesus was obedient to his parents and that he advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and humans. This didn't happen by accident. By faithful teaching and sacrificial love, sharing life's problems and joys, by forgiveness and being forgiven, we live life to the full.

Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of person, who are tortured, bombed and exterminated. With those for whom there is no room Christ is present in the world.

—Thomas Merton