



IDENTIFYING WITH THE HOLY FAMILY

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They are certainly not an ordinary family. Jesus is the Son of God as well as of Mary. Joseph is his foster father. Mary was "full of grace"--sinless. While married to Joseph, our tradition tells us that Mary remained a virgin.

None of our families can be *exactly* like *the* Holy Family. And yet, we can identify with the Holy Family in many ways. We can look at the similarities between their struggles and ours.

The Holy Family was like us in many ways. Joseph, a carpenter, was a *family provider*. Joseph and Mary *faced difficult choices*. Joseph had to trust God by accepting a pregnant fiancée as his wife. Mary had to face many obstacles when she agreed to bear God's Son. The Holy Family were *refugees* who had to leave their homeland for safety in Egypt. Joseph and Mary knew the *panic of losing a child* for three days in Jerusalem at Passover time when over two million people crowded the city. Jesus *relates to teens*. He felt the urge to "do his Father's will," but had to wait for the appropriate time by "being subject" to Mary and Joseph. *Widows* can go to Mary who was widowed at a time when women had no social status apart from family, and no personal means of support. Mary, who cradled the body of her crucified son, can relate to a *grief-stricken parent*. *Jesus experienced the hurt of being taunted, misunderstood and rejected*. Any person *faced with an overwhelming burden* can cry out with Jesus whose sweat became like drops of blood in the garden.

A holy family is respectful. The first reading focuses on the respect of children for their parents. However, that respect is modeled by parents who have respect for authority above them and, ultimately, respect for God. While Sirach seems to put the burden of respect on the children, it is primarily on the parents. If they treat each other with respect, treat their neighbors with respect, treat themselves with respect, treat their elderly parents with respect, then the children are more likely to be respectful, too.

A holy family is one that does the will of God. Being in his will demands love, respect and self-sacrifice. Knowing God's will takes prayer and discernment. Joseph followed God's will when he took Mary for his wife, despite her pregnancy. At the Annunciation, Mary submitted to God's will even though it may have meant stoning. Jesus' submission to God's will in the Garden led him to the cross. "Not my will, but yours." We follow God's will whenever we choose his way over the world's way.

We already belong to the holiest of families---God's family. The second reading tells us that we are God's children now! The original Holy Family is the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit---a love relationship from and for all eternity. From that holy beginning, we become members of many families in this life: a birth family, a family of choice, a religious community. Right now, in this church, we are a church family, united by the Holy Spirit, sharing the one Christ in Holy Communion. Christ alive in us, unites us, works through us and makes us holy---that makes us family. Come now to the family meal that Christ has prepared for us.

The child
grew to maturity



and was
filled with wisdom