

The Holy Family & Our Holy Family



On this great feast, we have the temptation to compare our family with that of Mary, Joseph and Jesus: the Immaculate Virgin whose body was unsullied by sin; Joseph, the just one, who always put first the needs of his wife and our Lord; and Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. What family can measure up?

But if we examine things from a different point of view, it is possible that we are much like them. The Holy Family knew scandal: after all, Mary was pregnant before marrying. Joseph ran the risk of being ridiculed for her “apparent” infidelity. Being a good man and thinking she made an error in judgment, a mistake, he wants to divorce her quietly. Their son becomes the most famous homeless person born without lodging nor a sterile hospital. Instead of being cared for by doctors and nurses, his attendants are animals, shepherds and the Magi. Immediately, they have to flee for safety because of threats due to jealousy. When Jesus is young, he gets lost, wanders astray, his parents fearful of his whereabouts. What happened to him? Did someone abduct him? Is he alive? Safe? And, when they find him, he tells them they should not have worried as he has to be about “his Father’s will”? What will? What is the future hold for him and them? The unknown! The uncertainty! They continue putting their confidence in God without knowing how this will play out. Joseph knows his role is to stay in the background quietly providing for them never wanting to be the center of attention. Likewise, the center of Mary’s focus is always her son. It’s fascinating that her last recorded words in Scripture are at the Wedding Feast in Cana when she gently pushes her son into the limelight to begin his ministry by telling the waiters to “do whatever he tells you.” She has no need to saying anything more! From a distance, she observes his ministry unfold as he heals, embraces, seeks the last, the lost, the least and the lonely. Some don’t want to accept him and try to plan a way to destroy him, to kill him. On the cross, Mary shares his pain, hears them mocking him, listens attentively as he entrusts her and the beloved disciple, John, to one another. After forgiving his persecutors, she hears him entrust his spirit into God’s hands. Three days later, she understands. She appreciates the role of her son in the holy family and the family of God. She knows well that the support of each member of the family made a difference and brought the Word of God to the world. Promise completed! There were difficulties and much pain, but they stayed together. They were holy or blessed because they were open to the activity of God in their lives. In this way, they serve as models for us.

We are recipients of salvation history. Mary conceives by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no scandal. We learn that we should not judge the lives of others as we do not know their situation, their story and the details of their lives. Like the Holy Family, pain enters our families: some are unemployed or underemployed; others are divorced, drug addicted, in prison, rejected because they love someone of the same sex, or a different race, color, or political affiliation. Some have many broken relationships. Many have lost their faith. Some have such disdain for another that has festered for so long they are incapable of recalling the origin of the anger and separation.

This Christmas, to our families comes this year, the compassion of our Lord, his saving presence, his understanding and his support to continue as a family embraced by him with infinite love. As a holy family, we have to accept this grace offered, this compassion, this peace and this relationship that the only Son of God, of Mary and Joseph came to save us. This salvation is a permanent and unending gift that is always faithful, that renews each day for us. It’s all very simple, very precious and it is the truth now and forever.