

## **Feast of the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus (A)** **Obedience Constitutes a Christian Family**

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-2,3,4-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What makes you a Christian family?

Let us ponder this question on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

It is an evident truth that the Feast of the Holy Family, observed on the Sunday after Christmas, reminds us that Christmas is for the family and that salvation begins within it. God wills that the family be a medium of salvation!

The family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus offers a beautiful model of an ideal Christian family. Joseph, the perfect husband and father, is God-fearing, righteous, a silent worker, a good provider, and a protector. His protective nature is evident in the Gospel of Matthew (2:13-14), where he heeds the angel's warning and flees to Egypt with Mary and Jesus to escape King Herod. Mary, the ideal wife and mother, is prayerful, simple, kind-hearted, attentive, and a good listener. Her attentiveness is evident in how she treasures and ponders the events of Jesus' early life in her heart, as mentioned in the Gospel of Luke (2:19). Jesus, the perfect child, is obedient, respectful, and gracious.

However, their family was not exempt from challenges. The Scriptures record many trials they endured. Mary and Joseph faced misunderstanding and skepticism from their community when Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born in an animal shelter because there was no room for them. They fled to Egypt and lived as refugees to protect Jesus from those who wanted him dead. Mary and Joseph endured the pain of losing Jesus for three days. Eventually, Joseph presumably passed away, leaving Mary to endure the sorrow of her son's public ministry and to witness his crucifixion.

Without doubt, the Holy Family knows the uncertainties and struggles of families today. They knew fear and uncertainty, but their obedience to God kept them together and sustained them through their trials.

Obedience to God defines the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. This is a profound way to understand family. When asked, "How do you become a family?" the answer is often a blood relationship or love for one another. Few say that we become a family through faithful surrender to the will of the Father. This is the core of the Holy Family, a family formed by their obedience to God. Mary, when offered to be the mother of God's child and told by the angel that she would have a child from God, said yes. She obeyed. Joseph, when he found Mary already with child, decided to divorce her in secret. But after an angel appeared in a dream and clarified that the child was the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Joseph obeyed and took Mary as his wife.

Mary obeyed God, and Joseph obeyed God. In faithful surrender, they took each other and Jesus, God's gift to them, as their child. Jesus grew up with two parents whose relationship and foundation were rooted in obedience to God, a commitment that expressed their faith.

Obedience begins at home, nurtured by genuine love and faith in God.

The Book of Sirach reminds us of this indispensable aspect in how we speak to parents, treat grandparents and elders, how patient we are when everyone is tired and when things go wrong, and how we value caring for parents, especially in their old age, as it is a blessing (Sir. 3:2-8). This is shown in how members are willing to be present to one another, to put down their mobile phones and other gadgets, and listen and laugh together. Love grows when we are truly present.

St. Paul's practical advice complements the Book of Sirach: "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (Col 3:12-14). He does not say that families will have no problems. He teaches how to live with Christ at the center of every circumstance. There may be pressure and stress, and a family member may be tempted to shout, blame, or give up. When Jesus Christ rules the heart, love becomes stronger than stress. The centrality of Jesus Christ in the family is fostered when a family spends time together

in prayer, even for a brief time. A short prayer before meals, at the start of the day, and before sleeping invites God into the home. Often, it is not about long prayers but sincere hearts.

Obedience to God is what constitutes Christian families. This is the kind of family our Lord Jesus challenges us to strive for. In the Gospels, he declares that those who obey the word of God are his family (cf. Mk. 3:31-35, Matt. 12:46-50, Lk. 8:19-21). When we obey God, we form the Church and help deliver the world. If families are obedient to God, they can build a stable nation. Such families strengthen the nation. Statistics show that nations with higher family stability have better social health and lower crime rates. This shows how a family's strength and obedience to God benefit a nation's well-being.

That is why the holiness of a family and their obedience to God serve not only their own sanctification but also the sanctification of other families. Every family that seeks holiness by obeying God's will has a place as leaven, transforming the wider family, society, and the nation.

Let our obedience to God be the principle of our family ties. A real family, the foundation of society, is one that obeys God's law and will.

What act of obedience can your family undertake this week?

This question invites us to move from reflection to action, strengthening each family's bond and contributing to the broader community.

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe, Pastor