

HOLY FAMILY (Year A)

12-28-2025 Homily

I. Introduction

There have been many inspiring stories in history about persons who made heroic sacrifices on behalf of their families. For instance, almost 200 years ago a woman carrying a baby through the hills of southern Wales in England was overtaken by a blizzard. Sadly, she froze to death. The search party which later found her wondered why she wasn't wearing any outer garments; when they looked further, they found that her sweater and coat were wrapped about the baby, who was alive and well. This child was named David Lloyd George, and he later grew up to become the prime minister of Great Britain during World War I.

I once met a Cambodian family who came as refugees to the United States; they had managed to escape from the southeast Asian country of Cambodia during the late 1970s, a time when millions of people were being murdered there by the Communists. However, the husband and father was not with them; he had starved to death in the jungle, for instead of eating anything himself during the grueling escape, he had given all his food to his wife and children so that they might live. Many years ago there was a story in the newspaper about a family who had escaped from political oppression in Cuba. The father was a pilot who had flown to the United States and defected over a year earlier, but he couldn't bear the thought of living without his family—so at great personal risk, he secretly returned to the island of Cuba and arranged for them all the escape together.

Family members are supposed to watch out for each other and to protect one another from danger, and this happens most wonderfully and perfectly when they are united in their faith. Life has always included fears and worries, tragedies and problems, and difficulties and dangers—and the home is meant to be a place of healing, refuge, and support. This is also true of the Church, our spiritual home on earth, and it will one day be perfectly true of our eternal home in Heaven. Families are a source of protection from danger—and this is especially true when we are members of the family of God.

II. Development

The Gospel on this Feast of the Holy Family describes a crisis they faced some time after the birth of Jesus. The astrologers, or wise men, had in effect “ghosted” King Herod by ignoring his deceitful request that they report back to him the location of the newborn king. Therefore, upon realizing he had been tricked, Herod decided to eliminate this potential threat to his rule, and ruthlessly ordered the killing of all the male infants in the region around Bethlehem. These children became known as the Holy Innocents—the first martyrs to die for the sake of Christ. The child Jesus himself, however, was saved because of the warning given in a dream to Joseph. On His own, Jesus had no way of surviving. Even if Mary had tried by herself to save Him, the odds wouldn't have been very good; a young woman fleeing to Egypt while caring for an infant would have faced a very difficult and dangerous journey. Mary and Jesus needed Joseph, and he did everything necessary to protect his family from harm. However, St. Joseph would be the first to tell us that it was God's guidance, and not his own efforts, which made the difference. The flight to Egypt provides us with an important lesson: family members must protect one another, and they must use God's help in doing so.

III. Conclusion

We face many problems and dangers today—sometimes in a material or physical sense, but more often in spiritual terms. The world is at best indifferent, and often actually hostile, to God and to those who serve Him; Christian values are steadily losing their power and influence in our society. This is an incredibly serious threat, for if we're swept along by the false values of the world, we're in grave danger of losing our souls. As Christians, we have to do everything possible to prevent this, and to help others avoid this tragedy—especially the members of our own families.

In practical terms, this means taking our faith seriously, and raising our children and grandchildren to do the same. Attending Mass, saying grace before meals, being involved in the parish, spending time with one another, and praying as a family are all vitally necessary ways of building a shelter against spiritual danger. Another very important and practical step is simply to eat the evening meal together as a family; research shows that teenagers from families who do this are much less likely to use drugs or get in trouble with the law than their counterparts. Families raising young children must begin their religious training as early as possible—in the sense of creating a home where Christ reigns supreme; children who grow up in this atmosphere are much more likely to become and remain naturally religious. Catholics who have spouses or grown children who've abandoned their faith must continue to set a good example, though without nagging, and—if the opportunity arises—invite their family members to join them at Mass. Above all, it's necessary to pray on behalf of those who've left the Church. Persistent and fervent prayer can work miracles, and it's one of the greatest and most important things we can ever do for those we love.

Unlike the Holy Family, none of our families are perfect—but all of them are precious in the eyes of God. Mary and Joseph did everything necessary to protect Jesus, and when He grew older, He did everything possible to honor His parents. Our world today in the 21st century is quite different from 1st century Palestine, but some things never change: life can be difficult and spiritually dangerous, and it's easy to become spiritually lost or be led astray. Our membership in God's family gives us inner wisdom and strength and peace, and challenges us to pray and work for the spiritual well-being of others.