

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

December 28, 2025

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is held out for us today as an example to follow and also reminder to all of us of our call to holiness. The Church for a long time now, has been insisting that all people are called to be holy, and the holiness of our families depends on the holiness of each member of the family. And that is true at whatever level the reality of the family is manifest. Even if that is a husband and wife, or a husband and wife and children, grandchildren, or our extended family, or our parish family, or the family of the Church, in our nation, or in the world, or the human family. There are so many different levels at which the reality of family is being manifested.

But it is always true that the holiness of the family depends on the holiness of the members of the family. So, when we desire to have holy families, if we want to respond to God's desire for us to be holy families, then we each have to work on our own holiness. We each need to grow in holiness. How does that happen? How does that happen? We don't make ourselves holy. We don't make ourselves holy. The Catechism teaches us that charity is the soul of holiness. Charity is the soul of holiness. So, it's precisely in growing in charity, growing in divine love, that we grow in holiness. If we are growing in holiness we are growing in charity. If we are growing in charity we are growing in holiness.

How do we measure that? Well, maybe 'measure' is the wrong word, but we can certainly each examine our loving, our life in charity. For example, when you think about your relationship with your spouse, or with family members, are all of those relationships characterized by true charity and love? The way we treat people on the street, the

way we treat the sick in hospitals, or the homebound. The way we treat people in public places. And so forth. Are all of those relationships characterized by charity? That gives us a good sense of our path of holiness.

But charity itself is a gift from God. Charity is not something that we just sort of generate in our own hearts. Charity is poured out into us, by God himself, beginning with our Baptism, and at our Baptism, we receive the theological virtue of charity, along with faith and hope. And we receive all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And so forth. But charity, divine love, is a gift that God gives to us. So, then in our question about growing in holiness has to do with growing in charity, then at the base level here, the question is, how do we become more receptive to the gift of God's love? Because we do have a part in it. We don't just naturally become more loving or magically become holy. If I just find the halo that fits right on us and slips it right over the head. No, no, no. We have a part in it, but our part is to be receptive.

So, how do we become more receptive of God's love so that we become holier? Well, practices like prayer and penance, reading scripture, doing good works, serving others, all of these, of course, are very good ways of fertilizing the soil of our soul to become more and more receptive to the love of God - preparing a place for God to come in. You know in Advent we were saying, "Come Holy Jesus, Come Holy Jesus." We weren't trying to convince Him, but what we were actually trying to do was prepare our hearts to receive Him, to become more receptive.

But this morning, I want to focus on just three ways that we can foster a greater spirit of receptivity in our life. The first is perhaps not completely intuitive, but it is certainly spoken to in the first and

second readings, especially. And this is 'order' - increasing greater reward in our own interior life, but also in our family life. We need to make ourselves more receptive to the love of God. What do I mean by that? God has a design for family life. And in the context of the family each member of the family has their own part to play. The Lord speaks to us about this order. He speaks about the father, the husband, being placed at the head of the household, and it seems that order really stems from the fatherhood of the father. Not just in a household, but in the universe, right? The order of the universe stems from the Fatherhood of God. And the household, the family, the human family, is simply a microcosm of that greater reality. But St. Paul, writing to the Colossians, also to the Ephesians, the Book of Sirach, all of this speaks about the order, the proper order of a family. How a husband loves his wife; how a wife loves her husband; how the children love and honor and obey the parents, both father and mother. I really encourage you to go back and read the first and second readings, especially you who are raising families these days. It speaks just beautifully on the kind of order that God desires to be in our families. And granted, a lot of families are broken, a lot of families have their own forms of trials and brokenness and all of that, so sometimes we're not able actually to follow every single line of these passages but we do what we can to foster that sense of order in our families and doing that helps the family thrive. Also, families thrive because what we are doing is, we are saying is, we want our family to be what God designed it to be. And God designed a family for thriving and for joy. So, that is the first way that we foster this spirit of openness and receptivity to the love of God - we embrace the order that God himself has placed in the family. And so, maybe, that entails a little reflection on each of our hearts. If I am a father, if I am a husband, do I lay down my life for my wife, my

children. Or children - how well do I do at obeying my mom and dad? And so on and so forth – wives loving their husbands.

The second point is that going to Confession actually fosters receptivity in our hearts to the love of God. I know of a family, they say that when things are kind of ‘off’ inside the home, when people are, for adding each other's throats, or there's just sort of a general sense that, things are not good, the mom and dad march everyone off to Confession, and they all go to Confession. Mom and Daddy included. And it works wonders; it works wonders. Why is that? The Sacrament of Confession helps us to recognize how much we need God. I came to kind of an embarrassing realization a few weeks ago that I fallen into the pattern sort of thinking like, “All right, after I go to confession and I don't need the mercy of God anymore.” Like, “Okay, I got His mercy, so I don't need it until I sin again.” No! Going to Confession teaches us that we need God's mercy more than ever. We think, you know, if we're growing in holiness, we're getting closer that, you know, there's less of a gap or something like that. We need God more and more and more as life goes on. Not less and less. And going to Confession helps us to grow in humility and gratitude which are two virtues that dispose us to receive the outpouring of God's love and into our heart. And Confession also helps us to recognize, to pinpoint the areas in our lives where we are closed to God so that we can open it, so that we can allow God to open those areas. Making a good Examination of Conscience is a wonderful way of bringing to light those areas where we have closed off our hearts to God. Going to Confession is a wonderful way of beginning - tilling that soil.

The third suggestion, the third area, is receiving Holy Communion. So, if we're trying to figure out how to receive God, better - practice makes perfect, right? The more we practice receiving God with a

heart full of love, receiving the body and blood of Jesus with eagerness and with desire the better we get at receiving Him in whatever way He comes to us. So, worthy reception of Holy Communion is good practice for receiving the Lord. It fosters ever greater openness. And just like I was saying with Confession, receiving Holy Communion may to some degree, bring us a sense of satisfaction, but more than that, it should enkindle a greater hunger in us so that we don't go out the doors of the church saying, "Well, I've done that and I am satisfied and know I have enough." But we say, "I can't wait to receive Him again with even greater love than I received Him today." So that each time we receive Holy Communion our love for God is increasing and receiving Him just makes us want to receive Him more. And therefore, it prepares our heart to receive, even receiving Communion orients us toward receiving Him. Does that make sense? Receiving the Lord makes us want to receive Him even more.

So, these three things, trying to establish or maintain order in our interior life, and in our family relationships, going to Confession regularly, receiving Holy Communion worthily on a regular basis, with greater and greater love, all of these things are good ways to foster receptivity in our hearts and therefore, to be filled more and more with the love of God, and therefore, to grow in holiness and therefore, to have a holy family.

We are coming to the end of this calendar year; we are about to begin a new calendar year. People are starting to consider what resolutions they might make. These are four things to consider: Studying these first and second readings; striving for greater order; resolving to go to Confession on a regular basis; and asking God for the grace, in receiving Holy Communion, to experience an increased

desire to receive Him more and more worthily for the transformation of our hearts, our lives, in holiness.