

## The Feast of the Holy Family: Being a Holy Family

One proud grandma was showing off pictures of her grandchildren to a neighbor. "How old are they?" the neighbor asked. "The lawyer is two, and the doctor is four," the grandma replied.

In the publication *LectionAid*, Rev. C. Edward Bowen tells about a children's Christmas pageant. We all know how proud parents are of children and how they drag out grandparents and others to see their children perform in the annual Christmas ritual. In one such pageant a little boy had a very important line. At the most dramatic point he was supposed to say, "I am the light of the world." When he saw all the people watching, the boy became petrified and 'stage fright' set in. When the moment came, he forgot his line. Being close, his mother tried to feed the boy his line by mouthing the words. When the boy caught sight of her, a big smile came over his face, he relaxed and with great gusto announced to the congregation, **"My mother is the light of the world."**

I am sure you all have great ideals for your children. It is not that they need to become a lawyer or doctor to make you happy, but you do want them to grow up into the finest people they can be, using their potential, being happy in their lives.

If this is what you really want for your children, then like Joseph and Mary in the Temple, these treasures must be dedicated to the Lord. For your children to fulfill their potential they must find the reflection of God and bring it into the world.

The Holy Family was not built on glamour or the wealth of this world, but on love... they were rich with the grace of God. It is not just because Jesus is one of the family, but because of the active participation of all members of this Holy Family.

Jesus was an obedient Son, who listened to his mother even though at times he told her of things which she was not aware of, due to his unique nature of both being God and Man.

Mary was a loving and caring mother, genuinely concerned for her family. She devoted her entire life caring for Jesus as he grew from a baby into adulthood, ready for his life's mission. Mary was his **"light of his world"** while he grew in wisdom and age and grace.

Meanwhile, St. Joseph, who was not related by blood to Jesus, but was related through his legal marriage to Mary, became the foster-father of Jesus. Though Joseph had his skeptical moment when he found Mary was pregnant without yet being married to him, he was a righteous man and a responsible person. For Mary's own good he wanted to divorce her quietly so that she would not suffer any of the repercussions of being an unwed mother.

Joseph was a good father figure to Jesus, and the one likely who taught him various things in life, educating him on skills and even perhaps on carpentry. Jesus was likely also a carpenter as was Joseph. Joseph was an upright man who took his duties and

responsibilities seriously. He protected his family well, and he brought them to Egypt to live in exile while those who sought the death of Jesus were around.

In Luke's Gospel we are introduced to a couple of characters who have been waiting for a long time for a promise to be fulfilled. Luke uses the figures of Anna and Simeon to announce the fulfillment of God's promise to humanity.

Mary and Joseph bring the baby Jesus to the Temple to fulfill their religious duty of making an offering for their firstborn. And here they come across this old, odd couple. We don't know much about these two, Luke tells us that Simeon is touched by the Holy Spirit and comes to the temple. Anna, it seems, is just there all the time.

Both Anna and Simeon were people who looked forward with hope. When God acts and the promise that they have been waiting for is fulfilled Anna and Simeon are in tune. Simeon recognizes that his wait is over...that long-awaited promise of God has been fulfilled in the Child of Jesus.

The best things in life are worth waiting for. As Christians we are a people who wait in joyful hope for the coming of God's Kingdom.

The story of the Holy Family is the story of life not always turning out the way you expected. It's the story of a teenage mother, conceiving a child before she was married. It's the story of an anxious father, confronting scandal, planning on divorce. It's the story of a family forced to become refugees, living as immigrants in the land that once held their ancestors as slaves.

This family was holy, but it was also human. We need these reminders...especially now. This is a family that struggled and suffered, like so many of us. But they also knew profound hope, trusting God completely. They call all of us to that kind of trust and they are with us. In our own time, they stand beside all who worry, who struggle, who search, who pray.

They stand beside parents anxious about their children, worrying for their welfare.

They walk with immigrants and refugees separated from those they love.

They comfort teenage mothers and single parents.

They console the prisoner, the outcast, the bullied, the scorned—and the parents who love them.

They offer comfort and compassion to any mother or father grieving over the loss of a child.

The Holy Family shares our burdens, but they also uplift us by their example. Jesus, Mary and Joseph were never alone. They endured through prayer and the grace of God.

It was not written in the Bible or the Gospels that the Holy Family did this, but it is most likely beyond any doubt that Jesus, Mary and Joseph often and regularly prayed together to God...at their meals, at the time when they were working, and at many other times.

If we, as a family, pray constantly, we'll grow closer to the Lord. And if we learn to love and be faithful as the Holy Family had been, we'll have genuine love, faith and harmony in our families.

I'm sure the Holy Family made their lives a prayer. And when **we** find ourselves overwhelmed, we need to look toward the crèche where we find our model for living in Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Through all their hardships, in a time of anxiety and difficulty, persecution and tragedy - a time very much like our own - they showed us how to be people of faith, people of hope, and people of love. **They show us how to be holy.**

We **need** to be like that. God bless us, everyone! Amen.

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(excerpts from Fr. Joe Pellegrino, Fr. Fr. Edward F. Steiner and deacon Greg Kandra)