



Homily for 12/30/2018

*Holy Family*

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During the Octave of Christmas, as we adore the Christ-child surrounded by Mary His mother and Joseph His foster-father, the Church bids us to celebrate the Holy Family. The Holy Family is a model and a reminder that the family is the basic building block of human society. It is the place where human beings learn that we belong to something bigger than our self; the place where we learn to share. It's the place we learn we are loved and how to love.

Family is also the first place we hear the word, "no." Healthy families actually do use that word. The family is where we are supposed to learn discipline, tough love, self-control, respect for others, responsibility, follow-through, honor, integrity. Parents are not always the most popular ones in the house. The parent who seeks to 'just be friends' with his children will quickly find his authority eroded, the child spoiled and society will suffer.

The nuclear family is not isolated. We are also called out to be part of something even greater. In fact the name Church, 'Ecclesia' in Greek, means "those who are called out." Called out to be the family of God. As the family goes, so goes the church. As the family breaks down, so does the church. I ran across a meme about leadership that I thought pertinent:

"If you want to make everyone happy, don't be a leader, sell ice cream!" The same could apply to parenting: "If you want to make your children happy all the time, don't be a parent; become a clown!" Children need authority that is loving but firm in order to grow in virtue and mature. Of course children rebel against authority and throw temper tantrums and complain. But parents were children themselves once. They have 'been around the block' and they are the ones who 'know the consequences.' So the good parent says, "no, you can't just eat candy for dinner - it will rot your teeth out, the sugar will make you stay up way past your bedtime and you will be worthless in school tomorrow." "I think much better thoughts for you, your future education, the health of your teeth, your true happiness and so, 'eat your vegetables!'" This is hard to stick to but that is why God designed the family as the 'team approach' - mother and father united for the good of the child. How many times did my exasperated mother turn to my father to discipline us rowdy kids! But imagine if there were no father to turn to, or if the father had abdicated his role of authority.

The place where family has broken down the most in our age is in the role of fatherhood. Mothers have been great. "Can a mother forget the child of her womb?" That the rhetorical question asked by the Scriptures. But fatherhood must always be chosen, willed. Fatherhood is so much more than being a genetic contributor to offspring. And fatherhood is under attack in the West. From radical feminist attacks on masculinity, to Hollywood portrayals of dads as stooges, to the very real crisis of fatherless homes where the man has abandoned his wife and children. Now, to be honest, there have always been examples of rotten fatherhood. And overbearing authoritarian figurers who were cruel were the cause of many of the reactionary philosophies of the past century. But the opposite extreme seems to be at play - a radical individualistic autonomy divorced from all authority. And it is just as destructive as any tyrant. Perhaps it is even worse, in that there is now no one to blame but ourselves. Nowadays, instead of "I hate my father" it is, "I hate myself!"

True fatherhood, and therefore true authority, needs to be recovered for the family, the Church, and society to survive. The biggest problem is the resistance and even hesitance to take on the role of responsibility and to exercise authority. The culprit is the tyranny of emotions. A father must be intent on the actual objective good of his children not just how they feel. He always has to weigh in the balance truth and feelings. Sometimes the truth hurts. If he is more concerned about feelings than truth, he would be tempted to withhold the truth, "Ignorance is bliss," he might say to dismiss his responsibility. And so those in charge these days are often hobbled by other people's emotions. Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share feelings, is a good thing. But it is only one factor in an equation that is much more complex. Whereas in previous generations people could be



accused of 'lacking empathy', that is, not being sensitive to other's feelings, nowadays it seems that feelings have a trump card over reason and truth. Just look at the modern circus of politics and news media. It is all calculated to bait an emotional response, and people live on emotional drugs like outrage and spite. It is as if hate defines them. To crown empathy as king, leads one to a pathetic tyranny. Pun intended.

I've been challenged by this myself. It is increasingly difficult to be the pastor of a parish when forces of sentimentalism, relativism, individualism, and resistance to authority reign in society. Just like politics being relegated to popularity polls about how people 'feel' about an issue, so too our precious faith, the inheritance of centuries of saints, and our parishes in many instances are turned into a self-help aisle or a cafeteria of options or to leave as our whims dictate. It is reduced to an entertainment enterprise content to placate the people and 'give them what they want' instead of providing them with the food that sustains them through this valley of tears into the everlasting light of heaven.

I've often remarked that my job as a pastor is not to make you "feel good," but to help you "be good!" I give all parents here permission to use that phrase whenever appropriate ☺ That should be the role of every father! In fact, good healthy balanced discipline leads to a greater happiness than indulgence, laziness, and gluttony could ever bring.

In the same way we need a good, healthy, balanced discipline in our religious observances. Rules are not evil. We are just now emerging from the great anti-authoritarian age that was the backdrop for the sexual revolution and the overthrowing of major institutions and mores of society. It was done in the name of liberation and freedom from oppression. What we have now, however, is worse. Whereas before, the rules had constrained freemen from indulging in vice, now we have slaves to vice who don't even know they are chained. In the aftermath of an anti-authority revolution we need to regain a healthy respect for true authority.

The Church is meant to be the field hospital for the brokenness of humanity, not a nightclub indulging us in our brokenness. Families are broken, bruised, faithless, and fatherless. Our society is suffering. What we need is a religion that challenges us; that sees our true potential as children of God most High; which knows the power of the Cross, self-denial, death to self for love of God and neighbor. We need a religion that is not pandering or trying to win a popularity contest or simply bent on inebriating us on an emotional level, just to leave us with an existential hangover the next day. What we need is religion that believes in repentance, conversion and the power of Grace to do both. A hospital should not put a 'Snoopy' Band-Aid on someone who needs radical surgery! We accompany the sinner, for sure, but we don't accommodate the disease! We fight it and train the soul to become healthy!

So what do the Fathers of the Church always preach?

- Daily prayer - set time aside for God. If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy.
- Sacramental life - regular confession, Sunday Mass, daily Mass even.
- Participation in the life of the parish; be attentive to your duty to your community.
- Perform works of charity, get your hands dirty, be attentive to the needs around you, offer to help.
- Don't be afraid to fast and pray when evil comes around; sometimes that is the only medicine.
- If marriage is your vocation, marry and fight for your marriage according to God's plan in the Church. Have your children baptized and teach them the faith at home, learn it with them if you have to.
- If the single life is your vocation, fight for chastity, be generous with your time and money, and be single-minded in your relationship with the Lord.



Is heaven our goal? Why should we settle for less? Why pander to the world? That is why our liturgy focuses on mystery and transcendence. I can't preach, "I'm ok; you're ok." Because I'm not ok! I know I need to submit my will daily to higher authority. I submit to Christ, to His rule and His dominion. I am a sinner in need of a savior and I can't save myself. Anything less is man-made religion; the religion of me. "Not to us, Lord, but to your name give the glory!" On this feast of the Holy Family let us rejoice in the Family of Faith that the Lord has called us to. Let us rejoice in the authority of a Good Father God who loves us His children and does all in His power to strengthen us against our adversary; who trains us to resist evil by proposing to us the cross. Let us rejoice that He has provided for us this banquet of His son's saving sacrifice. Come let us worship!

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Mary Mother of God, pray for us.

St. Joseph, guardian of the Holy Family, pray for us.