

Liturgy for the Feast of the Holy Family

by Fr. D. John Kennedy

Introduction: Our families are invited to live like the Holy Family which is the revelation of the Divine family. Let us pray for our families called as “Domestic churches” to witness to the Christian values of love, forgiveness, truth and Justice.

READINGS:

FIRST: Sir 3: 2-6, 12-14;

SECOND: Colossians 3: 12-21

GOSPEL: Luke 2: 41-52

Homily:

In a radio interview given by Pope Francis on July 27, 2013 in Brazil we heard very prophetic words, “The family is important, and it is necessary for the survival of humanity. Without the family, the cultural survival of the human race would be at risk. The family, whether we like it or not, is the foundation.” We know that families did not come about by accident. The family is part of God’s plan for us. God wants our families to be holy. The family is the basic unit of society and the Church; we say the family is a domestic Church. The Family is also referred to as a “University” because individuals learn to communicate, to love, to forgive, to pray, to respect, to discern, and importantly to celebrate their faith. The future of humanity depends on the family because it is through families that society flourishes.

As the Church presents the Holy Family as our role model, we should not conclude that they did not have challenges. Just like every family, they had to face and overcome difficulties – misunderstanding over the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, the possibility of Joseph divorcing Mary to whom he was betrothed, the birth of Jesus in difficult circumstances, a flight to Egypt to escape the greed of an insane man, Herod, the awful experience of losing Jesus for three days on their way back from the Temple, the pain of separation with the death of Joseph, and then the struggle that Jesus experienced in his ministry leading to his death on the cross. The Holy Family went through its share of misunderstanding, doubts, poverty, death and suffering.

What helped the family through all these tests was their prayer and utmost trust in God. In the Gospels we see that Joseph, Mary and Jesus were in tune with God the

father and who often kept their whole beings open to listen to God's word. They kept up with the requirements of their faith.

The readings of today enumerate the different values that are pertinent to the human family: support, respect, sympathy, kindness, love, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, wisdom, obedience. Therefore, these values form the building blocks of the human family. In the First Reading from the Book of Sirach, there is special emphasis on the importance of honoring one's parents, (3:5-8). The Lord promises rewards to those who honour their father and mother. A point of emphasis is that one's treatment of parents is, at a deeper level, also an action toward God. e.g. In our Gospel text today, after three days, during a time of great anxiety, Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple, Jesus then instructs them on how their parental role must be subordinate to the will of his divine Father as he submits himself as an obedient son.

On this Feast of the Holy Family, we realize that the institution of the family is challenged by a lifestyle of disrespect towards the sanctity of family life. The beautiful aspect of family life is struggling in times of focus on materialism, consumerism and even scant respect for faith and morals. Holiness in the family will be realized when parents live out with reverence their wedding vows of love, fidelity, permanence of the Sacrament and the transmitting of faith to the children they accept lovingly from God. The foundations of family life are laid around the altar, the dining table and importantly acts of sacrifice and service. When parents lay the foundations and nurture their children towards strengthening the same there is bound to be the spirit of togetherness, respect and compassion for each other. Pope St. Paul VI encouraged the rosary as the prayer of the family (in *Marialis Cultus*). Today, some families pray together and read the scriptures. Surely, the faith dimension in the family helps us to go beyond mere instincts to live together to an appreciation of the plan of God for the family. At the same time families must make use of the opportunities given by the Church for repair and renewal of relationships whenever they face upheaval and turmoil in family life. Families should never feel embarrassed to seek help from agencies that can in bringing healing and reinforcement of family ties.

Today on the Feast of the Holy Family, we pray for our own families and for each family in the world that they be filled with peace and joy as gifts of the Lord. God wants all families to be the best they can possibly be and the best place for children. God wants all families to be holy. May the Holy Family inspire us to look beyond the challenges and difficulties and stay united in love.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Celebrant: Lord, we come to the manger as a family and surrender all our needs and intentions with faith in your generous mercy. **Our Response is:** Lord hear our prayer.

1. For our Pope, Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay faithful; that we may all reflect the love, compassion, mercy and generosity as a family of believers after the heart of Jesus... We pray...

2. For our political leaders and policy makers; that they may work for the well-being of the family as an important unit of society... We pray...

3. For all our families; that couples may live out their sacramental covenant in the love they have for each other and that children may grow in respect for their parents... We pray...

4. For the difficulties and challenges facing families; that the example of the Holy Family may strengthen the faith and responsibility of every member of the family... We pray...

5. For our personal needs which we offer in silence; that the Lord may be merciful and generous (*pause for 7 seconds*)... We pray...

Celebrant: Almighty God, we thank you for listening to the prayers we have made with faith in You and Your Son Jesus who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.