



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

Living the Joy of the Holy Family

The Sunday following Christmas celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family. We should first acknowledge that the Holy Family experienced tremendous challenges, including the perplexing mystery of the virgin birth, the flight from their homeland to protect the infant Jesus from murder by King Herod, and panic over losing Jesus in the Temple when He was just twelve. And yet they lived with joy as they trusted our Heavenly Father to bring them safely through it all. Let's take a closer look at how our families can live the joy of the Holy Family.

What does it mean to be "holy"? Contrary to what some expect, being holy does not mean to stop having fun or walking around with a stoic expression. Being holy, simply put, means that you want to become the family that God intended, to be the "best version" by living with greater love and joy.

How can your family become holy? Let's start with a few practical ideas from the Pope. He asks parents to "waste time with their children." His invitation stresses the importance of just being together and developing relationships which bring life to the family. He also provides vivid imagery in his apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" by encouraging us not to be "sourpusses" but, instead, to radiate joy by smiling more and frowning less. It is tempting to dismiss this as too simple. Yet, these challenges help a family increase in holiness.

Pope Francis also suggests that a family who desires to be holy will use three words often in their everyday life: 'Please', 'Thank you', and 'Sorry'. These words are essential! All too often, the impact and significance of these simple words are overlooked. Yet, these simple words of civility clearly recognize each family member's basic human dignity and helps each to grow in love and holiness.

St. Ignatius of Loyola (d. 1556) invites us to reflect daily upon and be grateful for the blessings of God's presence. Over the years, my wife and I have intentionally fostered in our children daily habits of grateful prayer. As our children grew and changed, one method that has "stuck" the best is what we simply call "blessings." Each night, we gather and relate how God blessed us. This daily sharing has truly been helpful for our family to grow in our thankfulness to God, which leads to acting with greater love towards others—to be holy.

In Matthew 25:31-46 Christ names actions to which everyone will be held accountable. These acts, which are known as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy direct our concern towards the material and spiritual needs of others. These include feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, and acts of forgiveness, bearing wrongs patiently and consolation. Families who engage in works of mercy – especially during the Christmas season, are definitely traveling a path to greater holiness.

Throughout history, the most joyful and contented people are those who respond to God's call for holiness. They have a deeper appreciation for life and find ways to live each day in abundance. Even in the face of suffering, people seeking holiness maintain a sense of peace because of their trust in God and grounding in Him. Above all, those who seek to imitate the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph allow the Holy Spirit to guide their decisions and actions. They find ways to engage in daily prayer, attend Sunday Mass, monthly Reconciliation, and carve out time to deepen their friendship with God by attending a retreat, as either an individual or as a married couple.

The Office for Marriage and Family invites couples to attend an upcoming marriage enrichment retreat. Here are two:

GIVEN is a short, powerful retreat for couples who are married, dating, or engaged. It is an opportunity to share, learn and celebrate marriage with other couples through engaging talks, lively music and adoration, prayer & reconciliation. GIVEN retreats help couples foster a deeper relationship that is rooted in Jesus Christ & His Church.

The GIVEN retreat begins at 8:30 AM and concludes at 2:30 PM. Babysitting is offered. Retreat dates are

- JANUARY 12, 2019 – St. John the Baptist, Marshfield
- JANUARY 26, 2019 – Notre Dame, Chippewa Falls
- FEBRUARY 23, 2019 – Mary Mother of the Church, La Crosse

Domestic Church Retreat is a lay-led ministry for sacramentally married couples that enhances marriage and family life by opening the treasures of the Church's teachings on love and life. The goal of the retreat is to strengthen the couple to experience greater harmony and joy in their marriage through simple formation and meaningful dialogue.

- The next Domestic Church retreat is March 28, 2019, 7:00 pm to March 31, 2019, 12:00 p.m. at the St. Anthony Spirituality Center in Marathon City, WI.

For information on either retreat or to register, go to <http://diolc.org/marriage/marriage-enrichment/>

Let us seek to become families who are living with greater gratitude, love and forgiveness flowing from committed, daily prayer after the model of the Holy Family. Of course, we can only do this with the help of God's grace.

By Dan Kitzhaber

Office for Marriage and Family Life



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