

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

THEME: THE HOLY FAMILY OF NAZARETH: A MODEL FOR CATHOLIC FAMILIES

The climax of the goodness of the family was reached when God himself became a member of the human family. That happened when the word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14). So, we have the Holy Family, the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The church holds up that family as the model for all Christian families.

The church invites all Christian families to be like the Holy Family of Nazareth. There is just one problem: the bible does not tell us much about how the Holy Family lived. The problem is easily resolved if we consult the teaching of the bible on family life. And the bible has a lot to say about family life in both the Old and New Testaments as can be seen from the first and second readings of today's Mass. The Holy Family would not have lived differently from what the bible teaches about family life.

The different members of the family have their different roles. Today's first and second readings give some indications of those roles. A Christian family is one in which the different members endeavor to live up to the roles that God assigns to them. If the members of a family fail or refuse to live up to their proper roles or, worse still, seek to reverse those roles, that family is no more a Christian family.

Essentially, a Christian family is one in which the wife respects her husband, or, as St. Paul says, the wife gives way to her husband. It is to be understood that respecting one's husband is not the same thing as being his slave or even his servant or housemaid. In the Nuptial Blessing given during marriage ceremony, the church prays that husbands would recognize their wives as equals and heirs with them to the life of grace. Respecting one's husband would require a wife to defer to him and let him be the head in the family. It should not be the case that she contests that headship with him, even if he is not as successful or as well-endowed as she is.

In a Christian family, the husband should love his wife and treat her with gentleness, as Christ does his bride, the church. There is clearly no room here for a husband ever beating his wife or being violent to her in any other way. But there is room for the husband to make sacrifices for his wife, bending over backwards to meet her needs, subordinating his wants to her needs.

In a Christian family, children are expected to be obedient to their parents, because that is what will please the Lord. Even the child Jesus was obedient to his parents. (Lk. 2:51) Children's obedience to their parent should be only in matters that please God. If parents would ever ask their children to disobey God or do anything that is either sinful or immoral, the children would be duty-bound to disobey their parents, because, as St. Peter told the Jews in Acts 5:29, we must obey God rather than man.

Christian parents, for their part, have the duty to take care of their children in every aspect of their lives. Traditional Catholic Theology of marriage identified one of the purposes of marriage to be procreation and education of children. They should also be there for the children to bring them up, to nurture them. In the rite for baptism, parents are told to be the first teachers of their

children in matters of faith and morals. They are also charged to be the best of teachers. Parents are expected to teach their children by what they say and do, not just by word of mouth, but even more by the example of their own lives.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, any family that endeavors to live in accordance with the biblical teachings on family life is a Christian family, modeled on the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.