

- This was always one of my favorite Sunday's of the year, mostly because we were always together AND off from school. The Christmas presents had been opened, favorite toys had emerged and there were still candy in the Book of Life Savers we got every Christmas (although the apple and the orange we got in our stockings remained!).
 - We'd always go to Church and sit in the same spot, about 1/3 of the way up on the right hand side near what would become the stained glass window of the Last Supper when the parish got the money.
 - And we'd always sit in the same formation: my Dad on the end of the pew, my mother towards the center aisle and the four of us cherubs in between.
 - And we all loved the readings. As the lector would read about wives being *subordinate to husbands* we would all look up the pew at my mother.
 - Then, as the lector would read about husbands loving their wives and avoiding bitterness, we would all look down the pew at my father.
 - As the lector would read about honoring one's father, the authority of one's mother, and obeying, both my parents would look in at us kids.

- As the lector would read about minds failing and father's not provoking their children (The old translation had the word "nagging" which was much more fun for us than "provoking.") we'd all look over to my Dad.
- It was only when I went into seminary that I learned that, for centuries, these readings were used to subject women to men. For us as a family, it was more simple.
- And as I reflect on it now, this feast and these readings also speak of the great gift of our families, the gift of our parents and our children, our sisters and our brothers.
- Today, we honor Joseph and Mary and Jesus as the Holy Family. This is more than a memorial of the ideal family. It is a practical reminder about what is important and how families can thrive even in imperfect conditions.
- In the three Gospels the Church gives us for this feast, we hear both the joy and challenge Joseph and Mary faced in raising Jesus.
 - In today's gospel we hear of the Presentation in the Temple.
 - Mary and Joseph, faithfully following the traditions of the Israelites, brought their first born son to the Temple. How excited they must have been to return to the Lord the blessing God had given them.
 - They wanted to follow the Jewish laws and the traditions, not as hoops to jump through but to provide their child the foundation to know, love and serve God just as it was the foundation for their own lives.

- Both Mary and Joseph are guided by the Lord, seek to do His will, both in the religious tradition and in their lives.
 - Christian parents are called ultimately to provide the space for children to grow in knowledge of God and of God's love for each and every one of us.
 - Sure it's a challenge to live out those traditions at times, to come to Mass or to go to Confession, or pray together at home. Even more, it is a struggle to live lives that are guided by God's will and provide an example to children.
 - But these traditions and examples help make real the love of the God we cannot see.
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- Last year's Gospel for this feast recounted the struggles of Mary and Joseph to provide the basics for their new-born Son.
 - Driven out of their home by the cruelty of Herod, Joseph and Mary were forced to become immigrants, to travel away from family and everything they knew.
 - When it was safe for them to return, they would go back to Nazareth, an environment that would allow Jesus to could grow in grace and age and wisdom, knowing his extended family and learning his faith.
 - From Mary and Joseph we see what you parents know so well.
 - Even before children can learn about God, of necessity parenting is first about providing the basics: food, clothing and shelter so the child can grow and mature.

- I have watched the heroic struggles of so many, seeking to provide these basics, to provide more than enough so that your children will lack for nothing.
- Parenting is about creating a space of safety and security, both physical and emotional, that allows children to know they are loved and to develop naturally according to that love into the all that they can be.
- We think in a special way of those who, with Mary and Joseph are immigrants, forced from their own lands by violence or poverty to provide for their families, working in degrading conditions, separated by great distances, both geographical and emotional
- In next year's Gospel for this Feast, we will hear the finding of Jesus in the temple when Jesus was about 12 years old.
 - After traveling a whole day, they discover that he is missing. Fraught with worry, they searched for three days until they find him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking questions.
 - And Jesus is shocked by their concern "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" It's the answer of an adolescent, completely focused on what is in front of him, in a way so that everything else is blotted out, even his own love for his earthly parents.
- The gift of family, of true parenting is a selfless gift.

- Family, parenting, is about allowing children to grow and develop, even among misunderstanding, confusion, or fear.
- Parenting, it is not about being perfect. Mistakes will be made.
 - Jesus was God, Mary without sin and Joseph a man of deep prayer and a saint. But even this family made the mistake of leaving Jesus in the temple.
 - Yes, mistakes will be made. But they must be addressed as Mary and Joseph did, with God as the focus and respect at the center.
 - Parenting as Joseph and Mary show us, involves forging a middle road, striking a wise sense of balance between parental concern and legitimate emerging responsibility.
 - It's not an easy call to make, not an easy line to locate. It demands love, respect and patience on both parts.
- Parents will need to respect children and the individuality of each child. Joseph and Mary may not have always understood Jesus but they always respected and supported Him.
 - And children will need to respect their parents. Even with the world to save, Jesus went down to Nazareth and was obedient to Mary and Joseph.
 - In love and respect then, a truly **holy** family is one that seeks to know the will of God through prayer and then live it out with one another.

- It's never easy, but parents and children do not do it alone. This is the point Saint Paul was trying to make.
 - We are all children of the one Father, brothers and sisters all.
 - All of our relationships, whether it's husbands and wives, parents and children, co-workers, friends, neighbors, subordinates or superiors, all of our relationships should be modeled on Christ and how Christ gives Himself to us.
 - So husbands and wives should be subordinate to one another, allowing Christ's love to cement their love for one another and be the foundation for their family.
 - So children and parents should allow the respect of Christ to dictate their interactions, allowing both to grow in grace and age and wisdom.
 - Both children and parents should be **as conscious** of the virtues Paul lays out as the clothes they wear. Just as we pick an outfit every day so, too, we should put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness (as the Lord has forgiven), often most difficult for those who are closest to us, those who know how to push our buttons.
 - Of course, over all of these others we should put on love. This should be no mere accessory but noticeable and definite, the signature of our lives as Christians.
 - And each one of us should look for and find in each person the God who has sacrificed Himself for me. We do it all as if for Christ, because, in fact, it is for Christ.

- God has ordained that search, indeed has created us, in such a way that each one of us is part of a family.
 - God did not create us to be alone and does not want us to be alone.
 - This is true not just of our search for Christ but of our very existence. From the day we are born, until the day we die, we are called to share in the graces and the challenges that come from our families.
 - For most of us it's our natural family but for some, because of death or distance or division, it is a different family made by choice or by adoption.

- In any case, even if your family wasn't (or isn't) perfect (like mine!!) we can understand what family means and share in the joys we have been given.
 - As Sirach makes clear in our first reading, even an imperfect family is a blessing.
 - To be part of family, to serve within a family, both in the giving and the taking, for both the young and the old, to be part of a family is a blessing, allowing the favor of God to be upon us, even as it was on Jesus.