

- Today as a church we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family.
- It is a feast that is celebrated throughout the Catholic Church worldwide and there are some interesting customs that have developed over time related to this feast day.
- For example, today in many families, members will gather round the door to their home and bleed each other, tracing the sign of the cross on each other's forehead. This recalls their baptism day when the priest greeted them at the door of the church and gave the very same blessing. As each family member is blessed they are entrusted into the care and protection of God.
- Many couples will quietly renew their marriage vows today.
- Many families will pray the special consecration prayer to the Holy family placing their family in the protection of the Holy family. (You can actually find a copy of the consecration prayer in this week's bulletin).
- You might want to try one or more of these practices with your family (after Mass today, any couple wishing to renew their marriage vows can meet in the Blessed Sacrament chapel and we will have a short renewal prayer and blessing).  
PAUSE
- The first time I read this particular gospel passage I remember thinking **how strange it was** that Mary and Joseph did not keep a more watchful eye on their child; finding themselves in such a predicament.
- When I told my wife this she reminded me of a beautiful Spring day, some years ago, **when she and I and our two young sons** were out planting flowers in the yard. Fran was in one corner of the yard and I was in the other. We were weeding and digging for about a half hour when Fran suddenly stopped and asked "Where is Stephen? (He was about two)" I shouted back "Isn't he with you?" We looked all

around the yard-**no Stephen**. As we **frantically** turned toward the driveway, we saw a woman- a complete stranger- holding Stephen's hand, walking him down the driveway, asking if he belonged to us. To this day I can remember the fear and anxiety I felt for those few short seconds.

- The same fear and anxiety Mary and Joseph must have felt as they searched for Jesus.
- This is an interesting Gospel passage to ponder. Jesus is God, Mary is sinless and Joseph is a saint and yet this Gospel passage tells of when something went terribly wrong.
- When Mary and Joseph find Jesus, Mary asks: Why have you done this to us? Jesus responds (almost sarcastically): Why were you looking for me? Joseph remains silent. No one apologizes. What are we to make of this?
- If Mary and Joseph who were charged with the care of the Son of God can lose track of him for three days; If Jesus who embodies goodness and love doesn't bother to tell His parents where He is going – perhaps the message is that some things that go wrong are just accidents. Sometimes in families people get hurt even when no body means to do anything wrong.
- This Gospel reminds us even in the saintliest, and holiest of families- problems can occur.
- Today, the Church holds up before us the Holy Family of Nazareth: **Jesus, Mary and Joseph** – and says Learn from them - they lived through the things you are living through now.
- So, let's spend a moment looking at that Holy Family to find something each member has to teach us:
- Our Blessed Mother Mary teaches us the importance of prayer and reflection. Mary knew the importance of having a

relationship with God, spending time in prayer talking and listening (we don't always do the listening part!)

- Mary teaches us the importance of taking time to reflect on things. We read often in scripture that Mary pondered these things in her heart. Pondered what the events in her life meant, and what her role was to be. She thought about when to speak up or take action (as she did at the wedding at Cana when she prompts Jesus to perform his very first miracle) but she also knew when to keep silent.
- Mary urges us to take time out of our busy lives to pray and think about the events going on in our lives, in our families and to try to see their purpose - to look for God's presence in these every day events. (PAUSE)
- There is not a whole lot in the Gospels about Saint Joseph but what is there is powerful. Joseph could have had Mary put to death when he learned she was with child and it wasn't his. Instead he teaches us the importance of being compassionate: not rushing to judgment; the importance of listening and trying to understand; being merciful and loving.
- Joseph shows us how to let compassion and love take the place of anger and rash judgment. Not always easy for us when we have been hurt or when things don't go the way we expect them to go.
- Joseph teaches us to trust in God and believe if God calls you to something difficult – He will also give you the grace and strength to face it. (Pause)
- Together, Mary and Joseph remind us if we have tough choices to make; if we are going through a difficult, confusing time; if you think no one will understand- don't carry these things alone. Trust in others, especially your family and those closest to you. Trust in their understanding, their help, and their love. God put them in your life for a reason.

- There are so many lessons we learn from Jesus it is difficult to pick one: But on this feast day I suggest we think about what Jesus teaches us about family.
- One of the most interesting parts of today's gospel is the way it ends, we read: "He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them". The puzzling thing is this: If Jesus, **already at the age of twelve**, was well prepared for a public ministry (we read that "all who heard him were astounded /amazed at His understanding and Answers") why would he go down with his parents and spend the next **18 years** in obscurity only to begin his public ministry at the age of 30? Were they wasted years? Of course not! Our Gospel reminds us that it was during this time "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God". That happened within his family!
- Jesus teaches us the **family is a sacred place of love.**
- Family is where we first learn what **is good and bad**, it is where we learn **what love is** because we **first receive love** there.
- In the family we learn to **pray and to forgive.**
- In the family we learn to **value ourselves** and everything else we will eventually value. **A lot of important things happen inside the family.**
- Jesus also reminds us that beyond our immediate family we are all members of a larger family and as his followers we need to see and treat each other as family - with the care and love and respect due our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- What wonderful lessons we can learn from each member of that Holy family!
- They knew God was with them. They loved God, they trusted God, and they listened for God and out of that came their love for each other and their love for those around them.

They show us God is with us- all the time.

- Today on the feast of Holy Family (Our parish feast day), we are called to celebrate, promote, and cherish family life. We are called to take these teachings about family and put them into action in our individual families, in our parish family and beyond.
- Jesus, Mary and Joseph remind us that true family love, the love of Jesus, requires that we bring that love to others, especially those in need; the poor, the sick, the lonely, the depressed. The Holy Family shows us that true love involves entering into the lives of others. Being willing to feel that person's pain and being there to help, to comfort, to show you care. How many times did we see Jesus do this during his earthly life? We saw Mary do this as she walked along the road to the crucifixion with Jesus.
- In our individual families and as a parish founded under the name "Holy Family parish" we too are called to bring God's love into this world and to show all those we meet that God loves and cares for them.
- So as we continue on in this Christmas season and all year long, may we cherish our parish family gatherings with Jesus at that altar and may we always remember to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and the Holy family of Nazareth for those examples of how to live even better individual lives and family lives. Happy parish feast day and may God continue to bless us.