

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph | For Sunday, December 30th, 2018

Mirror the Love of the Holy Family

Written by Angie Windnagle

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:41-52



Our clan of four kids brings an immense diversity. Each little personality is so unrepeatable and unique. I never cease to be amazed that even though they all have grown up in the same home with mostly the same routine, environment, and parenting, they can be so drastically different. Our first has always been kind and gentle, but we always hear what's on his mind. I never have to guess how he's feeling! Our second son is a lot more reserved and isn't likely to share as much, but when he's provoked, he can explode instantly. The other two are a happy mix of the older two. With such a variety of personalities in our home, we've tried a variety of parenting methods. But the best thing we've ever done is to look to the Gospels and the divine parenting methodology found in the words of Scripture and the life of the Holy Family.

This Sunday's readings echo something that we've learned in our short years of parenting: for familial love on this earth to be authentic, it ought to mirror the love of God as much as it can. Our meditation and measure for that is the Holy Family, whose feast we celebrate this weekend.

The first reading reminds us of God's action within our families. Sirach says that God *"sets in honor a father over his children; a mother's authority ... over her sons."* So often when we read Scripture about family and relationships, our focus is on which earthly person becomes the dominant character or one in power. But this should call us to see something deeper and more substantial than what our initial earthly view can see.

It is *God* who sets a father over his children, not any choice or power of the father. Just as humble St. Joseph was set to take care over Mary and Jesus — two who were greater in power and holiness than he was — we ought to see every head of the home as a place of humble servitude to the great souls in the home. Any authority or place of honor is not owed or deserved, but rather a gift from God to be used in service back to Him.

As we move on to the responsorial psalm and second reading, we see this theme again. If we look with merely eyes of this world that equate power with domination, we might begin to think that there is a hierarchy in the family — those who are biggest are the best, and those who are littlest have less rights. However, with the eyes of faith, we can see a different story.

The psalmist speaks of a blessed state for those who fear the Lord. But true fear of the Lord is not a state of terror but rather holy awe. What would we be in holy awe about? It says that if we walk in *His* way, we will eat the fruit of our handiwork. That speaks loudly to the truth that Christ is the Way. He prepares the path for us, cutting down all that could harm us and making the soil fruitful for our souls. God isn't a far off deity demanding we honor Him because He is so powerful and terrible. Rather, He has already thought of us and our littleness and made a fruitful way for us back to His heart.

The second reading continues on this path of gentle and servant-like love. We first hear that we ought to “put on love” and forgive as God forgives. This first half is a written example of how the Holy Family must have loved — without quarreling and without pride but full of genuine kindness and love. In the last half, we see how that can come to fruition. Subordinate means to be under the mission of another. Husbands and wives must work together, love each other, and be on the same team working to love as God loves. There is no power trip here, only Christ-like love. When we think of those smaller than us and put them before ourselves, we are beginning to love divinely.

The Gospel teaches even more, though in a subtle way. We see Jesus as a boy, left in the temple. He seems quite sure of what he's doing, but Joseph and Mary are upset and concerned. Most parents would come down hard and find an equally hefty punishment. But instead, there was no threat or shaming. They simply asked what he was doing and shared their hearts. Jesus, wanting to honor them, followed them home and remained with them until his public ministry.

My kids are all so different. But when we focus on mirroring the familial love we learn from the Holy Family and the Gospels, our parenting becomes a moment of conversion and love rather than shame and fear. Even beyond our family, when I remember that my call as a baptized Christian is to be a “little Christ” to others, it's easier to let go of my ego and need for power and put others before me in order to serve them and lead them to Jesus. In our culture today that thrives on power and prestige, living like this is truly heroic.

“The Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.” — Pope Francis, [Amoris Laetitia](#)

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PRAYER

Father,

help us to live as the Holy Family,
united in respect and love.

Bring us to the joy and peace of your eternal home.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

—[Holy Family Collect](#)