

What makes a family holy?

Today's celebration does not focus merely on family, but on the Holy family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, but I ask the question what makes their family and any family 'holy'? If I want to summarise what makes a family Holy, I would say that when family members put God, the Holy One, as their first priority and let Him reign in their hearts, then a family becomes holy.

First of all we know from the Gospel of last Sunday that the marriage of Mary and Joseph is not merely their choice, but it is God's call to them; it is their vocation. This is what we read: 'the angel of the Lord appeared to him [Joseph] in a dream and said: 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit.' So a family is holy, because parents consider their marriage as God's call to them.

However, that's not enough, because you also need to listen constantly to what God's plan is for your marriage. Mary and Joseph constantly listened to God, the Holy one, and followed what He told them through Joseph, the head of the family, even though Jesus wasn't his biological child. In today's Gospel reading we hear about another two examples of when the angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in his dream: first he asks Joseph to escape to Egypt, then the angel tells him to return from Egypt. God speaks to your family also, but you need to give time to Him, sit down together and listen to Him by reading the Bible together regularly or by reflecting on the daily events of your lives, and by sharing with each other what you believe God is telling you. St. Paul in the 2nd reading urges us to let the message of Christ be in our homes.

I know from conversations with married people that many of you don't talk and reflect together on what God might be telling you, and don't read the daily readings from the Bible together, or don't even pray together as a family or as married couples. However, I also know that there are some couples who don't switch off the light at night without talking about the day, and thanking God for his blessings, and pray together regularly. St. Paul encourages us in today's 2nd reading to praise and thank God for his blessings. Prayers at mealtimes are also a good opportunity for that.

St. Paul also calls you to teach one another in wisdom, which doesn't mean patronising each other, but it means helping each other know the Bible and the teaching of the Church better. Therefore it might be a good idea to have a copy of the Catechism at home and when you read the Bible together or when you discuss moral issues with your children so you can check also what the Catechism teaches about those issues. Despite popular presumptions the Catechism deals with a huge variety of daily issues.

Holy families also have holy friends. So to remain on the path to holiness families have to nurture close relationship with those who are close to Him. The Catechism teaches us (in CCC 374-376) that humanity was created to be in friendship with God, to share God's life and to be in and remain in an intimate

closeness with God. Sunday Mass is a good starter for this, but this closeness and friendship has to be sustained at home all throughout the week.

We Catholics still have this mentality of religious individualism; namely that we only relate to God as individuals and not as a family. To build a friendship with God as a family you need to talk to Him as a family; set aside a special time for Him as a family, thank Him daily as a family, and find out His will together as a family, especially if you both as a couple believe in God, because you are one body through the sacrament of marriage and not two separate beings. If you can be naked physically as a couple before each other, be naked spiritually as well.

Finally it is very important that for the sake of the holiness of your families you have to put unity and peace as your top priorities and members have to be willing to humble themselves before each other, acknowledge their mistakes and faults and seek forgiveness and reconciliation between each other in Christ, who told Peter that we should forgive each other seventy times seven times, ie. always, and never write off anybody.