

Homily for Sunday Mass, December 30, 2018
Year C - Octave of Christmas - Feast of the Holy Family
Luke 2:41-52
----Father Mike Cadotte----

I preached on the Feast of the Holy Family last year and it appears that I 'drew the lucky straw' again this year too. I say that as the readings have their challenges and can be difficult to digest at their face value, so I will do my best to walk us through them and allow us to make some logical sense of them in the context of the times we live today. For me, I want to focus my reflections on the Holy Family and what family values should really mean to us all.

We finally get to a point, after an Advent season of preparing and waiting, to get on with the follow of the teachings of Christ and live them out in our daily lives. St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, talked about, "Put on, as God's chosen one, ...compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ..." (Colossians 3: 12) Putting on the Word (another way to say following Christ) means removing the clothing of the Old Testament, or the past. No more waiting, it's time to dress in the new Word, the new law, and not only move on from the teachings of the past but also shed the teachings of society around us that are often contrary to the Word and/or lead us away from it. We must now remove those items and dress ourselves in the Word and follow Christ humbly with compassion, kindness, and gentleness for all people.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians we have some traditional talk that should be noted today as it is easy to miss the point and not cloak ourselves in Christ's teachings. The end of the second reading's long form, we find the 1st century household codes a bit patriarchal and sexist from today's vantage point. But look at what Paul is saying and to whom. He is telling the traditional head/boss of the household to be kind and loving to those more marginalized: wives and children. To modernize this, we might read about being kind and loving in word and deed to our cleaning lady, the check-out clerk, the service worker who helps make our daily lives easier, or the undocumented parent frantically trying protect their child in a foreign land – just as the Holy Family did when they entered into Egypt as refugees or, to use modern terminology, or as undocumented immigrants. That may not be what some want to hear, but it is exactly what it was. Our society's view of the marginal may have changed but the call to how we are to treat them has not, as Paul reminded the Colossians and us today. It reminds me of the greeting that St. Paul, in his final years, would say when visiting churches he parented, as he was carried in, "My dear children, love one another." My dear people, love one another. If we do this there will be no high nor low stations in the social order, rather just God's perfect creations – all of us. If we truly love one another we can only hold each other as our equal and worthy of every ounce of dignity we have to offer our sisters and brothers as they deserve as creations by God, in God's image. So, as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family today, I want us to connect with the command to love one another and the need to interject that back into our society, as a whole and our families specifically. Our base family units, our church family, our circle of friendship families, and our other social families we belong to.

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These family units grow and merge in all sorts of ways, including single adults fitting into other family groups and even groups of friends that can form their own unique 'family structure.' Regardless of how we identify family, following St. John's example of loving each other in how we raise children and interact as adults is critical to growing our society as God wants us to. Recognizing that and living that each day is following Christ's example. The time to wait and do nothing has past. It's time to follow Christ, love each other, honor and do our part to support each other as well as support and raise our youth in the loving embrace of the faith so all our society will grow, be strong, and full of wisdom – just as God wants it.

To accomplish this, we must grow in our own faith and be strong in following the love filled teachings of Christ. For One thing seems clear, no matter what preparation one makes, if we are not grounded solidly in the ways of the Lord and listening to God's calling in our lives then we will not have God centered in our lives and the result will be a false living. Input = output or as I like to say, "garbage in, garbage out."

Today's Gospel reading does give us a unique, although ever so brief, peek into the childhood life of Christ. He was a pre-teen acting as pre-teens often do. He was not a bad child, but he was a child that did obey, or in today's terms – listened to, his parents but did do things that put his poor earthly parents through literal hell. Today's reading was the cliff notes to the movie Home Alone and both the Biblical reality, as the move, ended in love and not anger, nor punishment or hate – on either side of the characters in these stories.

More simply put, the message is respect for the other, for listening to the other, and in loving the other. That is Paul's message. In Luke's gospel, the return of Jesus with his parents and in his listening to them is a model for not only children but also parents. We should understand obedience as another word meaning listening with one's heart and will. We need to listen to our children, to our spouses, to our extended families. If we listen, we learn from them, share with them, and respect them in their personal struggles and in their accomplishments and hopes and dreams. And in so doing, we will only build stronger connections through love. Good in...good out.

AMEN