

Commentary on the Readings for December 31, 2023

The Feast of the Holy Family

In the Readings for the Sunday after Christmas, the Church celebrates the **Feast of the Holy Family** and family life. This is timely and appropriate because Christmas is, or should be, a family celebration. It began with the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph becoming parents, rounding out their household into a family. This is the perfect model for our family culture.

In the **First Reading**, from the ***Book of Sirach (3:2-14)***, Sirach, the sage, gives us his concept of the ideal family with all the responsibilities, as well as, the honors and benefits that are bestowed on each member. In modern society, we have a tendency to overlook the responsibility that each member of a family has to all the other members regardless of age. That is why we have so many families falling apart. They are not pulling together because parents are not teaching the importance of "family life" and children, as soon as they are able, break away to follow their own interests instead of the interests of the family. Parents should read and teach this passage of scripture to the children for the betterment of the entire family.

In the **Responsorial Psalm (128:1-5)**, the psalmist picks up the same theme of family life and blesses those who "walk in the way of the Lord." This subject is so important to the Lord and to the people of the Old Testament that it is repeated in ***Proverbs (31:10-31)***.

The **Second Reading** is from St. Paul's ***Letter to the Colossians (3:12-21)***. In this passage, Paul gives us his thoughts on the ideal family and Christian life in general. This is just as true and applicable today as it was then. However, many women get upset with a certain phrase within this beautiful section of Paul's ***Letter*** and dismiss the entire passage. Please take a moment to listen to what Paul is really saying: If we are truly Christians, with Christ living within us, then authority over, or responsibility to, should be a matter of ***"Love"*** not only within families, but toward everyone.

In the **Gospel Reading** from the ***Gospel of Luke (2:22 – 40)***. In this passage we have three separate stories surrounding the dedication of the Child Jesus to God in accordance with the Mosaic Law and culture. Although Jesus was God and Joseph and Mary knew He was special in the eyes of God they were obedient to the Law and custom of their time. Simeon and Anna the prophetess recognized that something was special about this child and his family and without hesitating they attributed that to the goodness of God. We, today, should learn a lesson from this passage and also recognize how special this family is and accept them as a role model for our family.

Although Advent, a time of soul-searching and preparation, of waiting and hoping, of examining our hearts and actions to see if they conform to what God expects of us is over, we should not stop the process at the end of Advent. Examining our lives as individuals and as a member of a family should be a daily event (as part of our Prayer Time) to see if we are in tune with what God wants from us. Why not consider, perhaps as a New Year's resolution, to have a weekly ***Family***

Prayer Meeting where at least one member of the family reads from the Bible and then all share their understanding of that passage. Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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