

## Holy Family 2020B

A classmate of mine told me some years ago of visiting his brother one Christmas, and he created a beautiful image of the meaning of family, living a simple domestic moment. They were gathered in front of the TV watching a movie, Mom was sitting in Dad's lap, and their two-year old was sitting in Mom's lap. Here was this little boy, doubly-wrapped in an embrace of love. Substitute a fire for the TV, and it is not hard to envision that same scene in Nazareth - Joseph and Mary wrapping their Son – God's Son – in a double embrace of human love. The Eternal Word, the divine Son of God, could have entered human history any way He wished; but that He chose to do so through a family. Jesus sanctifies every moment of family life – the joys as well as the struggles – by this humble Presence. ***COVID has meant many more hours together at home, and that has naturally been a challenge for many, used to our routines. But it is also an opportunity to experience your homes as the domestic Church where, like the Holy Family, you give a home to God's love made flesh in the Body of Christ.***

Every family lives in time ... a living link with the past through its ancestors; immersed in the routines and the dramas of the present day; and yet also with hopes as well as concerns for the future. In a troubled world, many face the future with uncertainty, anxiety, even fear. ***Fear of the Lord is a virtue found in Scripture. Fear of the future is a work of the Evil One.*** That kind of fear is fruit of the same seed of doubt that the Book of Genesis portrays, planted in the human mind in the Garden of Eden. There, the Father of Lies told our ancestors that God does not truly desire our happiness, but only wants to restrict our freedom. Every time we wonder if God is trustworthy, whether we can rely on God's love and care, we are still hearing that same whisper of doubt. Of course we need to work to solutions to the problems that surround us, but we do it best when we follow the light of faith, just as the shepherds found Jesus guided by the angels. They saw an Infant, as promised; and while they could not know all He would do, even to the Cross, they trusted this was good news of great joy, meant for all, in a future they themselves would not see.

***Experience shows us that families succeed, not because problems are absent, but because love endures.***

Even the Holy Family knew the everyday chores of life, as well as the sorrow of being exiles and losing their Son for three days ... a foreshadowing, perhaps, of Jesus' three days in the tomb, gone from sight.

Surely Simeon's words must have echoed often in Mary's memory ... that Jesus would be opposed, and a sword of sorrow would pierce her heart ... but her trust remained a solid anchor in times of darkness.

Every parent looks at children and grandchildren, and there sees something of the future ... and no doubt Mary and Joseph did the same. As St. John Paul once said, even though the sorrows of human life are real, every child given the gift of life from God reveals that love is stronger than death.

Pope Benedict, speaking already 35 years ago about the fear that can dominate those who grow up with violence, loss, war, and suffering, said: "***Those who have never experienced goodness and kindness simply do not know what such things are. But if they can recall a memory of some good experience, they are able to believe in goodness and thus relearn hope; then there is a way out of despair.***" It is in families that those first seeds of goodness and kindness are planted; and when they are nurtured, cultivated, shaped by care and reassurance, the future generations have roots that can reach the living waters of hope and resiliency. Today, remember with gratitude some of those moments of goodness in your life, whether from years past or just last week. The physical embrace sitting in front of the TV or the fireplace does not last as children grow; but the spiritual embrace of belonging, security, and love are meant to remain.

Today, celebrate the gift that is your family – a gift you have received, and a gift to be shared in love with others – and in some way, whether the members of your family are close or far away, wrap them in an embrace of prayer and love.