

The Holy Family

January 2018

For the start of 2018, Fr Digby Samuels reflects on the Feast of the Holy Family, and the inspiration that we can take for our own families.

As we hear or read the phrase 'The Holy Family,' it's possible that we're immediately reminded of how 'unholy' some moments of our own family life have been over the Christmas holiday!

"How could that big row have happened so soon after the giving of the best gifts we could manage?" we might ask, or, "How could I have been so weak as to not speak up when that family member needed support and the truth?" These are the kind of thoughts we might have whilst being aware, at the same time, that 'Peace to people of goodwill' has been at the heart of Christmas; that this is what God really wants for us and from us as we celebrate and adore the new-born Christ.

There seems to be such a gap doesn't there, between the Holy Family and my family?

Yes, there's no getting away from it, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were unique and there wouldn't have been those rows that hit us so hard over the Christmas season. However, that doesn't mean that they don't understand our own family life or are removed from it. In fact God became one of us: 'the Word became flesh' through a family precisely to show us that the family is where most of us will find him.

An obvious example could be those moments (and maybe we wish there were more of them!) when we just glimpse, perhaps unexpectedly, a new and beautiful quality in one of our children. Didn't we read in today's Gospel that in Nazareth, the family's hometown, that the "child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him". What a blessing when we can glimpse something of that in our own children. A thank you prayer to God can arise spontaneously in our hearts.

Even when the world news shows us the desperate conditions of many millions of families who are displaced, refugees or struggling with famine and war, the Holy Family is not removed from such suffering. The flight into Egypt to escape the persecution of Herod show us the very real terrors and hardships they experienced. The sanctity of life was modelled by the Holy Family in a way we really need today.

Whether we like it or not, family life is where we learn about relationships, forgiveness, challenge and all the values and virtues that equip us for life. Yes, we also receive wounds, experience

sinfulness and frustration but the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are already there, within our family life. It's the privileged place where they are at home. Maybe at the beginning of this New Year we can ask to make our home in them.

Prayer

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God our Father,

Thank you for the Holy Family in whom you became incarnate 2000 years ago in Nazareth.

Show us how this gift, which we renew at Christmas each year, relates to our own family life with its joys and sorrows.

Help us make time and space for you to be at home in us we in you.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen