

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD  
IN  
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, & JOSEPH  
DECEMBER 31, 2023**

**SCRIPTURES:**

<b>Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14:</b>	Respect for God requires that we honor our parents.
<b>Colossians 3:12-21:</b>	Christian life asks that we respect one another.
<b>Luke 2:22-40:</b>	Child Jesus grew to maturity and wisdom.

**READ THE SCRIPTURES:**

*Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faithful community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.*

**Luke:**

Luke's typical attention to both men and women appears in this passage on the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple. The mother and father take their firstborn to the temple for the customary rites. Simeon and Anna witness to the extraordinary future that this child will live out. Mary, the mother, holds center stage in these events. She is not presented as being there only for the rite of purification of women as prescribed in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:1-8), but she participates in the presentation and redemption of her firstborn, along with her husband. She is addressed specifically and personally by Simeon in terms that foreshadow the passion and death of Christ. A mother's feelings for the destiny of her child can best be felt by other mothers. A mother's desolation at the death of her child, even when that child has become an adult, can best be witnessed to by mothers who have experienced the death of one of their children.

*A firstborn* is a firstborn even though he is the only child born of that woman. That was the technical religious terminology of the Jewish law. *A firstborn* belongs to God by right of law; that firstborn needs to be purchased or redeemed from God by the parents.

Simeon speaks of "waiting for the consolation of Israel." The rabbis at that time used this expression when referring to the expectation of a Messiah (Isaiah 40:1). Simeon uses the words of an emancipated slave as he asks God to let him go in peace (freedom) now! He obviously is asking God to be admitted beyond death into eternal life.

Holiness radiates everywhere in that Temple scene. This family is holy; the sacred rites of religion are holy; the prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna are holy, as are the words of God that come out of the holiness of their lived experience. Holiness means the presence and the power of God. Holiness is there that day. Holiness is there in very ordinary dress! The power and presence of God envelop the daily fabric of our lives, too. We experience God first in family living, then, in the community of the Church and in the fellowship of all other sincere and honest human beings. Family life is the foundation of all our relationships: with God and with other persons.

### **Sirach:**

In the Latin version of the Bible, this book was named Ecclesiasticus. It is not found in most Protestant editions of the Bible because it has not come to us in the Hebrew canon or collection. It was written by a Greek-speaking scribe and teacher about 200 years before Christ, in a Jewish community, perhaps Alexandria. Its formal title is: "The Wisdom and Teachings of Jesus ben Sirach." It contains the rules of etiquette and protocol for young men in civil service. They are taught to have right relationships with God, family, neighbors, businesspersons, close friends. The values promoted are self-discipline, sin and forgiveness, finances, child-rearing, physical fitness, and social manners. Parent-child relationships are the topic of the passage in our Lectionary. The child must treat both mother and father with honor and reverence. To have a right relationship with one's parents is to have a right relationship with God.

### **Colossians:**

Colossians deals with the practical consequences of the Christian life. Are we or are we not transformed into Christ by our baptism? Have we not changed our clothes: Taking off the garments of our former ways of living and putting on the radiant garments of salvation? Why should we hang on to death? We are alive in the Risen Christ. Our peace and reconciliation with God need to be shown by our harmony with other people. In contrast to the custom of their neighbors, early Christian families practiced a tender and sacrificial love between husband and wife; children respect their parents and parents encourage their children. It was not so among the pagans.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What are some of the issues that challenge family living today? Are you familiar with what difficulties parents encounter today in raising children? What are some of the relationship problems that husbands and wives deal with in their marriage? What benefits can come to those challenged families from these passages of Scripture?

2. What does your parish have to offer that helps and supports families in their God-given tasks of living the Christian life? Do you have a sense that your parish truly cares about what happens to good families and about how faltering families can be helped effectively? Is there an environment that at least does no violence to family growth in spirituality and virtue? Are your worship services 'child-friendly,' welcoming to families with small children?

3. Reflect on your family of origin. What was helpful and what was not helpful in the development of a solid faith in Christ for your own adult living? Was it your experience within your family that authentic personal spirituality was encouraged and fostered? Or was it just a question of rigid external conformity with rules and regulations that seemed to predominate? How have you been able to grow spiritually beyond the limited experience of the family in which you were raised?

### **SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION**

For good or for ill, our parents are for us *images of God*. They are truly *icons* of the living God! They not only *show* who God is. But they effectively *communicate* the presence and the power and the love of God to us their children. Meditate on this fact by yourself, then, communicate some of your insights to the members of your family.

### **PRAYER**

“God, our Parent, you have given us time today to reflect on our families. Bless us with the clear light you gave Anna and Simeon. Help us to recognize Christ in our midst as they did. Amen.”

### **CATHOLIC DOCTRINE**

Among human beings, the family provides an environment for the creation, education, nurture, and growth of the person in all aspects. Biological life springs from the relationship of a man and a woman committed to one another and to the children to be born from the union of hearts, souls, and bodies. Protection and care for those children is provided by mothers and fathers as human life develops from the embryo to adulthood. Love and guidance provide the energies needed for children to hope in a future for themselves and for their own families. Education in human and social values comes first from the family.

Any disorder in family life affects children profoundly and sometimes leaves wounds that will always be carried as burdens in those lives that have been so marked.

A healthy family life also includes education and formation in spiritual and religious values and principles. Mothers and fathers who themselves possess a healthy spirituality and practice positive religious expressions will pass these on to their children primarily by the example and witness of their lives. It is natural for children to want to absorb and imitate the values and practices of adults if these are seen as beneficial, freely chosen, and productive of happiness for the individual. Parents do not need to “preach” these things to their children. In fact, “preaching” is often perceived as an indication that adults are fairly insecure in the ideas and principles they promote so vocally and so loudly. The result is that children often react protectively against such “preaching” and do the opposite!

Love, respect, and kindness are never oppressive when these are authentic and firmly rooted in a healthy family environment. Unfortunately, what some call “love” happens to be a distorted kind of compulsion to control another person. That ends up being destructive of freedom and of growth. Children cannot grow to become responsible persons in that kind of

environment.

The mystery of Christian marriage (called a sacrament in Catholic tradition) envelops persons and their most intimate relationships in the power and healing energies of Jesus Christ, the Lord of our Redemption.

**(See: The Catechism: #2201-13, 2232-33.)**

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