

Holy family Sunday Year A – Feast of the Holy Family  
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

(place suitcase at front of altar)

During the Christmas masses I am always struck by the Number of families that come to worship. The 3:00 mass alone we had over 1700 people.

It is so good to see the children at these masses. As Jesus said, “Let the children come to me.”

My heart fills with Joy as I watch the Parents come forward to receive the Eucharist with their little ones clinging to moms dress or dads pant legs. Or watching a little one make a break for it up the center aisle!

One dad in particular, while holding his child asleep in his arms...had not a free hand to receive, thus, he opened his mouth in faith to receive the Body of Christ.

All of this offers up much food for reflection as today we Celebrate the feast of the Holy family. Mary, Joseph and the Baby Jesus.

Matthew’s Gospel moves us quickly from the stable of Jesus' birth, to the visit of the Magi and then rapidly to today's scene -- the need for Jesus' parents to flee to protect their child... to save his life.

Imagine how difficult it must have been for this simple couple to break family and village ties, take their baby into their arms and flee to a foreign land.....

After a Christmas mass yesterday I witnessed a young family bring their little boy forward to receive the sacrament of the sick. Later I reflected on Mary and Joseph’s Journey carrying Jesus the messiah, the “Anointed One” to safety and was struck by the image of this family here, carrying their young boy forward to be anointed through the sacrament.

The little boy in his Mom and Dads arms, surrounded by his grandparents, all with tears in their eyes...as Father Ed prayed over him and them.

It was a moment in which all of them were bathed in the grace of our loving God.

This is a modern day example, an act of faith, of a family on a very difficult journey, loving...protecting their young boy, placing their trust in God as they prepare to flee to a land of foreign hospitals, sleepless nights, praying over their young boy that he be held safe in the hands of God... to save his life.

Joseph and Mary's Journey had to be a nightmare. The Sinai desert would bake the three of them in the day and deep-freeze them at night. Can you picture them struggling to keep their baby safe from the elements? They hugged the Mediterranean coast as long as possible. Though they could not drink its waters, they could enjoy its breezes.

Chances were that they would meet nomadic caravans. From them they might buy precious fresh water and probably pay extravagant prices. So, already the gold brought to them by the wise men was changing hands.

They knew what it was to deal with poverty and an empty stomach. Their closeness to God did not erase the terrible heat and freezing blasts of the desert's various moods.

All they could do was trust in God. They believed firmly that someday they would understand the reasons for all their deprivations and sufferings.

Meanwhile, they journeyed in faith. They walked with Jesus. They prayed.

In our times of pain, we ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In those periods, remember that Mary and Joseph likewise suffered. God did not shield them from hardship. But their focus on God in their suffering brought spiritual strength and the character needed to bear their pain.

Its Through Mary and Joseph, God tells us that He will not turn His back on us when we find ourselves experiencing the difficult times in Life's journey.

Joseph and Mary packed all they owned.... and on their Journey were probably met with many uncertain circumstances. Some good and some not so good.

Scripture tells us, Mary had a had a tendency to hold circumstances close to her heart. We heard this in Christmas mornings Gospel reading from Luke: “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”.

One would have to believe that as difficult as Mary and Joseph’s journey was...there were moments of kindness from others poured out upon them. Did Mary see God in these moments of kindness as she reflected on them?

No doubt, as this little boy from our parish and his family go forth on their journey, they will be met with acts of kindness and compassion from the doctors and the nurses that are called to be their caregivers on their journey.

I know they found compassion and kindness here on Christmas day. Let us pray that they too see God in these moments.

I can tell you that last weekend Sue and I made a journey to Cleveland to be at the bedside of her mom as she went home to the Lord.

Sue and I have both had the opportunity to hold close and reflect on acts of kindness and compassion from the staff of the hospital.

The compassion and love felt from this community here has been wonderful. Thank you all for your prayers, your thoughts and your hugs. We see God in you.

As Paul in our second reading told us:  
Put on as Gods chosen ones, holy and beloved heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and over all these things put on love, that is the bond of perfection, and let the peace of Christ control your hearts into which you are also called into one body.

We are all called to be family for each other. Loving God and Loving one another..

So today, during the prayers of the faithful, as we come to the part where in silence, we pray for the things that we hold in our hearts,

Maybe we can look at this suitcase, as a symbol of this young (holy) family's journey with their little boy ,our little brother in Christ, to a land of foreign hospitals and procedures....

...and sure, the baggage they carry may be packed with their hope and faith in God, but we as a community, bound together in God's love, can pack it a bit fuller with prayer for a safe journey and healing for this little boy and peace for his family.