

Holy Family Sunday – 2007
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Some time ago, a good friend gave me a cute little book called “Children’s Letters To God.” It has about 40 short, personal letters to God from 8 and 9 yr olds...Some of them are hilarious, some are very serious, ...all of them are precious...all of them speak to God with a child’s frankness and honesty. ...I thought on this Feast of the Holy Family, that I would share a couple of the letters that give us little glimpses of family life from the perspective of the youngest members.

Dear God, Did you really mean “do unto others as they do unto you?” Because if you did, then boy am I gonna fix my brother.

Darla

Darla did get the golden rule backwards, but her attitude of “you did it to me, so I’m gonna do it to you” is one many of us have seen acted out in our own families, and not just by children.

Dear God, it rained for our whole vacation and was my father mad! I know he said things abt U that people aren’t supposed to say, but I hope you will not hurt him anyway.

Your friend, but I’m not going to tell U who I am.

Isn’t that a great example of how protective we can be of a family member who behaves badly?

Dear God, I bet it’s very hard for you to love everybody in the whole world all the time. There R only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.

Bobby.

Ain’t that the truth...Seems like there’s always someone in our family that’s hard for us to love..

I think all of us can relate to what these children expressed in their letters...because – like their families – our families aren’t perfect...None of the members of our family are perfect...Every family will have problems. ...Every family will need healing...Every family will need God’s help: whether it’s a traditional family – mom, dad and kids - ...a single-parent family,...a divorced family,... a step family,...an adoptive family,... extended family,... church family. Whatever the makeup of the family may be – every family needs God’s help....That goes for the Holy Family too – Jesus, Mary and Joseph. ..They needed God’s help just as much as any other family, and I don’t mean only in times of crisis like the one Matthew describes in today’s Gospel, where they had to flee to Egypt to escape King Herod’s murdering army...The Holy Family relied on God’s help, God’s loving presence in the ordinary, everyday situations and problems, ups and downs, that every family goes through.

You know, we do tend to idealize the Holy Family. We have this picture-book image of them being the absolutely perfect family: Jesus always does the right thing by His Mom and Dad; Mary and Joseph always do the right thing by Him;...there’s never a raised voice,...never an angry word, no problems, no stress. ...Do you think that’s how it really was?

No, I don’t think so...Jesus must have been brought up in a family like yours and mine,...one that shared much love, but also had its misunderstandings, conflicts, and problems, ...If he hadn’t, how could He appreciate and understand what the rest of us deal with?...If He had it easy and was never tested or tempted, never had to cope with normal family stuff, how much

would His goodness be worth as a model for us?...The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us Jesus was tested in every way that we are, yet without sin, ...and because He was tested, He is able to help us when we are tested...I believe the Holy Family was a REAL family and led a REAL family life....Yet, they are the **HOLY** family.

When the Bible uses the word HOLY, it means "different – set apart."...What sets the Holy Family apart from other families is simply this: They knew where their strength came from. They knew that no matter what they faced, it would work out all right if they trusted God to give them what they needed to follow His way. ...Jesus, Mary and Joseph – each of them – said "Yes" to God even when they did not fully understand what God was asking of them. ...They trusted God completely...Our families may never reach their level of faith and trust in God, but we can be holier families if we spend less time thinking about their halos and more time trying to follow their examples of faith and trust in God... We all know from experience, that's not easy for us to do, no matter what shape or form our family comes in, ...Every family has its troubles....We could recite a long list of them, but you all know what they are because – like Ron and me – you're living them...and most of us can do better at living them if – like the Holy Family – we look to God as the source of our strength,...as the One who will help get us thru our troubles and lead us in the right direction.

And God leads us in the right direction today, through the words of Sirach and Paul in today's readings, words that are a treasure of timeless wisdom about the family...Words like: *bring comfort to,..be considerate,..take care of,..bear with one another....*And words like: *forgive as the Lord has forgiven you...and above all put on love*. These scripture passages invite us to ask ourselves what we can do to make our families more holy....Can we forgive our spouse or parent, or our child for doing or saying something to us that is so horrible it seems to kill something inside of us?.. Can we take care of the one who needs to be cared for....the one who is sick or lonely...the one who depends on our presence, our touch to bring healing to her day?

Can we be a little more patient with the little one pulling on our leg or lifting his arms up to be held when we have a million things to do and are too busy for him?....Can we be more understanding of our teen-ager – attached to her cell phone - who thinks that everything is all about her?...When we are listening to our elderly parent or relative tell us the same story for the 110th time, can we remember how they put up with our constant childhood chatter and our endless questions?...Can we bear with one another....even in those times when being together sets our nerves on edge? If we really try, maybe we can accept and affirm each member of our family as the precious gift he or she is.....because, as much as we don't like to think about it....the make up of our families does change....We lose people....and then we miss them, and feel sadness and regret because we never told them how much they meant to us, ..how much we love them....or sadder still, because we never said "I'm sorry" or "I forgive you."

It's not easy, but we CAN make every family we are part of more holy by following St. Paul's advice and "putting on love" ...think of it as dressing ourselves in love...making it a part of our outfit every day...wearing a love that puts the needs of the others first....Maybe we can remember it this way: Family, F - A - M - I - L - Y. Forget About Myself...I Love you.... Forget About Myself...I Love You.

There was a TV news report I saw some yrs ago that I'll never forget...It was about a fatal hit and run accident on Main St. in the city. As the reporter described the incident, the camera scanned the scene and focused on a battered crutch and a dirty baseball cap lying in the street. They belonged to the victim - a homeless man who had been identified only by his street name, "Shorty." The TV camera then switched to a street-side interview of another homeless man. He looked to be fairly young; he had long, stringy hair, a scraggly beard and wore a tattered knit

cap pulled over his ears. ...I was touched by how tenderly and lovingly he spoke about the loss of his good friend Shorty. He didn't even know Shorty's last name, but he knew Shorty and he told the reporter about Shorty and the family he had and lost...I remember feeling very sad because it seemed this poor soul was the only family Shorty had...Shorty had died there in the street, with only his fellow street buddy to cry and grieve and pray for him...Still, it was family.

Shorty's story helps us realize just how blessed we are,... how lucky we are to have our families...Sure, they are far from perfect...they may even be really messed up,...but they are family...And we should be thankful that our wise and loving God has placed us in families and communities...During this Eucharistic celebration in which we thank God for the gift of salvation - it is right for us to also give thanks for our families...So, let's do it together in prayer: *For each petition, please respond: "Thank You, God."*

For those who nurture us in mind, body and spirit, and give us the foundation for a good and rewarding life....we say...*Thank You, God*

For those who believe in us when we have trouble believing in ourselves... we say...*Thank You, God*

For those who keep on loving us when we're cranky, or stubborn, or selfish, or unreasonable,... when we're not very loveable:...we say...*Thank You, God*

For those precious people who are always there for us when things get tough... we say...*Thank You, God*

For the warm hugs from our children and grandchildren, the unsettling insights of our teenagers, and the married love that grows deeper thru the years... we say...*Thank You, God*

For that place we call home where - no matter what –they will always take us back... we say...*Thank You, God*

For our church family, for the friendships grown here, the Eucharist we share here, the sins forgiven here, and the compassionate, caring Spirit of Christ that is lived here... we say...*Thank You, God*

Above all else, for Jesus – born and raised in a human, holy family – whose saving grace embraces us and links us together in a new family of God which bridges heaven and earth. ...For this most extraordinary among all gifts, we say...*Thank You, God!*

AMEN!