

HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Gen. 15:1-6; 21:1-7; Heb. 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40

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Brothers and sisters, on this feast of the Holy Family, we are invited to reflect on the gift **and** mystery of life and the blessing of family life in particular. In Luke's Gospel of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem, we encounter four individuals who embrace the new life of Jesus held in their arms: the elderly and faithful Simeon, the old, wise prophetess Anna, and the young couple, Mary and Joseph, who in faithful obedience offer their child to the Lord.

Simeon's beautiful prayer is part of the prayer of ancient Israel: "*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel*" (Luke 2:29-32).

The whole scene of the Presentation, and the carefully chosen words of Simeon's prayer raise several questions for us: How do I see God's glory in my life? Do I thirst for justice and peace? What are the new situations and who are the new people who have entered my life in the last little while? How am I light and salvation for other people?

In case you don't know, Pope Francis proclaimed a "Year of Saint Joseph" from 8 December 2020, to 8 December 2021. With the Apostolic Letter "Patris corde" ("With a Father's Heart"), Pope Francis recalls the 150th anniversary of the declaration of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church.

And so, today I would like to **zoom in** on Joseph. To "**zoom**" **in** on the foster father of the Lord gives us some profound insights into the family background of our Saviour. Joseph is often overshadowed by the glory of Christ and the purity of Mary. But he, too, waited for God to speak to him and then responded with obedience. Luke and Matthew both indicate that Joseph is a descent from David, the greatest king of Israel (Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38).

Scripture has left us with the most important knowledge about Joseph: he was "a righteous man" (Matthew 1:18). Joseph was a compassionate, caring man. When he discovered Mary was pregnant after they had been engaged, he knew **the child was not his** but was as yet unaware that she was carrying the Son of God. He planned to divorce Mary according to the law but he was concerned for her suffering and safety.

Joseph was also a man of faith, obedient to whatever God asked of him without knowing the outcome. When the angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him **the truth about the child** Mary was carrying, Joseph immediately and without question or concern for gossip, took Mary as his wife and the baby as his own.

When the angel came again to tell him that his family was in danger, he immediately left everything he owned, all his family and friends, and fled to a strange country with his young wife and the child. He waited in Egypt until the angel told him it was safe to go back (Mt 2:13-23). We are told that Joseph was a carpenter, (more likely a builder), a man who worked to provide for his family.

Joseph wasn't a wealthy man, for when he took Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised and Mary to be purified, he offered the sacrifice of two turtledoves or a pair of pigeons, allowed only for those who could not afford a lamb. Joseph revealed in his humanity the unique role of fathers to proclaim God's truth by word and deed. His situation of "foster father to Jesus" draws attention to the truth about fatherhood, which is more than a mere fact of biological generation. A man is a father most when he invests himself in the spiritual and moral formation of his children.

He was keenly aware, as every father should be, that he served as the representative of God the Father. Joseph protected and provided for Jesus and Mary. He named Jesus, taught him how to pray, how to work, how to be a man. To say the contrary would be absurd, not understanding the culture he grew in, and especially the Jewish faith handed down for generations. While no words are attributed to him, we can be sure that Joseph pronounced two of the most important words that could ever be spoken when he named his son "Jesus" and called him "Emmanuel." When the child stayed behind in the Temple, we are told Joseph (along with Mary) searched with great anxiety for three days for him (Luke 2:48).

Joseph's life reminds us that a home or community is not built on power and possessions but goodness; not on riches and wealth, but on faith, fidelity, purity and mutual love. The present challenges to fatherhood and masculinity cannot be understood in isolation from the culture in which we live. The effect of **fatherlessness** on children is deeply alarming. How many young people today have been affected by the crisis of fatherhood and paternity! How many have been deprived of a father or grandfather in their life? It is not for nothing that St. Joseph is patron of the Universal Church and principal patron of Canada. If there was ever a time when we needed a strong, saintly male role model who is a father, **it is our time.**

And the feast of the Holy Family is a very significant day to go to Joseph and beg him to send us good fathers who will lead families. Joseph and Mary, more than anyone else, were the first to behold the glory of their One and Only who came from God the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). May Saint Joseph make of us good priests, religious and laymen who will imitate the humble worker from Nazareth, who listened to the Lord, treasured a gift that was not his, all the while modeling to Jesus how the Word becomes flesh and lives among us. Saint Joseph; pray for us.