

## Holy Family 2007

*Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23*

We celebrate the “Holy Family”.

This celebration is more recent as an *official* feast  
(established in late 1800’s)

but has always been celebrated in the hearts of believers...

Now, when it comes to the Holy Family,

we often envision a cute, blissful, almost plastic, trio,  
that is to say, a painful caricature – with Mary as a quasi-nun.

We look at the crèche, and think, “How sweet; but it’s definitely not my family!”

We envision something frankly disconnected and thus *irrelevant*.

The ease with which “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph” is used as a statement of humour  
shows how easily we envision them distant.

The question is: how real is the Holy Family?

How real are “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph”?

The Holy Family is these three *persons*: a father, a mother, and a child.

OK: I will grant you that this family is rather unique and unusual!

- Mary, immaculate, virgin, conceives her child by the Holy Spirit, then remains a virgin
- Joseph, after “command” from an angel, decides to stick around, and adopts the son
- a son who is God

Still, despite unusual circumstances, it can be argued that they are very real,  
more real than we imagine them distant.

How can we say that they are real, however, when their virtue is unattainable  
and their piety seems to remove them from real life issues?

They are real because it is *love* that makes a family.

Love makes a person real.

And *love* ties, more than biological ties, form family,  
which is why adoptive parents are *real* parents.

Now, these love ties between Joseph and Mary and Jesus are both *human* and divine.

They loved each other humanly speaking,

*and* they loved each other in/with the love that comes directly from God,  
a love which we all receive.

It was their choice to live in/with divine love that made this adventure possible.

The Holy Family lived something far too big for them to understand.

Moreover, their life was marked by trial and great challenge from the beginning:

- Joseph’s dilemma in discovering Mary pregnant
- the inappropriateness of the place to give birth *and here:*
- the flight to Egypt and return from Egypt

It was discomfort on all sides rendered possible to live by love.

Both Mary and Joseph, in circumstances that were chosen for them,  
in faith, hope, and love  
*chose and loved and educated a child, their child: Jesus.*

Here the circumstances are rather extreme:

Joseph and Mary barely have time to breathe,  
and to enjoy the wonder of their newborn, when,  
immediately following the visit of the Magi – not a minor event, they must depart.  
They are carrying the child who is revealed as the fulfillment, that is to say:

- as the new Moses, *the one who definitively frees from bondage*
- as the new Israel, *the one in whom we are covenanted to God*
- as the response to the weeping of Rachel, the ancestress of Ephraim,  
the chief of the northern tribes of Israel, taken into Babylonian exile, and thus as  
*the one in whom all pain finds its end*
- as the one from Nazareth, the hamlet not even mentioned in the Old Testament,  
and thus as *the one who is present in the simplest, humblest places of our life*

Joseph and Mary live with their Messiah, who is also their son.

They do this with the honor, reverence, care, kindness, and justice  
mentioned in the first reading (Sirach 3;2-6, 12-14).

They do this in the way mentioned in the second reading (Colossians 3:12-21),  
with Mary as a model of submission (just kidding!),  
in a way that mirrors the perfect love between God and his children: mutual giving.

As suggested,

*Holy Family* does not mean humanly perfect family, like a big, living Hallmark card.

*Holy Family* means that everything in their family life was touched by divine love.

And, apparently, what they lived was so important that Jesus stayed at home until age 30!

What they lived serves as more than a model.

There are not really any behavioural guidelines given.

What they do model is the *Christian life as a family/within the family*, that is to say,

- a family open to the mystery of God – in all things, at all times
- a family promoting and respectful of each member's intimacy with God.

And what they live is available to us.

The Holy Spirit wishes to irrigate and refashion our hearts  
so that all of our relationships, including family and marriage,  
be like those which constitute the Holy Family:  
relationships where, because of/thanks to a Presence,  
lives are lovingly laid down.

The love can be that generous if we acquiesce.

It is daunting, but what happiness awaits us when we go that far...