

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**Feast of the Holy Family, Dec. 26-27, 2020, Cycle B**

During the Christmas season, much attention is placed on romanticizing the family. Christmas movies and advertisements portray happy family reunions and joyous family gatherings! In reality, many families DO experience happy gatherings during the Christmas season, but many do not. Many families experience pain and loss that is all the more acute during the holidays. Perhaps a loved one has died during the holidays. Perhaps a loved one died during the past year, or a family member may be in some distant war – such as in Iraq or Afghanistan. Old hurts and wounds may keep some from wanting to be with family at any time. A failed marriage may have split apart parents, who struggle with how to share their love and time with their children.

Let's face it. Every year when we celebrate the Christmas Feast of the Holy Family, there are just as many families who do not match the Norman Rockwell picture of everyone gathered happily as one. All families, I know, experience some kind of pain or suffering. And when we read the Christmas stories of either Luke or Matthew, we may feel like such an idealized portrait of family life is being presented of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph that we find it difficult to identify with the Holy Family. We sometimes may feel what can Jesus, Mary, and Joseph teach us about family life with the struggles we have to deal with as modern-day families?!?

However, if we take a closer look at the Christmas stories, we will see that the Holy Family did not really live in an idealized situation. Looking closer at our scripture stories about the Holy Family, we will see that we call the Holy Family "holy" not because their family life was picture perfect, but we call the family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph "holy" because they show us how to weather the storms of family pain and suffering with grace and deep faith.

In the Gospel passage we have from Luke for this Holy Family Sunday, old Simeon tells Mary and Joseph that Jesus is not only a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, but this child will also cause much conflict and will be a sign that will be contradicted by many, opposed even and persecuted! In fact, Simeon bluntly tells Mary you yourself will experience the sword of much sorrow and pain.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus knew much of deprivation and pain already by the time of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple! The Christmas story of the Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as being born under very mean conditions in a stable where animals are kept. Also, Mary traveling nearly nine months pregnant, from Nazareth to Bethlehem - a trip of at least 70 miles – on rough roads and on the back of a donkey was certainly not ideal. If we go to the Christmas story of the Gospel of Matthew – the story of the Magi – the Holy Family couldn't even travel safely back to their home town of Nazareth, they were a family on the run from King Herod who was trying to destroy the child. They even had to make the long trek to Egypt to escape Herod's clutches.

Experiencing incredible strain and stress and even fear, the Holy Family is a very good model for us on enduring the trails of family life with grace, with faith, and trust that God would see them through, whatever comes!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph show us how to remain faithful to God's will despite hardship, suffering and sorrow. They endured, and the Church holds up Jesus, Mary and Joseph as THE model of how a family can be holy, not perfect, but HOLY!