

Holy Family Sunday  
December 29-30, 2018

*A Model of Love, Fidelity and Firmness of Purpose*

Readings: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

It is entirely appropriate for the Feast of the Holy Family to be situated in the context of the great season of Christmas, as it is quite likely that we have been spending more time than is typical this past week with our immediate family and relatives.

Today's special feast is perhaps more important than ever as we see the many challenges to family life multiply before our eyes. One of those challenges is morally neutral in and of itself, and it is all in how it is used. I refer to technology. Growing up well before the era of cell phones, much less texting and other forms of communication, the advances that have been made provide incredible possibilities for staying connected.

We can reach each other like never before and smart parents can know there whereabouts of their children, again, like never before. And yet, this in no way solves anything, especially if we do not understand what is going on in each other's lives.

Technology has resulted in many new addictions, ones we scarcely had thought of before. The addiction to gaming is particularly troubling. Whereas friends used to hang out after school, many are now in their rooms at home conversing with their friends via gaming, communicating with each other via a wired headset, rather than in person.

But it comes with a steep price tag and we would be naïve not to recognize the other side of this two edged sword. This is no longer the era of Pac-Man or Donkey Kong; we have entered the realm of over \$1 billion in sales for arguably the most popular game in today's market.<sup>1</sup> Though rated PG, its ultimate object is to survive by killing off the other players, most of whom are strangers, having joined the game from the comfort of their own basements.

One hundred players are dropped onto an island from flying buses—and battle one another to the death. The winner is the last one standing in

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<sup>1</sup> Fortnite Battle Royale

this make believe land with clever alliterative place names and lush grass. I readily admit I do not understand the attraction, nor I suspect do many parents. What they most certainly do understand is that their children can easily spend hours interacting with gamers, while at the same time missing out on meaningful interaction that we used to call a conversation.

In our Scriptures, we witness one of a parent's greatest sorrows as it afflicts Mary. First, she lost sight of her child, and then, to add insult to injury, she does not understand him. Upon finding Jesus, she must have been filled with a mixture of emotions—joy, relief and perhaps a mixture of frustration. She was still trying to understand the full impact of what her motherhood meant, as well as the full implications of the life of Jesus yet to come. She pondered on these things in her heart, and it seems reasonable that this pondering endured for a time.

In our complicated world today, there is certainly a mixture of emotions for parents in relation to their children, and many do not understand their children, despite trying valiantly. Part of this is a normal transition to adulthood and the necessary changing dynamics in the relationship.

But absent of meaningful interaction, that disconnect I fear is getting wider and wider. As they strive for understanding, sometimes it seems to be in short supply, as does patience when one needs it the most. This Feast may well be one of the easiest with which to make connections in our daily lives. While we know that we have imperfect families, we nevertheless have hopes and dreams and wonder about God's plans for us, our brothers and sisters, children and parents.

We pray for peace and tranquility in our families, or if necessary, we begin by praying for healing. We have our hopes and dreams and we may question where God may be found in the ups and downs of family life. Some families demonstrate heroic virtue in accepting particular crosses and challenges, owing to serious health concerns, abusive relationships, and wayward children to name just a few. Others feel at times or even in large part that the crosses have been too heavy and burdensome, and feel

crushed by their inability to bear them in faith and trust. To these families, the Church's promise of prayers and support must be clear.

Your edifying witness to us who have answered the call to a religious vocation is inspiring, for our own vocations were borne from loving families, imperfect as we may all be. May we all look to the Holy Family as a model of love, fidelity and firmness of purpose.

May children be able to see the love of their parents, not only when they are showered with gifts, but even when they are showered with questions about how they are spending their time. In truth, deep down, these questions are a sign of love and concern. In our first reading Hannah prayed assiduously for Samuel: "I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request."

May parents rightly discern when their own motivations in regards to their children are pure and when they may be clouded by unrealistic expectations. May God's grace help them to discern the difference between a legitimate "need to know" and "prying" that can be construed as showing a lack of respect for legitimate privacy. May they feel the presence of God in the midst of some of life's questions that admit of no ready solutions, always seeking God's wisdom in their parental decisions.

May all these challenges be subordinated under the banner and headship of Jesus Christ, who is himself the head of all households. In honoring Jesus, Mary and Joseph today, we also honor all those who strive in their own families to emulate their example. May God's grace always be close at hand for each of you on this great Feast.