

HOLY FAMILY - B
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Most of us gathered in the Church have certain ideas about how the ideal family is supposed to look. A third grader went home one day and she told her mother that she was in love with a classmate and that she was going to marry him. “That’s fine,” said her mother going along with the gag. “But before you do,” she asked, “you’ve gotta make sure he is going to be able to take care of you. For example, does he have a job?” And the little girl replied, “Oh yes! He erases the blackboard in our class.”

We have our own particular ideas about the ideal family. Maybe its because we’re tired of the images of families that we see before us. The news is full of reports of anger, abuse and even murder at the hand of a family member. Spouses don’t seem like they’re often attentive to one another. Parents neglect their children. Children do not respect their elders. Maybe we just want to return to good, old-fashioned family values. But we’ve been bombarded with so much “bad family PR,” we might not even realize what these values truly are. Might today’s Scriptures readings be challenging us to model our idea of family after the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus – a family that experienced the same struggles we encounter.

In our first reading today from the book of Sirach, the prophet gives us one dimension of creating a good family: we should respect our elders. Sirach reminds the people of Israel that their future is rooted in the rich soil of their past. He tells them that true wisdom for living is found in their elders who have already lived wisely.

Paul gives us a second value to include in the creation of a good family. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul admonishes all of the members of the Church to bear with one another and to forgive one another. He tells them that all of the members of the family have to work together. Parents must be gentle with their children; adult children should be gentle with their aging parents. Due respect should be given by members of all of the generations to create an attitude that fosters cooperation and collaboration as one body.

When we think of the Holy Family, we might feel hopeless. How can we ever create such a picturesque family in our lives? They seem almost impossible for a “real” family to identify with. When looking at the nativity scene, there seems to be a harmony with few disagreements and tensions; it’s peaceful and serene. There’s a virginal relationship between Mary and Joseph. And I’m sure that Jesus never protested any demands of his parents.

But the picture that we see in the Gospel is that their family might not be that much different from the family that you and I experience. There were lots of people living in the household of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and there surely came much tension. Remember how life was right after Gustav when families were crammed under one roof! But in that same situation, there was likely much love and loyalty. Jesus parents were faithful to the practice of their religion. Like many parents, they were amazed at what the future would hold for him.

I think the Holy family serves as a model for us today not because they’re different, but because

they're similar to us. It's not because they're perfect that we venerate them: it's because they were committed to respect and support of one another. And I think our challenge is to do just that. For us to be part of a Holy Family, we have to be willing to lay aside our own agendas and put the good of others ahead of ourselves.

We're human and we'll likely never be perfect. But we can be committed to respect and love for one another to create Holy Families in our midst. As we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family, maybe the question that we should focus on today is, "Are you willing to let go of your agenda so that you can be part of your own holy family?"