

HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH, CYCLE A

Open with a prayer: *Jesus, God and man, you were born into a human family to model for us the sanctity of family life. Teach us and empower us to love our families as you love them. Show us how to reverence and respect each other, especially the aged and vulnerable members of our family. Be with us now as we gather to break open your Word. Amen.*

Sharing of life question: What do you love most and least about your family?

Facilitator reads focus statement: On this feast of the Holy Family, the readings speak to us about relationships within families. Sirach stresses the Lord's command to "honor thy father and mother." Paul focuses on the need for children to be obedient to parents and the responsibilities of parents towards children. Matthew highlights Joseph's obedience to God's commands pertaining to Jesus and his care for Jesus' mother.

If you have not read the commentary prior to the meeting, consider reading it before or after you read the scripture readings.

FIRST READING: Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14

In line with a strong Israelite tradition, Sirach places a high priority on respect for one's parents, especially in their older years. Sirach also lists the rewards that come with such respectful conduct: one atones for one's sins, is blessed with offspring, and is assured an answer to prayer and a long life.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 128

This psalm, which speaks about the fear of the Lord, makes reference to the blessing of a worthy wife, which, in turn, is a blessing to a whole family.

SECOND READING: COLOSSIANS 3:12-21

In baptism, Christians *clothed* themselves in Christ. Paul now urges his readers to clothe themselves with the virtues that befit a follower of Christ: forgiveness, kindness, patience, love, etc. Then Paul exhorts his readers to be grateful, to sing and do whatever they do for the glory of God. According to the cultural outlook of the time, Paul urges wives to be submissive to their husbands. If living today, Paul would most likely encourage spouses to be submissive to each other.

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

Matthew's gospel was written primarily for Jewish people who had become Christians. The community also included some Gentile converts. In his gospel, Matthew takes pains to portray Jesus as a true Israelite and in this story, as a new Moses. Jesus' journey to Egypt is reminiscent of Israel's going down to Egypt and just as Moses escaped from Egypt, so did Jesus escape from violence and from Egypt. When Jesus returned he came back to Nazareth in Galilee where there were many Gentiles. Jesus' mission is not just to the Israelites, but also to the Gentiles. Today's story is also a beautiful example of a father who is most *obedient to God*. When God speaks and instructs, Joseph responds with promptness.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you the most? Why?
2. The first reading speaks glowingly of the rewards that come to those who care for their parents, especially for elderly parents. Living out this reading becomes a big challenge when one has a poor relationship with ones parents. Any suggestions for adult children in this situation?
3. In the second reading, Paul names several virtues that have the power to strengthen a marriage or family. In your

experience what are the keys to a strong marriage (if single a strong friendship) and family?

4. Scripture records no spoken words of Joseph. How does his silent witness speak to us?

5. What do families today need to do to become *holy* families?

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Name one way that you can act on these readings. Suggestions: If there is a family member with whom you are distant, call or write to him/her. Pray often for your family if you do not already do so. Reach out to a neighbor who lives alone and has very few friends.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all families, including your parish family and your Small Christian Community family. Pray for families who are hurting for whatever reason. Pray for elderly parents who are abandoned by their children and for children who have been abandoned by their father or mother or both. ©