

STORIES AND REFLECTIONS ON FAMILY ON THIS FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Reflection for the Feast of the Holy Family, Cycle A

The following are a miscellaneous series of reflections, stories and questions on today's readings and on family life.

Reflections on the Family

Sandra DeGidio, O.S.M. writes:

Rosemary Haughton, noted theologian and herself the mother of a large family, says, "Contrary to popular belief, the best marriages and the happiest families don't happen because people concentrate, first of all, on the quality of their relationships, but rather when the couple and then the family as a whole is involved in something bigger." That "something bigger" is the commandment of Christ to love and serve one another. "My family," says Jesus, "hears God's word and acts on it."

Healthy families make a concerted effort to go beyond their cozy clan, to enlarge their focus to include the people around them in their communities and the world who are less fortunate. They involve themselves in parish outreach projects. They volunteer at local soup kitchens and contribute service to local community projects like Habitat For Humanity, shelters for the homeless or Food for the Hungry.

*"Contrary to popular belief, the best marriages
and the happiest families don't happen because people concentrate, first of all,
on the quality of their relationships, but rather when the couple and then the family
as a whole is involved in something bigger."*

Healthy families who value service to others not only see the need to serve others, they find concrete ways to assist them. They strive to simplify their lives in order to share with those who have less. They weed out their closets and donate good used clothing to thrift shops or Goodwill without seeking to replace the clothing with new. They are open to others and generously hospitable. They find joy in welcoming strangers by sharing their homes and themselves with others, especially in times of disaster.

Reflecting on today's feast, Jay Cormier writes:

In his book, *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Elie Wiesel (famous survivor of Nazi war camps) recalls a terrible moment confronting his family. The war was coming to an end, but the deportation of the Jews continued. Elie—who was fifteen at the time—his parents, and three sisters faced deportation to the Nazi concentration camp at Birkenau. Maria, a Christian and the family's housekeeper, begged the Wiesels to hide in her family's cabin in the mountains. The family gathered at the kitchen table for a family meeting: Should they go with Maria or stay and take their chances? The family decided to stay. "A Jew must never be separated from his community," Elie's father said. "What happens to everyone else happens to us as well."

Elie Wiesel writes of their decision: "My father was right. We wanted to stay together, like everyone else. Family unity is one of our important traditions, as the enemy well knew. . . The strength of the family tie, which had contributed to the survival of our people for centuries, became a tool in its exterminator's hands."

*Yet their love for one another and their trust
in God kept their family together through
the worst of times.*

Like the Wiesels, the family of Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus had to endure a great deal as well the scandal of Mary's pregnancy, Mary's giving birth far from home, their fleeing from Herod's murderous wrath. Yet their love for one another and their trust in God kept their family together through the worst of times.

Every family experiences its share of difficult moments and challenges. Today, on this Sunday after Christmas, we celebrate “family” - that unique nucleus of society that nurtures and supports us throughout our journey on earth. This Christmas season, may we rediscover the special bond that transforms a household into a family—a family that is a harbor of forgiveness and understanding and a safe place of unconditional love, welcome, and acceptance.

Meditation: What has been the hardest situation your family has had to deal with? How were you able to cope with it?

Prayer: *Loving Father, in times of tension, bless our family with the hope of your consolation and forgiveness; In times of joy, bless us with a spirit of thankfulness, never letting us forget that you are Father of us all.*