

## HOLY FAMILY–2024

Someone made a list of the ways having a second and third child is different from having the first. One of the things that changes is your attitude toward germs changes. With the first baby: If the pacifier falls on the floor, you put it away until you can go home and wash and boil it. With the second baby: When the pacifier falls on the floor, you squirt it off with some juice from the baby's bottle. With the third baby: You wipe it off on your shirt and pop it back in.

And your attitude toward going out changes. With the first baby: The first time you leave your baby with a sitter, you call home 5 times. With the second baby: Just before you walk out the door, you remember to leave a number where you can be reached. With the third baby: You leave instructions for the sitter to call only if she sees blood.

Your attitude toward being with the baby changes. With the first baby: You spend a good bit of every day just gazing at the baby. With the second baby: You spend a bit of every day watching to be sure your older child isn't squeezing, poking, or hitting the baby. With the third baby: You spend a little bit of every day hiding from the children.

Even your attitude toward swallowing coins changes. When the first child swallows a coin, you rush the child to the hospital and demand x-rays. When a second child swallows a coin, you carefully watch for the coin to pass. When a third child swallows a coin you deduct it from his or her allowance!

We are all well aware of the importance of and the special place that families have in our world. I think most of us would agree that families are truly a wonderful blessing, even though at times it can be very challenging for all involved.

I'm sure most of know that Jesus came from a very devout Jewish family. Every year they went to Jerusalem for the Passover observance. We know from stories about his birth, that his parents trusted God. We know he was versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. He confounded the scholars in the temple with his questions concerning scripture when he was only twelve years of age. Passages from the Hebrew Bible were on his tongue throughout his ministry. Probably this was a tribute to Joseph. In the Jewish home the father had the responsibility of training his son in the faith. We know that Joseph did his job well.

For sure, Mary did her job well too. Getting ready for today I came across a story about a young man who on his graduation from high school was chosen to give the commencement speech. He began by reading from his prepared text: "I want to talk about my mother and the wonderful influence she has had on my life. She is the one most responsible for me being here today, standing in front of you giving this address. She is a shining example of parenthood, and I love her more than words could ever do

justice.” At this point he seemed to struggle for words. After a pause, he looked up with a sly grin and said, “Sorry, but it’s really hard to read my mother’s handwriting.”

On this feast of the Holy Family, we remember the why of the Son of God being born as one like us. The birth of Jesus is a reminder of the dignity that is ours as human beings, and, his being born into a human family, is a reminder of the dignity and the importance of the family. Over the years, the makeup of many families has changed. Today, family can mean the traditional nuclear family, or single-parent families, or blended families, or families comprised of grandparents and grandchildren, or families of persons who are not related by blood. However, while the concept and form of many families might have changed, the ideal of loving service, generosity, mutual support, along with the other values and principles that bind family members together has not changed.

The family continues to be the place where those who love and care for one another discover who they are and come to be who they are called to be. In the spirit of that loving service, our tendencies toward self-centeredness and self-importance are held in check and we come to realize in real and concrete ways, that without each other, we will never make it.

It goes without saying that it is through our relationships of family and friends, that we are able to respond in a very real and concrete ways to God. Again, as we witness from the Gospel reading today, it is not something automatic; it is something learned, modeled, and shared. This was true even for Jesus. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, his identity as one like us was intimately tied into his being part of Mary and Joseph’s family and all that went with it. And, even though two out of the three members of the Holy Family were sinless, they still had to work on things and iron out their difficulties in loving and respectful ways.

As we remember that Jesus was born into a human family to remind us that all families are holy, and that when problems, hurts, confusion or misunderstandings come our way, it doesn’t mean that we are unholy, unloving or not good. But, like Jesus’ family, it is important not to leave things undone and to make sure that we try to take care of whatever our needs to be worked out. Let us remember that God’s love, the love that we share as family and friends is a precious treasure and that it is even stronger than death and that those we love who have gone before us, are still with us and will be always be with us. As we prepare to begin a New Year, may our focus always remain on what is most important in life and what will bring us joy, peace and fulfillment and help make a real difference in the world in which live, that is, our relationship with God and all those people who bless our lives.