

**The Holy Family
(Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, Year B)**

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14—Honor Your Father and Mother

1. Honoring your Father:
 - a. Reparation: “atones for sins” (Sir 3:3)
 - b. Joy: “gladdened by his own children”
 - c. Efficacious Prayer: “when he prays he will be heard” (Sir 3:5)
 - d. Longevity: “will have long life” (Sir 3:6)
2. “Glorify” your Mother:
 - a. Debt of Sin: “lays up treasure” (Sir 3:4; cf. Exod 20:12, *kabodah*)
 - b. Gives Joy: “will refresh his mother” (Sir 3:6)
3. Care for Elderly Parents:
 - a. “Help your father in his old age”
 - b. “Do not despise him...”
 - c. Reparation: “kindness to a father... will be credited to you”

Psalms 128—Blessed the Family that Feels the Lord

1. Family Happiness: rooted in “fear” of the LORD; “you shall be happy”
2. Wife: “like a fruitful vine within your house”
3. Children: “like olive shoots around your table”

Colossians 3:12-21—Christian Husbands, Wives, and Children

1. Christian Virtues: above all “love”; context of everything else Paul says (3:12-17)
2. Wives: be “subordinate” (Greek *hypotassomai*) ≠ inferior (3:18; cf. Luke 2:51)
3. Husbands: “love” (Greek *agapaō*) your wives; = sacrificial love (3:19; cf. Eph 5:22)
4. Children: “obey” your parents “in everything” (3:20)
5. Fathers: “do not provoke your children”; i.e., gentleness and justice (3:21)

Luke 2:22-40—The Presentation in the Temple

1. Obedience the Jewish Law: Mary and Joseph obedient to the Torah
 - a. Law of Purification: sacrifices for mother and child (Lev 12:1-8)
 - b. Law of First-Born: “first-born” are “consecrated” to God (Exod 13:2, 12)
2. Poverty of Joseph and Mary: only able to offer “turtle-doves” (Luke 2:24)
3. Simeon: “Now, let your servant depart (Lat *Nunc dimittis*) in peace” (Luke 2:29)
4. Anna: prophetess, living in the Temple (Luke 2:37-38)
5. Return to Galilee: they “performed everything according to the Law” (Luke 2:39-40)

The Popes on the Teaching of Paul

John Paul II: This relationship is nevertheless not one-sided submission... *Husband and wife are, in fact, “subject to one another,” mutually subordinated to one another.* The source of this reciprocal submission lies in Christian pietas and its expression is love.

The Mass Readings Explained

(John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 473)

Pope Pius XI: *This subjection, however, does not deny or take away the liberty which fully belongs to the woman both in view of her dignity as a human person, and in view of her most noble office as wife and mother and companion; nor does it bid her obey her husband's every request if not in harmony with right reason or with the dignity due to wife; nor, in fine, does it imply that the wife should be put on a level with those persons who in law are called minors, to whom it is not customary to allow free exercise of their rights on account of their lack of mature judgment, or of their ignorance of human affairs... But it [St. Paul's teaching] forbids that exaggerated liberty which cares not for the good of the family; it forbids that in this body which is the family, the heart be separated from the head to the great detriment of the whole body and the proximate danger of ruin. For if the man is the head, the woman is the heart, and as he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love... (Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubi* nos. 26-28).*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4th Sunday of Advent, Year A)

1. Read Sirach 3 and its teachings about honoring one's parents. Then reflect on your own relationship with your father and mother. How have you followed the Scriptures in this regard? Does this passage challenge you in any way?

2. What do you think of Paul's teachings that wives should be "subordinate" to their husbands? Or that husbands should "love" their wives? How do most people interpret these verses? What have the Pope's taught about the proper interpretation of this passage?

3. How can the holy family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus be a model for families today?

For Further Reading

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Official summary of the Church's teaching on holy

- matrimony. Must reading. (CCC 1601-79)
2. Pope Francis. Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of Love, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016). See nos. 1-290. An extremely rich and up-to-date reflection on the biblical vision of the Christian family by Pope Francis, following up on the two Synods on the Family. Available at www.vatican.va.
 3. Pope Pius XI. Encyclical on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubii* (1930). A classic papal teaching on the Christian vision of marriage. Contains beautiful explanation of Paul's teaching on wives and husbands. Available at www.vatican.va.