

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

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

1. Honoring your Father: reparation, joy, efficacious prayer, long life (3:3-6)
2. “Glorify” your Mother: pays debt of sin; gives joy to mother (3:4, 6)
3. Care for Elderly Parents: “Help your father in his old age” (3:12-14)

Psalm 128—Blessed the Family that Fears 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)

Matt 2:13-15, 19-23—The Flight into Egypt

1. Angel: “angel” or “messenger” (Greek *angelos*) speaks to Joseph (2:13)
2. Joseph’s Dream: spoke to Joseph “in a dream” (cf. Gen 37:9-11; 41:1-54)
3. Obedient Protector: “he rose and took the child and his mother” (2:13, 14, 20)
4. Judea → Galilee: goes to safety (2:23; cf. Herod Archelaus, son of Herod the Great)
5. Nazareth: Joseph settles the holy family in Nazareth (= “branch town”)

The Living Tradition

St. John Paul II: And so Jesus' way back to Nazareth from Bethlehem passed through Egypt. Just as Israel had followed the path of the exodus "from the condition of slavery" in order to begin the Old Covenant, so Joseph, *guardian and cooperator in the providential mystery of God*, even in exile watched over the one who brings about the New Covenant.... One hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII had already exhorted the Catholic world to pray for the protection of St. Joseph, Patron of the whole Church.

Since that time—as I recalled at the beginning of this Exhortation—the Church has implored the *protection* of St. Joseph on the basis of “that sacred bond of charity which united him to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God,” and the Church has commended to Joseph all of her cares, including those dangers which threaten the human family. Even today we have many reasons to pray in a similar way:

“Most beloved father, dispel the evil of falsehood and sin...graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness...and *just as once you saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend God's holy Church from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity.*” Today we still have good reason to commend everyone to St. Joseph. (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph, *Redemptoris Custos*, no.

14, 31)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (The Holy Family, 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. What special role did Joseph play as “guardian of the Redeemer” in the Holy Family? How can Joseph be role-model for fathers in families today?

For Further Reading

1. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph, *Redemptoris Custos* (Available at www.vatican.va.)
2. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), 49-59.