

As it so happens this year, the day after Christmas is a Sunday, and the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family. During Advent we reflected on the distinction between preparing for the holiday, and preparing for the *holy day*. It might be good to make a similar distinction between what comes after the holiday and what comes after the holy day of Christmas. What comes after the holiday is after-Christmas sales, and the taking down of decorations. There might be some Christmas music played on the radio for a day or two, as well as some Christmas commercials on TV.

What comes after the holy day is continued celebration and meditation. We reflect on the Holy Family, on Mary as the Mother of God, on Epiphany, and on the Baptism of Jesus. These hopefully lead us to deeper reflection on the meaning of Jesus' birth and subsequent mission for our salvation.

This Sunday we focus on the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In our first reading from Sirach, we hear some admonitions about how wives and husbands, parents and children are to relate to each other. In our second reading from Colossians, St. Paul's exhortations to his fellow Christians gives us a great indication about how families should live: "Put on...heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another... And over all these, put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts... And be thankful... And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." How often do we feel the need for patience and forgiveness in our families!

I wonder what our family life would be like if we took to heart these words from St. Paul: "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus..." How would it be if we saw loving our spouses as something to be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus?" What would happen if we saw raising our children, or as children, helping out around the house, and studying hard at school, in the same way?

If we took that kind of approach to our families, I think it would do more than perhaps deter us from sin. I think it might help us get in touch with the sacredness of our lives. In other words, we are *all* called to be *holy* families.

To be holy does not mean to be free from trials and tribulations. Look at the family we celebrate on this feast. In our Gospel reading we see that they had to run away because they were in danger for their lives! And when it was safe for them to return, they had to start over again in a different place. To be holy means to be faithful. In our reading from Matthew's Gospel we see the faithfulness of Joseph. When he is warned in a dream by an angel to take the family to Egypt, that is what he does. When he is told to take the family back, he does that, too. As families, we are to be like Joseph and Mary, willing to do what God calls us to do.

In being faithful to God in following Jesus, we are faithful to each other in our families and in our world. How much have we seen families needing to run away because of war or terror or some natural disaster, or because of poverty and oppression? How often have we seen children in danger from all sorts of people and things? Our call to holiness leads us beyond our immediate families to consideration of the human family. The Son of God became part of a human family in order to save *all* families. May we follow Him and put on "love."

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP