

Nurturing Faith At Home ***Striving to be Like the Holy Family ... Yeh, Right!?***

The first Sunday after Christmas is always the Feast of the Holy Family. This year it was celebrated on Sunday, December 26. We are reminded then to follow the example of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. We are reminded to strive for holiness within our family. Yeh, right!! Joseph was a saint, Mary was without sin, and Jesus ... well, he is God's own Son. How can we possibly follow their example??



Well, the Holy Family was not without its challenges, difficulties, and misunderstandings. We know very little about Jesus' growing years and his family life. We do know, however, that Mary gave birth in a stable or cave. The family had to escape from Herod and find refuge in another country, and as a young adolescent, Jesus went missing and, three days later, was found in the temple in Jerusalem. This was not ideal family life. And that's why we can try to model our family life after them ... because ours are typically fraught with challenges too.

We are called to imitate the Holy Family. We are called to holiness ... to love ... to grow in these respects *together*. What does that mean practically for us and our families? It doesn't mean to do grandiose, extraordinary things, but to do the everyday things with love: to forgive each other and give countless second chances, to share, to console in times of sadness and to celebrate in times of joy, to encourage and to bless, to teach them, to help with homework, to discipline with both kindness and firmness, to spend lots of time together, to work together and play together, pray together, to endure struggles together, to hug and kiss, to try to keep our promises.

Last August my parents celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary ... fifty-five years of family life. As a family, we were far from perfect, and 'holy' wouldn't be the first word I would think of to describe it. But in hindsight, I recognize numerous examples of sacrifice on the part of my parents, for the sake of their children. They sacrificed material possessions. They taught us right from wrong. They taught faith by their own example. I can think of countless, thankless duties such as washing clothes in an old wringer washer (in which I would sometimes catch my fingers), cooking meals and trying to make the most of food coupons, taking us on holidays and sleeping – with five young children – in a heavy canvas tent, quizzing us on our spelling lists while ironing our clothes, and disciplining us for an array of misbehaviors. In each of these ways, my parents expressed their unconditional love, reliable support, and continuous concern for the happiness and well-being of their children. Does that sound familiar? It should.

When you can see these family 'virtues' ... when you can see past the fighting, the hecticness, the menial tasks, the demands of

children, and our own inadequacies and mistakes, you should be able to see the hand of God leading you – as a family – towards holiness ... towards happiness ... towards heaven. We are a work in progress. We *are* 'holy families in the making'.

As a new year begins, this is an ideal time for you as a family to renew your commitment to grow in faith and to establish what I call a 'spiritual growth plan'. As a family, identify any areas that need greater attention, and then set goals towards improving your faith life in those areas.

Some important and probably obvious areas to consider might be:

- ❖ **Praying Together:** Developing some prayer routines may be most helpful. It could be as simple as saying grace – a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving – before meals. I would also highly recommend saying bedtime prayers with your children – and that includes the teenagers! This can be done as a family or with each child after they have crawled into bed.
- ❖ **Reading Scripture:** Younger children will enjoy hearing and reading bible stories. Older children can become more familiar with the bible itself. It is the story of God's love for us.
- ❖ **Attending Church:** We need the prayers and support and example of those in a Christian community. Regular attendance will establish a habit and routine for your children. You will never regret the time you dedicate to God and to your faith community.

May God bless you as parents ... and as holy families.

Louis Kloster, Religious Education & Christian Family Life consultant
lkloster@gSacrd.ab.ca