

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez**  
**on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph**  
**Holy Family Parish, Jacksonville**  
**December 27, 2015**

Readings: SIR 3:2-6, 12-14, COL 3:12-21, LK 2:41-52

The birth of Jesus Christ, His Nativity has stopped the entire world in a major Celebration of Joy in community.

The birth of a Child—Jesus leads us to the Celebration of the Holy Family for, child and family, go essentially together!

Saint Francis of Assisi is to be credited with a major innovation: the crib, the crèches. For the Christmas story that was proclaimed from the Scriptures (ear), Francis wanted the (eyes) to see it! – of course he was Italian and Catholic!! The birth of the Messiah comes to our imagination visibly with the amazement of Joseph and Mary, with Our Lady of La Leche nursing the Child, with the lambs and the shepherd adoring Him, with entire creation reminding us IT WAS REAL, this is not myth, or fantasy, or a wonderful dream. It truly happened in Bethlehem as the census confirms it would add St. Luke.

1. The relevancy today of the everlasting values of family

St. John Paul II was passionate about the protection of traditional family. Modernity has another kind of passion about the family: to change it, to redefine it with multiples alternatives and styles. Without condemnation of any one, Catholic citizens have a very important responsibility: to witness the family as God intends it and as the Church transmits it. The voice of the Catholic tradition is heard today in the book of Sirach, Ecclesiasticus, which was written 200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ: one could say it is a commentary of 4<sup>th</sup> commandment...

As I was listening to it, I thought of the recent visit of Pope Francis to our country three months ago, for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. On Saturday night, Pope Francis made a final recommendation: care for children and care for the elders. Why? Children suffer abuse from domestic violence and at worst sexual abuse in our families; if unwanted they are legally aborted, even here in our city this kind of holocaust is happening, and the elders are in danger of being discarded. Just look at the laws in Oregon and California on euthanasia which bluntly state: why invest one cent in the healthcare of sick elders or why should we invest in their future?

How relevant are the words of Ben Sirach: ....

Sirach: Chapter 3 is beautifully complemented by Malachi 3, when the prophet announcing the coming of the Day of the Lord says, if you want to avoid the destruction of humanity: turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers...a very realistic little line follows: **lest I come and strike the land with doom.** St. John Paul's statement that the future of humanity is the family pointed to a warning also!

I invite each one of you to invest in strengthening the family life by the gift of presence. I envision healthy family life like this: Eating frequently together, having fun together, praying together especially on Sunday, coming to the parish—called by Benedict XVI a network of families—for the Holy Mass.

## 2. The immense privilege of an insight into the Holy Family

For 30 years the Son of God lived quietly in Nazareth with his family. What do we know about it? Practically nothing. That is why the Gospel today is so important. It shares an episode of a conflict due to lack of communication. It tells us about the stress of parents, misunderstanding between the child and the parents. Let us go deeper now.

The uniqueness of Jesus is that he was like us in all things but simultaneously he was the Son of God. What is in play here is that Mary and Joseph needed to embrace the mystery that he belonged to a supremely higher family—the family of the Trinity. That is why by his incarnation he could make us Children of God – explains St. John! And Mary understood and accepted this in her prayerful fiat: she keeps these Jesus sayings in her heart, she told St. Luke and St. Luke tells us today!

## 3. The Sunday Eucharist

Each Sunday the domestic church, the family comes and forms a network of prayer with other families of the neighborhood strengthening the family of the parish for the celebration of the Eucharist where we enter into the highest level of family life, the life of the Trinity in a magnificent and glorious celebration of unity.