

HOMILY ~ Feast of the Holy Family~December 26, 2021

Today is the feast of the Holy Family, and as we look at the gospel reading today we might be reminded of another story, a similar story, a more modern story. A story of a family taking a long trip during the holiday season who suddenly realize they've left their young son home alone. I'm speaking of course of the 1990 John Hughes movie Home Alone, where young Kevin McAllister is sick of being bullied by his older brothers and sisters, tired of being ignored by his parents, so he wishes his family would just disappear. His wish gets granted when, on the morning they're supposed to be getting on an airplane to go to Paris for Christmas, they oversleep and have to rush to get to the airport. And just as Mary and Joseph don't realize that Jesus has remained behind in Jerusalem, the McAllisters don't realize that young Kevin has been left behind at home.

It takes Mary and Joseph several days to find Jesus when they return to Jerusalem, and it takes Mrs. McAllister several days to get back home from Paris. And when they do get back—Mary and Joseph, and Mrs. McAllister, they come to realize that their sons were able to take care of themselves, and the message we might draw from this is that family is important, and our children are capable of more than we realize. Now this is a good message. It's good for us to appreciate the value of family and to see more in our children. But if we stop there, we short change the gospel. And the gospel reminds us that today is not the feast of the family, it's the Feast of the Holy Family.

The Church sets Jesus, Mary and Joseph before us as a model of what our families should be like. We might identify more easily with the McAllister family—with their bickering, noisiness, chaos—rather than identifying with the Holy Family. How could we ever measure up to that kind of holiness? How could our families ever be that perfect? What could we do that would ever be good enough for us to be called a holy family? But holiness doesn't come from our own efforts. There is only one who is holy, and that's God. Our holiness comes from our connection to God, from our relationship with God.

And so the first thing we learn about family from the Holy Family is that we walk with God. A holy family walks with God. Mary and Joseph welcomed Jesus into their lives. Jesus came to bring God to us. And just as that Holy Family welcomed God, we are to welcome the gift of each other that God has given us. Our parents, our siblings, our children, are gifts from God, and when we welcome them into our lives, we welcome God's presence and we take one more step toward holiness.

The next thing we learn from the Holy Family is that being family means serving each other. Mary and Joseph placed themselves at God's service to raise and take care of Jesus. Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve. When we look at our own families we see many ways we can live out that call to service. Husbands are to serve their wives by helping them achieve their salvation. Wives are to serve their husbands by helping them achieve their salvation. We become partners on our spiritual journeys, on this walk with God. We pray for and with each other. We spend time together—even if it's doing dishes together, working on yard work together, or folding clothes together, or just collapsing on the couch at the end of the day.

We walk together, we serve each other, to get closer to God.

And to be a parent is to be a servant. Driving kids to all of their activities, getting them ready for school in the morning, helping them with their homework, showing them how to cook and fix things. Hopefully, we pray with our kids, show them how to do acts of charity, bring them into the sacramental life of the Church, and bring them to Mass each weekend. We serve them.

Children, too, have a part to play. They support each other by cheering at games, or applauding at dance recitals. They play games with each other and when they grow up they help each other through difficult times, they care for aging parents, they serve each other.

And so we learn from the Holy Family that we are to walk with God, that we are to serve each other. And if we do this, then we make our little corner of the world holier. We allow God to make our lives holy. And in doing that we bring holiness to the world.

The Church is calling us to be a part of the New Evangelization, to reignite the Faith in the lives of those who may have forgotten or drifted away from the Good News. What better way to bring that Good News to the world, than by the example of our lives, than by living as holy family, families who walk with God. We may sometimes look like the McAllisters'—noisy, busy, frazzled. We may even wish, like Kevin at times, that we could make our family disappear.

But we have a God who will never disappear. We have a God who will never leave us behind. His presence is what makes us part of a truly holy family.

Peace,

Deacon Don