

HOLY FAMILY SUNDAY:

Dec. 28, 2025

Jesus, Mary and Joseph may seem to be the model of a family that is far beyond most human capabilities, a model that is too good to be true. I think I grew up with some kind of unreal picture of their family life. All sweetness and lovey-dovey life without stress. After all the child is the son of God!

Let's go back to the first family, Adam and Eve with their two sons, Cain and Abel. The Book of Genesis kind of paints an idyllic picture with them taking walks with God in the evening in some garden that is called paradise. But they can't sustain this niceness. They want something better. It appears that they did not trust God. They were made in God's image and were destined for living divine life. But they had to attain divine life by first being fully human. They wanted an easier way than humanity.

We have a difficult time being fully human too. We look for an easier way. And we use Jesus as a short cut for us. He told us to follow him, to embrace life as he did us, the way even to embrace suffering and death. At Christmas we come and adore the infant Jesus and we usually continue to treat Jesus as the divine savior who will be the way to a good life. We adore Christ, for instance, in the Eucharist, and neglect entering his humanity in the humanity of all human beings.

It is difficult for us to handle the Incarnation. God is in a human being. Because of that God is in every human being and in every particle of creation. But humanity remains humanity and all creation remains material. Have you seen any of the episodes of the series called "The Chosen"? It is a multi-year series on the life of Jesus. I only saw the first year of it which covers the birth and early life of Jesus. There is one scene based on the family of the three of them going to Jerusalem when Jesus is twelve. Jesus gets separated from Mary and Joseph and they have to go looking for him for some days. They have an episode, not found in the gospels, when Joseph tells Jesus, "Son, never do that to your mother again!" And Jesus obediently answers "Yes, father." True or not, I can believe that. What the gospel does say is that the three returned to Nazareth where Jesus was obedient to them.

We are all descendants of Adam and Eve. And, through Baptism, we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We are human just like Adam and Eve and this includes what is called original sin. What this sin really is might be debated but I like one

theologian's explanation that original sin is the human lack of oneness with all other human beings and with all of creation. Our individual egos get in the way of our being one. So we mistrust anyone different than ourselves. Males and females; white and blacks; straights and gays; any ethnic group or nationality different than mine. Today we treat immigrants as less than human. We always look for scapegoats to blame and choose anyone different. We can't admit our own shortcomings, our mistakes, our failures. We want to blame others so we blame someone who is other.

Jesus Christ came to atone for all this division. The word atone means at one. The Word of God became human and asked us to accept the kingdom of God which is what he named the real path of being human. Praying and working for the unity of all people and all of creation is our way to follow Jesus and become like him. We all begin our human journey in a family. A family binds us together despite the messiness of learning to get along and really love one another. Today we celebrate the model of the holy family, the ordinary union of a man, woman and child. Family and community are the way to be human. From a family we grow to become friends with other humans. We work together for the common good of all people, for the planet we call home, for the universe. We never lose our individuality and uniqueness but we are one. Individualism and superiority destroy this unity.

Giving away our unique gifts brings us together. What did the angel first say to Mary? – 'Fear not'. What did the angel in his dream say to Joseph? – "Fear not". What did the choir of angels say to the shepherds? - "Fear not". The angel also speaks to us and says fear not. Fear not to become fully human. Fear not to love, to hurt, to suffer, to be vulnerable, to practice justice, to live fully, to pray, to sing, dance and play. Jesus, Mary and Joseph overcame their fears, so can we.

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