

## HOLY FAMILY SUNDAY

December 26, 2010

Earlier in the month, our parish marked the 14th year that Eucharistic Adoration has taken place in the Burke Chapel. Through these 14 years, my wife Kay and I have managed to spend an hour in the chapel most Monday nights (except when we are out of town).

During that hour, my focus and attention are often drawn to the image of the Holy Family on the front and left wall. They were sculpted in 1950, by Christian Petersen, for the former convent chapel. Christian Petersen was one of the great regionalist artists of the early to mid-twentieth century and was once a member of St. Cecilia Parish. Christian Petersen's sculpture of Mary, the young boy Jesus and his foster father Joseph make them come alive to me as real people.

Today is **Holy Family Sunday** - wedged in between Christmas and Epiphany. For most of us, this is a family time, a family week. Many of you have already celebrated Christmas with your families and extended families. Others, like my family, have family celebrations scheduled today or later in the week.

More than any other time of the year, this is a time for families. Today, we look to the Holy Family as a model for our own families. The trouble is, we've put the Holy Family on such a high and lofty pedestal that from our lowly vantage point, the view is somewhat distorted. Over the years, artists have depicted the Holy Family as picture perfect people-- yet they were a real family, too, and we all know that real family life is not perfect. That's why I like the Christian Petersen creation. Jesus, Mary and Joseph seem like real people that I can relate to.

We know so little about this Holy Family. Scripture is sketchy, but what it does portray is not a perfect family life situation --- even for 2,000 years ago. Most young mothers did not give birth in a cave surrounded by livestock. Most families were not forced to flee their native land for the safety of their child-- as we read in today's gospel. And then fast forward 12 years. While many parents today may have lost a child for a few minutes when their back was turned and the kid did a disappearing act-- most do not lose a child for 3 days-- at church of all places! Those tranquil, serene pictures of the Holy Family, that we have grown up with, belie the tumultuous life that they must actually have experienced.

Perhaps we, too, are victims of the perfect picture scenario. We dress up in our best finery and go to a professional photographer to have our perfect image captured and digitalized. Then we hang this perfect family portrait on our wall and it smiles down on our daily life that is often more chaos than perfection.

That perfect picture on the wall is only one of the many facets of who we are as a family. For some of us, our daily family life is closer to a three ring circus or a bit like a Dr. Seuss nightmare- akin to riding a unicycle on a tightrope with a child on your back, another glued to your hip, and another bouncing ahead of you on the tightrope, just beyond reach, while you juggle 12 balls in the air and talk on your cell phone! We can only ask how much of our out-of-control family life comes from societal demands and how much do we create ourselves?

Just a month ago, Kay and I were invited to present a paper at a Congress on the Evangelization of the Family in Rome. It was a humbling experience. The Congress was sponsored by the Pontifical Council on the Family and the focus was on families as subjects of evangelization. The reality of today's complicated family life was addressed by 180 participants from 30 different countries--Cardinals, bishops, priests and lay people. We were reassured by the Church's on-going efforts to find new and better ways to support today's families .

After all, families are the heart of the Church. They, in their homes, comprise a miniature church- a domestic church. Despite all the chaos of daily life, today's families live the sacred in the ordinary of their day-to-day existence. Although, they may not be aware of it, families do the work of Jesus in the day-to-day life in their homes. They do the work Jesus did when they teach, serve, heal, and forgive. Families who follow this example of Jesus are Holy Families.

At this special family time of the year--as we approach the end of another calendar year---it is always good to reflect on where we've been and where we are going and then to ask ourselves how are we a holy family? How do we live a holy life in a secular world? Do we teach, serve, heal and forgive in our family? Do we need to simplify our lives to be more in line with the way that we are called to be a holy family? Do we live by societal standards **or** by the standards of Jesus?

Today, I'd like to ask you to consider a couple of actions. Sometime during this holy season of Christmas and Epiphany, I invite you to pay a visit to the Burke Chapel with your family. Look at the images of the Holy Family of Nazareth and then reflect on their trials and tribulations which may not have been so much different from our own. How are they a model for your family? Second- when you go home today-- take a long look at your family picture and know that despite the ups and downs and ins and outs **you too are a HOLY FAMILY.**

Deacon Gary Aitchison