

The picture I have placed before the ambo is a copy of an icon of the Presentation of the Lord which depicts the Virgin Mary's presentation of her Divine Son in the Temple which we heard in today's Gospel reading. Saint Joseph and the prophetess Anna stand by watching, while the aged Simeon receives the Child Jesus in his arms, proclaiming Jesus as a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.

"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all the peoples, a light for the revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32) Those were powerful words spoken in the temple by Simeon when Jesus was presented by Joseph and Mary. According to Jewish custom, a firstborn son, forty days after his birth was consecrated to God in the temple. Simeon's words were the first proclamation that God's promises in Isaiah (Isaiah 42:6) have been fulfilled in the Christ child.

For those who pray the Rosary, we remember this special time in Christ's life when we pray the Fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary "The Presentation of the Lord". Those same words spoken by Simeon are also echoed in the Liturgy of the Hours, in the Night Prayer which is prayed just before going to bed. It is a required prayer for priests and is encouraged for all laity. (CCC 1174) These same words when meditated upon, can help all of us reflect on how Christ has entered and enriched our own lives. Christ came as the true light to the whole world.

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. This feast reminds us that Jesus was part of a family, just as each one of us are part of a family. We all need to follow the example of the Holy Family. They model the perfect family. St. Joseph provided for the Holy Family. He ministered to all the needs of the family in Nazareth and protected both Jesus and His mother, Mary. Some consider Mary as the first tabernacle of the church since she carried Christ in her womb. We keep Christ today in our Church tabernacle.

We need to attempt to emulate the Holy Family in our actions towards others, especially within our own families. When was the last time you called your sister or brother or mom or dad to just say "I love you!" or "I was thinking of you today." These few minutes of our time can really make a difference in a family member's day, especially the elderly who may be homebound or in a nursing home or care facility.

The Feast of the Holy Family and the Holy Family itself reminds us of the importance of the sacrament of marriage. This sacrament brings two unique single individuals into a covenant with each other to establish a family unit, initially as a couple; but later on, as a larger unit when children enter into the family. The roles of the husband and wife, in addition to helping each other grow in their own spiritual faith journey towards heaven, is to bring their children up in the faith and to help their children also grow in their own individual spiritual faith journey. Just as Mary and Joseph were Christ's first teachers of their faith, the Jewish faith; fathers and mothers are the first and most important teachers of the faith to their children.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, offers these words of advice to families to help them be holy: 1) Pray together, 2) Keep the faith, and 3) Experience joy together. I will expand on these three to help us follow the guidance of Pope Francis.

Pray together: Praying together helps all of us, especially a family, to understand that we all need God's help in our lives. We need the humility that prayer often brings to us. We all can use God's help through His strength, His mercy and His forgiveness. A simple family prayer can be as easy as praying the "Our Father" together or a prayer before meals. Family Rosary prayer can also be a beautiful prayer occurrence since it can help each member of the family become closer to each other as they observe their family members praying for them when they state their intentions for each decade of the Rosary. Family prayer time is strong.

Keep the faith: Go to church together as a family. Witness as a family through your daily activities. Remember that we are reminded at the close of each mass with the "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." In other words, become missionaries to each other and to the outside world. Don't leave Christ in the Church. Spread His light and His love to others throughout all of your daily activities.

Experience joy: Celebrate the small blessings in your life. Make sure to say thank you or I love you when your spouse or child does something for you, or even better, when they don't. Remind them daily of your love for them. Be patient with your family members when they make a mistake. We all on occasion make mistakes. Allow God to come into your homes and spread His joy and happiness.

Today, especially with all the noise and busyness of secular society, we all need to live in faith and simplicity, just like the Holy Family of Nazareth. May the joy and peace of the Lord be always with you.

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