



The feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph gives us the opportunity to reflect on God's gift of the family. God gives us the pattern of the family: a husband and a wife united in marriage together with their children. Sometimes, of course, a spouse may die or a couple might be burdened with the cross of infertility. So this is not to say that these are no longer families, but the pattern of the family is given to us by God, and we know that this understanding is very important for us in a culture that wants to redefine marriage and family.

It's very important for us as Catholics to acknowledge that what marriage is and what the family is comes to us from God, and that it cannot be redefined by us, or the culture, or the state. It is a gift from God.

So then I want to turn for a moment to help you reflect on your own family. That's the first point to recognize about your family: that it is a gift from God for you and for each other. That doesn't mean that your family is perfect – no one's is. But your life together as a family is a gift from above.

Sometimes maybe we can miss that; we can miss the forest for the trees because of the difficulties of family life, the frustrations, the struggles, maybe being on top of each other all the time. So today this feast is a perfect time to step back and to appreciate again the gift that your family is.

Second, we can ask: What does the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph teach us about what the family is supposed to be? The Gospel reading today said, "Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover..." Obviously, Mary, Joseph, along with Jesus, put their lives into the Father's hands – they were close to God and they prayed.

If I could say that there is one thing that is most needed by families today – and I should say even desperately needed – it is family prayer time. Many will come to me in confession or outside of confession and say, "There's so much impatience in my family, or so much anger, or we don't seem very close with this person going one way, that person another." Mother Theresa once said, "You can't give what you don't have." You can't give patience, or peace, or love in your family if you don't have it. You can't give what you don't have.

From where do we get these things? From God. When we pray, God give us peace, patience, and love – and then we can give that away to others, especially our families. And we must be continually renewed in this by God, every day, because our tanks seem to run out quickly. So, what's the bottom line here? Families must pray together. And I mean more than just throwing up a prayer before meals – as good as that might be. There must be more than that.

You know the old phrase from Fr. Patrick Peyton, who is now being looked at for sainthood, by the way. This famous phrase was: “The family that prays together...stays together”. Fr. Peyton went all over the world in the 1950's and 1960's preaching the power of the Rosary for prayer, especially for families. It is a message that we need today even more than ever.

So, why not make commitment as a family to pray the Rosary together every day? Start slowly, maybe, with a decade of the Rosary every day and then build on it. I guarantee you something: if you pray as a family, commit to praying the Rosary every day, you will experience new love, new patience, new peace in your families – and above all, a new closeness to God.

But some of you might ask, “What about me? My kids are all grown. It's just me and my husband, or it's just me and my wife.” I am continually amazed by how many husbands and wives do not pray together – have never prayed together. As they draw on the power of God in prayer, husbands and wives can be filled with new love which spills out into the lives of the other.

Some of you might be single or a widower or a widow. Please remember that we all belong to a greater family than even our own family by blood, and that is the family of the Church: God's family. All our prayers and sacrifices contribute in a very real way to the building up of the life of the Church. So, even if we are alone praying the Rosary every day – this is still a family prayer, the family prayer of the Church.

My friends, the beauty and love today of the Holy Family spurs us on in our own families to greater prayer and greater love for God and for each other.

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend  
Feast of the Holy Family 2009**