

The Feast of the Holy Family (Dec. 29/30)

What a special Feast day as we follow the celebration of the Birth of Our Savior. The feast of the Holy Family ! It's a very special Feast really because we have a great deal to learn from them. The feast is an invitation to all of us to take a special look at this family as they set about being responsive to God's unfolding plan in their lives.

It is so easy for us to dismiss the model of the Holy Family as being out of reach for our family, How easily we can say 'Oh they were the 'Holy Family' they had a 'hot-line' to God it was easy for them to follow His plan. That would be grossly wrong, and certainly untrue for us to say such. The Holy Family was absolutely fully human, and if you look carefully they had all of the common challenges of every contemporary family.

A look at this family shows us that it was no easy journey for them, the experience was fraught with danger. Their story began with an unplanned pregnancy, the 'upright' Joseph deciding to divorce Mary quietly, when the angel appears to him in a dream, "Don't be afraid to take Mary into your home as your wife" ! What do you make of that ? Does the Lord speak to you in your dreams ? Hey of course He does ! The Psalmist says : Whether we are awake or asleep the Lord speaks to us ! The big question is what do we do when the Lord speaks to us ? Do we respond to Him ? Do we follow His direction ?

Joseph heeds the angel's direction and takes Mary as his wife. More challenges on the horizon because of the census, they have to travel to Joseph's hometown, Nazareth, what a difficult and challenging journey with a wife who was with child. Arriving

there is no room for them in the Inn where traveler's stay. They settle in a stable where the Christ-Child is born ! Might they not have been saying to each other : God give us a break this is your Son give us some help ! At least I am sure most of us would be inclined to go there ! After the birth more anxiety, fear for the life of their new born what is it like as a parent to be fearing for the life of your new born infant ? Many is the parent who has experienced that type of fear after the birth of their child. The infant having to have some corrective surgery immediately after the birth or something of that nature ! Then Joseph in another dream is direct by an Angel to move again this time to Egypt How appropriate the New Exodus ...Jesus the One who is to lead His people to freedom !

There are many more issues that require patience and attentive listening on the part of Mary and Joseph. As St. Luke puts it so well : "Mary kept all these things in her heart and pondered on them" I am sure Joseph was calmed by Mary's easy demeanor ! Next we have the teenage crisis, The family has gone to Jerusalem as faithful Jews to observe the Holy Days ...the Feast of Passover ! AS they head down home they realize that Jesus is not in the entourage of relatives and neighbors what a great shock Ever had the experience of having a missing child terror takes hold of you ! So they turn around and head back to Jerusalem to commence the search ... There he is in the Temple in the midst of the teachers and instructors of the lawengaging in lively debate ! Why have you done this to us they ask ? His explanation : "Why were you looking for me ? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house ?

Can you imagine your own son coming up with such an explanation ? Why were you looking for me ? Did you not know

that I had to be about my father's business 'Oh yes we would love for you to be about your fathers business' but it's your personal business that we are worried about !
Mary and Joseph's wisdom, and awareness, in the midst of such challenges is striking !

This is what really makes them Holy ... Their faith and trust in god and constantly being willing to be reflective on the experiences that were coming their way ! In our world we are enormously Reactive to the circumstance that come our way Imagine how different things could be should we choose to not be Reactive but rather Reflective This may be the ultimate difference between being Holy and not so holy ! We are all called to Holinessthe key to Holiness Being Reflectiveconnecting the loose ends of our lives ! And trusting as St. Paul puts it "Everything comes together for good for those who love God."

May we work more intensely during this coming New Year at being holy ! Trusting that the many and varied events in our lives will come together for good in Him.

St. Luke gives us a solid portrait of Mary in that one single verse :
"Mary kept all of these thing in her heart and pondered on them"
May we be quick to keep many things in our hearts and ponder on them !

—Fr. Gerry Hurley