

The Feast of the Holy Family – December 29, 2019

Just 3-4 days ago, we read the accounts of the birth of Jesus in our world. The huge journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the young couple, and all of its big questions ... Where are we going to stay? Who is going to help us in the birthing of our child? Are we going to be safe in the midst of all of these traveling people?..... Questions loomed large, and all the while the Eternal Plan was unfolding. St. Luke describes the birth at Bethlehem. Although the Manger may not have been the Ritz Carlton, we all imagined the scene described in the song: Silent Night, Holy Nightthe angels and shepherds surrounding the sightand the birth of a child who would transform our world ! What a wonderful event – God born into our world ! What is about to happen to us all ?

The peace and quiet are gone now oh so quickly. Matthew, in his Gospel, reminds us : The paranoid king, Herod the Great, is fearful of this child, his power threatened. Word is out he is intent on destroying this child ! The family have to escape, leaving their own homeland, and they become refugees in neighboring Egypt. It's like a splash of cold water in the face, but this splash is really a splash of cold reality, reminding us that no family, not even the holiest, has a stress-free life. It is a clear reminder of the universal conflict and tension between the forces of good and evil, light and darkness, grace and sin. The forces of evil are already set up against Jesus at His birth.

Matthew is also making us aware of a very critical detail **'Although our decision to follow Jesus takes us along a road that ultimately leads to Eternal Happiness, that road is not smooth and it is not always paved.'**

Today, we reflect on this little family trying to navigate all of these challenges of any contemporary family. Families who have experienced 'a threat to the life of their child immediately after birth' understand the terror of this experience. Some have stood in terror and distress, in the face of the doctor's words, **"I am sorry we did all we could, but we couldn't save him/her."** It is perfectly reasonable to think that they had the very same questions that most contemporary families have today What are we going to do now ? What's next ?

Joseph, despite his dreams and the awareness of God guiding them, was still plagued by the questions. Mary, all the while, meditating and reflecting on what her "Yes" to God means. Maybe Joseph leaning over to Mary saying, "Ask Him for a sign are we doing the right thing ? After all, you got us into this ! Surely it was not meant to be this difficult ? Had we known all of this at the outset Yes, Joseph !

Through it all, the Eternal Plan was unfolding ! All of the pieces falling in place to fulfill the promise of old ! How difficult to see that when we are in the midst of the issue !

**The plan is seen clearly only when we look back through the trying experience.
Is this not the real message ?**

Following His plan requires a great stepping-out in faith. During the Christmas Masses, I spoke of the importance of having a plan particularly the idea of having a plan in place for ourselves, so that our inner peace is not disturbed by all of the worldly influences. How easy it is for us to become reactive when our plan is challenged or undermined by outside influences. As we left the Christmas Mass, my good friend reminded me of the old adage, “The best laid plans of Mice and Men go off awry.” The words of Robert Burns, the great Scots poet who was a farmer. One day while plowing a field before winter time, he turned ‘Up Her Nest’ with the plough, and realizing he had done so, he scribed the famous poem, according to his brother, while he still had a hand on the plough. It’s an amazing piece of writing, “To A Mouse” he acknowledges to the mouse the great work that has gone into the preparation of this nest, and how necessary it is to survive the coming winter. He bemoans the fact that, “The best made plans of Mice and Men oft go awry.” What a great truth ! The very best laid plans of Men can indeed go awry ! But not the Eternal Plan the Eternal Plan has forever continued toward fulfillment.

The young family we celebrate today knew that only too well they continued to push through the numerous obstacles. They could have thrown their hands up in the air and said, **“It’s too much! We’ve had Enough!” But, they didn't !** That is why this story is so important for us ! Their faith and endurance in the face of so many obstacles is the key it leads them through the myriad challenges and obstacles to Nazareth where they settle and begin the process of being family !

Here at St. Paul, our Holy family is faced with very similar challenges, and difficulties ! What do we do now ? Where do we go next ? How do we know what to do ? I wish I could see more clearly how to move forward ! What is the right thing to do ? How do I know ? I wish God would reveal to me in a dream (like Joseph) what I should do ! I wish I could see pictures or renderings then my decision would be much easier ! I wish I could know the final cost !

We realize these are very important and valuable questions, and we also realize that we are being asked to make a decision without the answer to some of these questions. When we begun our Capital Campaign, we decided to not engage the services of a professional company to generate the necessary funds. That decision was based on the fact that we have a very generous family, and have always shown the ability to respond to the needs of our mission.

Throughout the month of January, you will be invited to make a decision about our future. We are asking you to make a pledge based on what the Lord is asking you to do regarding our future ! It is indeed a great Challenge !

—Fr. Gerry Hurley