

## Feast of the Holy Family December 28, 2008

Readings: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:22-40

### Home - The Domestic Church

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. And it's fitting that we celebrate this feast every year on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, because this holiday season is a time when we try to get together and enjoy our families. I was fortunate to have all of my family in town for Christmas and there was exciting news in the Hulway family. Of course we were looking forward to all our children coming home for Christmas, and especially my two little granddaughters from Minnesota who I hadn't seen since August. But to add to the excitement, a week before Christmas my youngest daughter became engaged to be married. And then our son and our daughter-in-law announced that they were expecting their first child. And then our daughter and son-in-law from Seattle announced they were also expecting their first child as well. We have two new grandchildren who are expected to be born about two weeks apart next summer.

The holiday celebrations can be fun, but sometimes they can get hectic and stressful as people's travel schedules conflict. Married children are torn trying to keep two sets of parents happy often dealing with long established Christmas traditions that can no longer be met. So it's difficult to keep peace; the peace that we strive for at this time of year. As parents we love our children and grandchildren and want to have them with us as often and as long as possible. But our love can turn to selfishness and there can be a tendency to keep score to make sure you're not being cheated out of your fair share of special days and hours together. Our love must be the true unselfish love of charity; we must be thankful for what we have received and not resentful of what we do not or can not have. And St. Paul tells us this morning that this is the key to peace. He tells us to grow in heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, but then adds: **“And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.”**

The holidays are a special time for peace and forgiveness and reconciliation; a time to grow closer as families; a time to be reminded of the importance of families in the development of our children and grandchildren. Our readings this morning remind us about being obedient and respectful to our parents. They remind us of the need to pray together, to set a good example, and to build an atmosphere of encouragement. When we were at a party at my son's last week, the occasion at which he announced the new addition to our family, we sat down to dinner and he asked me to lead grace, but I deferred to him. He is the head of his household and his family, and is now a father himself; it was important for him to now be a prayer leader as well.

In our gospel today we have the story of Jesus being brought to the temple 40 days after his birth to celebrate the ritual of presentation. It was a symbolic gesture indicating that a first child is being presented back to God in thanksgiving. If Mary and Joseph would have been of better means, they would have brought a lamb as a sacrifice. But, because they were poor, they brought two turtle doves instead. And Simeon, an old,

righteous, and holy man, symbolically received into his arms what was being presented by Mary and Joseph. And Simeon, through the power of the Holy Spirit, came to know that this was the long-awaited Messiah.

Mary and Joseph are an example for us of humility and obedience. Even though their child was the Son of God, they did not flaunt their special roles and expect special treatment. And in this way they show us how to teach our children by how they taught Jesus. As parents we are called to be the first teachers of our children. Our homes are considered to be domestic churches. This is what the Catechism says about the Christian family: **“The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*.’ It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament. The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father’s work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task. The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members’ respect for one another. The family is a *privileged community* called to achieve a ‘sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children’s upbringing.’”**

Does this sound like your family? Is your family a community of faith, hope, and charity? Is it an image of the love and communion shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Is there daily prayer and Bible reading to strengthen charity and lead to peace? Do family members respect one another? Do parents eagerly cooperate in the children’s physical and spiritual upbringing? As we come to the end of this year, it might be a good time for us all to reflect on some resolutions that will bring our families more in line with these ideals spelled out in the Catechism; the Catechism that the Church has provided to us as a guide. It is good to think about how we can be better ministers in the domestic church we call home.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**