

Pope Benedict teaches us something about the family

He says it is a necessary good for people

For couples

And for children

It is an institution between individuals and society

Where we as individuals learn how to live in society

It is where we learn to give and receive love

A school where we learn and grow in humanity

And God has given us the family in His image and likeness

God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

A family in itself

Perfect in every way

And the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph

A human family

One that had its trials and its blessings

A family that can offer us guidance

In our individual family life

And as a parish family

In our reading from Sirach we see qualities of a family

These writings point to the past

To ways of living that have brought blessings on people

And they point to the future

That if the people that have lost their way would return to the Lord

They will be blessed once more

And these writings, from the earliest moments of human civilization

Speak to family life today

To what it takes to live in harmony

As a family, as a parish or as society

Respect and obedience of children, even as adults, for their parents

The mother's authority over the children

Honoring our parents in advanced age

And parents honoring and respecting their children

These lessons are not about power and authority

They are about love, honor and respect

A two way street every one of us walks

A way of life our psalm speaks of as well

Blessed are those who fear the Lord

And walk in his ways

None of this is meant to be easy

In fact, living these commands of God can be very difficult

St. Paul tells us we are God's chosen ones

And we are called to live this

Having compassion

Kindness, gentleness and patience

Bearing with one another

Forgiving as the Lord has forgiven us

Letting the peace of Christ guide our hearts

All of these virtues are relational

And they require great sacrifice

We are called to live family life in light of God's family

With the peace of Christ and the love of Christ as our guide

It is not an easy thing to do

But it is possible

Not by human resources alone

But by God's grace

Like all things, there has to be an order in family life

There has to be direction

The order is all about relationship

We used to see this as kind of a pyramid

The head sits at top

Gives orders

And expects all to follow

this was a reflection of how we saw God, family or the church

Authority at the top

Those that obey in various aspects below

But John Paul gave us a different view

It is relational

Concentric circles

God beyond all

Whether you look at God, the Church or family life

Respect and honor being given to the head

Respect and honor being shown to all

Each having their own specific areas of activity

And at the same time, an interaction built not on the law

But on honor and respect for the other

This understanding gives the last paragraph of our 2nd reading a new understanding

One the Holy Family knew well

Because it is with this understanding we see the role of the family

Joseph was not the father because he was the greatest

In fact, objectively he was the least

Mary was immaculately conceived

She had no trace of sin

Jesus was divine as well as human

True God and true man

Yet Joseph was chosen to be the father of this family

And in this role he honored and obeyed

He is the head of the Holy Family

And the Holy Family is our model

The family today is under attack in so many ways

The role of the parents is attacked by our culture

In movies children are often seen as the wise ones

Showing their parents the path

Unborn children are often seen as a problem

Or something that might be in the way of our fulfillment

And we don't have to go far to see where a particular parent has failed

We see it in the family

We see it in the society

We see it in the church

And we know that this is not the first time in history these things have occurred

The family was under attack at the time of Sirach

And at the time of Paul

Otherwise they would not have written these lines

They are a direct response to concrete situations in their day

So it is nothing new

And neither is the medicine

The restoration to the health of the family is the Holy Family

Their example and intercession

They faced everything we face

They did not have an easy life

But they had a holy life

An unexpected pregnancy

A threat of divorce

Mary was 9 months pregnant when they went to Bethlehem

75 miles on the back of a donkey

Over mountains on dangerous roads

Not allowed into the hotel

Giving birth in a stable

Surrounded by the dirt and animals

Dried hay for bedding

Forced to escape by night to save the baby from a jealous king

Losing a child in a crowd

Joseph providing shelter and food by the work of his hands

Teaching the child Jesus the family trade

Mary doing her part, the role of a mom at the time

Cooking, cleaning, instructing the child

For 30 years

Not a glamorous life

But a real life

Similar to ours in so many ways

They are the Holy Family because of their divine son

But even more so because of their holy lives

Taking on all the challenges life presented

The son honoring and respecting the mother and father

The mother and father honoring and respecting the son

All of them observing and practicing their religious traditions

Their obligations

Growing in wisdom and honor

Before God and man

Not a life of extraordinary events all the time

Not a life of one miracle after another

But a life of ordinary things

Ordinary things done extraordinarily well

Ordinary things done with extraordinary love, devotion and gratitude

Following the example of the Holy Family

We too are called to become holy

Not despite all the challenges of everyday life

Not despite the craziness of ordinary life

Not despite the busyness of our everyday life

But through these things

And through everything else

Our families become little holy families

Where we find salvation

Where the world finds salvation