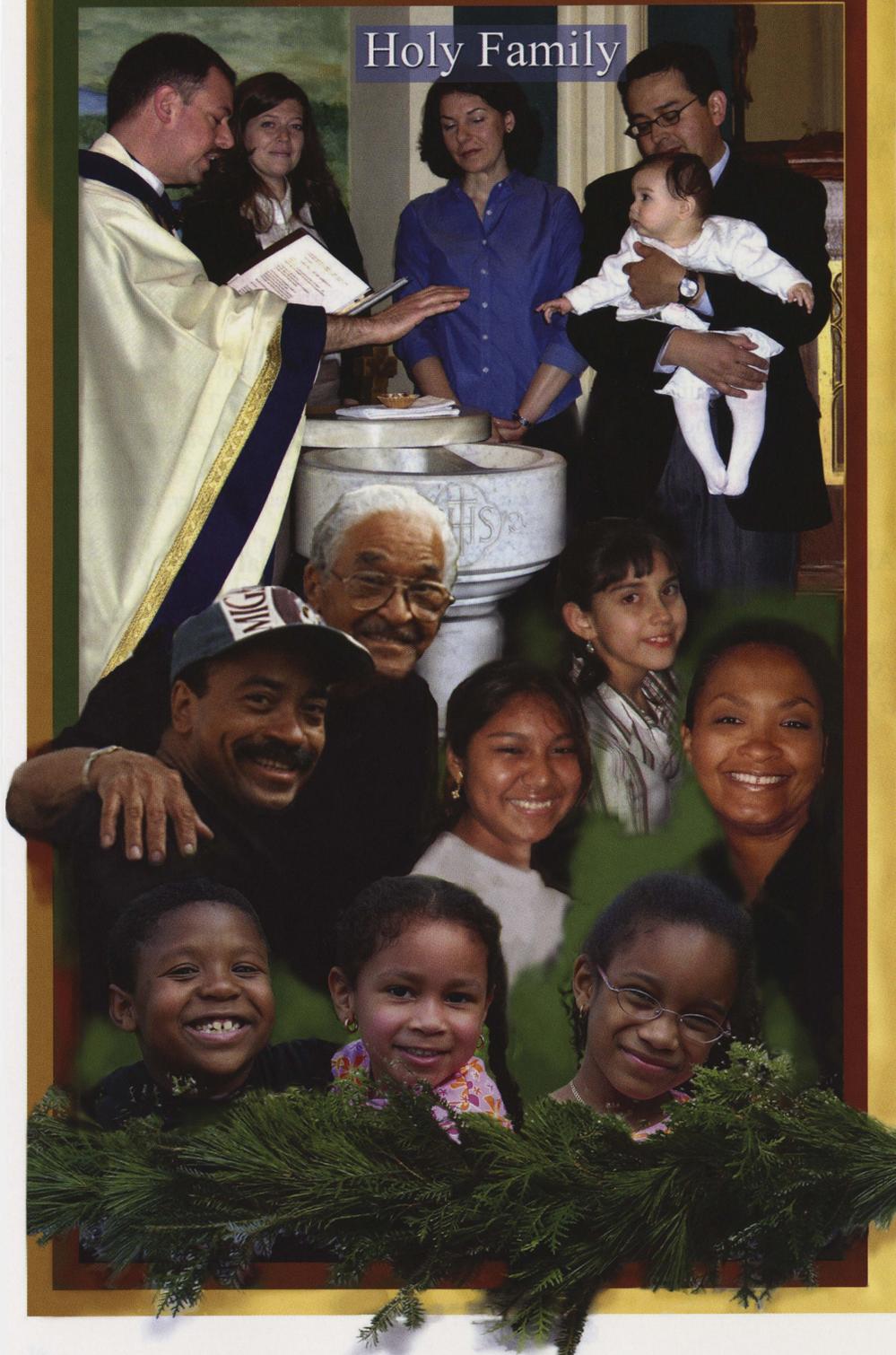
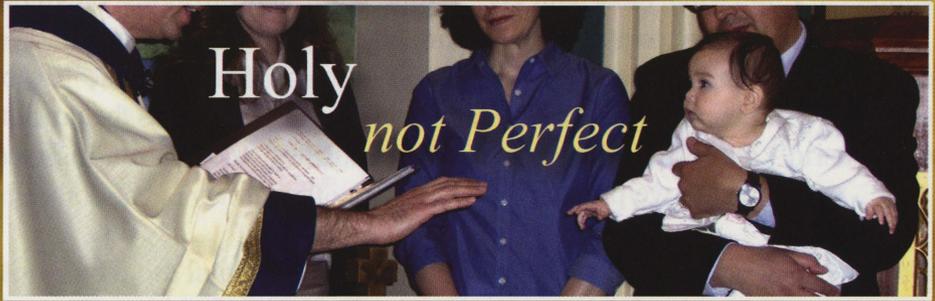


Holy Family





FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Cycle B

Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:22-40

GATHERING

(An unlit Christmas candle and figures of the holy family from a Nativity set are arranged on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place. As members arrive, they place the family photograph they have brought with them on the table.)

This week's scriptures invite us to reflect on the lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and to ponder how we are imitating them in our day-to-day family life. Last week we reflected on Mary's trust in God's promise and the need for deepened trust in our own lives. How did your life witness to trust during your celebration of Christmas this year? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. Members join in singing, "Once In Royal David's City." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the community dwells for some time in quiet reflection. The leader then prays as follows on behalf of all.)

Leader: Loving God, you created the earth and all living creatures. We are part of the larger family of creation and we are blessed. On this day we reflect on how you blessed home life by becoming part of the family of Nazareth. Give us the grace to learn from the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In Jesus' name, we pray.

All: Amen.

Focus Question

What holds your family together?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

Following the calls to honor God, to reverence the holy name and to observe Sabbath, the fourth commandment proclaims the honor due to our parents. Just after the claims that God has on us, and before all else, we owe respect to and care for mother and father. Even in the midst of the struggles of family life, Paul reminds us to live lives of “heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience....” The call to exercise these virtues, of course, also extends beyond our immediate families to all of our brothers and sisters and to all of God’s creation, this home we call earth.

Mary and Joseph made a home for Jesus and he “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” It is a special image of a special family. We know, of course, that family and home are not the same for everyone; families come in different sizes and different shapes. Healthy two-parent and single-parent families experience some of the same blessings and challenges of relating. Even the holy family had mis-

understandings and difficulties: at one point they were immigrants in a strange country; the parents suffered the son being lost; Mary was eventually left a widow. The family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph was holy, if not always perfect. It can be the same for us, for our families. The desire to make it through together is always there. Families come together to celebrate Christmas and other holidays even in spite of difficulties.

More and more families seem to find themselves caring for a family member who suffers with dementia. The loved one may make the same statement or ask the same question over and over. It is a challenge sometimes to respond with grace. But then witness the ancient sensitivity of Sirach. For us in our time, it is a matter of reminding ourselves that just as we slow down for children and move sometimes at their pace, so too, do we need to slow down for parents or other elders who are no longer as agile in mind or body as they used to be.

Observing the law, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. While they were there, Simeon and Anna recognized God's grace at work in this family. Elderly, and faithful to temple service, they received the gift of a lifetime in this encounter. It was a vision of the promise Jesus was meant to be, but also of the suffering that would be entailed. What anticipated grief Mary and Joseph must have felt that this child's life would also be a sign of contradiction.

It may happen on different levels than that of Joseph and Mary, but is it not also the story of many parents who must watch the lives of their own children unfold in confusing and confounding ways, that their hearts are also pierced with sorrow because they are not able to do anything about it? Might it be the same with God who watches his children abuse each other and the earth home he has made for us all?

Family is about relationships. As we celebrate this feast, let us more consciously appreciate our relationships in family, parish community and the larger world. May we live more generous lives in "bearing with one another and forgiving one another."

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ When has meeting a family difficulty or challenge strengthened your family?

- ◆ How do members of your family express their love for one another?
- ◆ How has this small Christian community become like family for you?
- ◆ What can you do to reach out to the larger family of our world – the poor, endangered animals, the earth?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ The Catholic Worker supports families in need. Call the Catholic Worker House in your area to see how you can help.
- ◆ *Go green* in your home by turning off the water when you brush your teeth and taking cooler, shorter showers as well as turning off lights when they are not in use.
- ◆ Propose to your parish liturgy committee that families, not just individuals, greet parishioners as they enter the worship space for liturgy.
- ◆ Join with other small Christian communities to sponsor a family game night at your parish.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

*(The leader invites members to some minutes of silent reflection about how they might yet more fully show their love for their immediate family, the parish family or our global family. A selection of **instrumental music** is played. When the music is complete, members are invited to share as they will. When all have had the opportunity to speak, the community prays as follows.*

Leader: Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
 who walks in his ways!
 For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
 blessed shall you be, and favored.

All: Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Leader: Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
your children like olive plants
around your table.

All: Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Leader: Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the LORD.
The LORD bless you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

All: Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

Leader: God of grace and destiny, you nourish us as your family with
amazing grace. You love us to holiness even when we are not
perfect. Thank you for the life of the holy family.

We give you thanks for the year that has been. Prepare us for
the year ahead. Help us to walk with you, hand in hand, caring
for members of our immediate family, our parish community
and all of your creation. Lead us in our creation of home as
we journey home to you. In Jesus' name, we pray.

All: Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)