

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH



Families

God our Father,
we first encounter you in the love of
our families,
and we give thanks for those who have
loved us.
Yet no earthly family is perfect.
All need your grace.
We pray especially for struggling families:

for single-parent households,
for absent parents and their children,
for grandparents raising grandchildren,
for foster parents and for orphans,
and for those with no one left to care for them.
Bring us into your one eternal family,
a family filled with your peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 29, 2019

Perfecting our Bonds



Today's Readings: Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14; Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5; Colossians 3:12–21 or 3:12–17; Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23. Today we reflect on the many meanings of *family*. Our first reading elaborates on the Fourth Commandment: “Honor your father and mother.” In cultures that prize youthfulness and autonomy, the aged seem like burdens or even reminders of our mortality. This passage enjoins us to respect and treasure our parents and elders. Acting otherwise offends our heavenly Father.

Joseph and Mary modeled the holiness God wanted for his people. Jesus’ parents could not have guided their son in holiness had they themselves not been open to God’s love and guidance. Today we hear especially how Joseph modeled parental love. When his family was in danger, he fled to

a foreign land in order to protect them. By protecting Mary and Jesus, Joseph ultimately protected the much larger family of God.

During his ministry, Jesus formed a new family. This family is open to everyone and is based not on one’s ancestry but on love and faith in Jesus. St. Paul describes the behavior of those who belong to this family in words that are inspiring and heart-warming. Members of God’s family are people of peace and gratitude who treat one another with the same love God has shown them.

Our treatment of both biological and spiritual family members may fall short of the behavior commanded in these readings. We ask one another for forgiveness as we call upon God to strengthen our family bonds.



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 30 The Era of Salvation

Anna tells how a new era of salvation has begun with Jesus. The old world with its deadly vices like anger and pride is passing away. Those who follow Jesus and his life of love become part of God's new world, a world of justice, peace, and mutual love. Today thank someone who has been like Anna to you, teaching you to give thanks to God and to do his will so as to become part of his new world. *Today's Readings: 1 John 2:12–17; Psalm 96:7–8a, 8b–9, 10; Luke 2:36–40.*

Tuesday, December 31 For the World

St. John sometimes uses the term *the world* simply to refer to everyone, but at other times *the world* refers to evil, to hostile elements, and to people who oppose God and his Son. God offers the light of his salvation for all the world, but some people prefer to remain in darkness. Such people might even have been baptized and anointed with the Spirit, professing their belief that Jesus was sent by God to save the world, only to turn away from the truth later. Talk with or pray for someone who has left the Catholic Church. *Today's Readings: 1 John 2:18–21; Psalm 96:1–2, 11–12, 13; John 1:1–18.*

Wednesday, January 1 Mary, the Holy Mother of God

The use of the title Mother of God emerged in the early centuries of the Church during debates about the nature of Jesus. Some theologians claimed that only the human Jesus took flesh in Mary's womb. Others rightly insisted that Jesus wasn't sometimes fully human and at other times fully divine: he was fully divine even while in his mother's womb. Mary is thus the bearer of divinity, the Mother of God. Honor her by praying the Rosary today. *Today's Readings: Numbers 6:22–27; Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8 (2a); Galatians 4:4–7; Luke 2:16–21.*

Thursday, January 2 St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen

The Gospel of John reads like a great courtroom drama in which Jesus is on trial, witnesses are called, and we must ask ourselves who we believe Jesus is. John the Baptist is the first witness to take the stand. John's true testimony about Jesus, the Son, unites him to the Father. Several centuries later Sts. Basil and Gregory also strove to speak truly about who Jesus was at a time when people denied Jesus' full divinity. Take some time today to reflect first on Jesus' divinity and then on his humanity. *Today's Readings: 1 John 2:22–28; Psalm 98:1, 2–3ab, 3cd–4; John 1:19–28.*

Friday, January 3 Lamb of God

John the Baptist continues his testimony, declaring that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Jesus is the Passover lamb who saves people from death, the food of fellowship between God and his people, a lamb sacrificed for our sins, and the triumphant Lamb who now reigns in heaven. He purifies all who believe in him, all who strive to turn away from sin and toward God's love. Write a prayer or draw a picture that honors Jesus, the Lamb of God. *Today's Readings: 1 John 2:29–3:6; Psalm 98:1, 3cd–4, 5–6; John 1:29–34.*

Saturday, January 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Today we celebrate the life of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, who founded the first Catholic school. The First Reading assures us that although we each sin, we are forgiven by God, who dwells with his Church, keeping it pure. When John the Baptist urges his disciples to follow Jesus, the process of forming this purified community begins. The two disciples, soon joined by Peter, stay with Jesus. They will remain with him forever. Imagine that you go to stay with Jesus, too. What do you talk about with him for the rest of that day? *Today's Readings: 1 John 3:7–10; Psalm 98:1, 7–8, 9; John 1:35–42.*

