

Homily. Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Year. C. 29-30 December 2018.

It's my opinion that this Year. C. cycle of readings is the pick of the bunch when celebrating this Feast of the Holy Family. I say this because the 1st reading gave us the story of the unexpected birth of Samuel, an answer to his mother, Hannah's, prayer. When he was old enough she took him to the ancient shrine at Shiloh, offering him over to the Lord's service and placing him under the care of Eli the priest. It was Samuel who would go on to be a great prophet of God, anointing the 1st Kings of Israel who united and led the people of God for the first time as one nation. Samuel's birth and life of service to God pre-figures that of Jesus, and of us.

Our second reading takes the notion of family further. In the 1st letter of St. John we hear that we're all one in God's family, children of God together, made so by the gift of God's loving of us. Only loss of faith, trust and confidence in Jesus, God's beloved Son and our older and wiser brother, and refusal to love each other, can separate us from belonging to this new and universal family. Moreover, St. John says that our hope and destiny is to be united in total oneness with our Lord and each other when we finally come to see God face to face, becoming God-like ourselves. This destiny is assured if we live daily in God's Spirit, believing in Jesus as our Saviour and showing our faith by practicing love according to His example.

Lastly, St. Luke offers us the gospel of every parent's nightmare, the anxiety Mary and Joseph experienced when Jesus went missing. They'd thought He was travelling with the caravan back north to Nazareth. At the

end of a day's journey they realised He wasn't with their relatives and friends or the other teenagers, but lost somewhere in the big city of Jerusalem. Abandoning the group and safety they went back to seek Him, only finding Him 3 days later after much fretting bordering on desperation. As we've heard Mary couldn't understand why their 12 year old son had done this terrible thing to them, with Jesus response not throwing much light on the reasons, either. St. Luke does let us know that this was the last time Jesus ever pulled this trick, realising how much worry He'd caused His parents. We're told that from then on He lived under their authority, a quaint way of saying that He toed the line.

It seems that even the holiest of families weren't excluded from the anxiety, hurt and stress that we experience in our family and community living. What made them holy, a true model for us today, is that they listened to each other, forgave unintended hurts, made good on their promises and trusted God in every situation. Our families, be they in our homes or here in our Church, aren't without their stresses and fears. The choice we have is the same as that made Jesus, Mary and Joseph; to listen hard to each other, to forgive the many small hurts that crop up in our relationships staying focused on honouring our word and commitment to loving service. Governing all of this we pledge to trust God's designs and wisdom no matter what, always with an eye looking out towards our final destiny together in unity and peace. Giving thanks to God for all of the styles and forms our families take today, we ask the Lord in this Mass to make us more like the Holy Family, both in our spirit and our deeds.