



Holy Family

Ecclus.(Sirach) 3:2-6, 12-14 Col. 3:12-21 Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23

There have been wonderful paintings of the Holy Family and most depict a scene of holy calm and deep contemplation. Yet the Gospel today presents a family in crisis. Every day we read of or know of families in crisis. Families thrust into detention centres, those experiencing poverty, homelessness or tragedy.

Joseph is a father, roused from sleep in the middle of the night, his child is threatened with violence, he must move quickly if Mary and Jesus are to be safe. This means a hurried packing of essentials; no time for careful sorting or selecting, no time for prized possessions, just a few things thrown into a bag then on the road.

This kind of uprooting is experienced in families through the chaos caused by death or serious accident. Old securities are torn away and the family have to pick their way through a minefield of emotional and physical disruption.

The second part of the Gospel records the return home. For safety, Joseph, Mary and Jesus must find a new home. They must go to a new place. After a major upheaval there is a return but it is always to a new place. It is impossible to return to where we were prior to the calamity. Even if the physical place is still the same the people are different. The damage always leaves scars.

Our faith helps us to work through the trauma. It doesn't provide short cuts but it enables us to remember the voice of God which speaks in the dark as well as the light.

As the seed waits in the dark soil for the warmth of the sun to reach its cold bed, so we wait on the warmth which will come from the healing power of God that reaches us through family, friends, neighbours and even strangers.

We speak of the "holy" family because the Gospel shows us in this brief fragment that family is the place of possibility; of wholeness, healing and love. When a family fails we are disturbed because this is not the "norm". When we see a family suffering disintegration we all feel a loss. Somehow the fabric of the universe is threatened. We often respond through criticism or help. Even criticism is a sign that we have been disturbed.

Good family experiences provide the stories which nurture the family in times of difficulty. The story telling that is part of Christmas knits up a new pattern in our church story and helps us to look at other families with the eyes of God.

Each generation tries to provide good time for the family and, by developing the virtues of forgiveness, kindness, patience and hospitality it seeks to create a foundation that will last beyond the lifetime of its children.

As Christian people, we try to model the peace of Christ by recalling that family, for us, is broader than the ties of blood and race. This is probably the most demanding thing that Jesus asks of us.

Jesus place of safety was a foreign country- this reminds us that we must keep our family, our groups, our local communities and our country open to the stranger who seeks shelter. This command of hospitality is our greatest legacy from our tradition.

Let the Word of God in all its richness find a home in you this coming new year,

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