

- Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family, and She does so to remind us that family life is one of God's most precious gifts to mankind.
- Perhaps after spending Christmas with your family members some of you beg to differ! It's a sad reality for us priests that we often spend this weekend after Christmas hearing confessions of sins committed against family members!
- But let us not despair, my brothers and sisters. For today's feast day is both a feast of hope, and a feast that challenges us to live our lives within our families in a holy fashion.
- This feast day is a feast of hope because in the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph we see the possibilities for familial bliss. In them we find just how wonderful and well-ordered family life can be.
- Just as we can see the beauty of human perfection in Mary's Immaculate Conception and sinless life lived in perfect accord with God's will, in the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we can see the full beauty of family life lived in perfection.
- Theirs was a life of perfect harmony, a life in perfect accord with the Father's will. But we should note well that this does not mean their family was without suffering.
- As we know from our Gospel story, painful misunderstandings arose even with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Truly, no family suffering escapes suffering, no matter how holy its members may be.
- While following God's will brings us peace, it often entails some amount of suffering, just as it did for the Holy Family. What's notable about the Holy Family is that they faced all of their sufferings with courage and with perfect obedience to God's will.
- In doing so, Jesus, Mary and Joseph show us how to grow in holiness as we order our own families.
- Our first reading speaks to us today of the blessing of children, and the faith we see in Hannah stands in stark contrast to so many in our modern society who view kids as a burden.
- Yet with the blessing of children and growth of a family comes serious responsibility, especially for fathers.
- You see, our earthly parents – especially our fathers – are the first representatives of God in our life. They exercise authority over us in God's stead. This is why we are called to honor, love, and respect them – despite their flaws and failings.
- And because we know God as a *Father*, our earthly fathers have the primary responsibility for teaching us about the nature of God.
- Those of you here who are fathers need to understand how important your vocation is.
- When fathers fail to live up to their God-given responsibilities of protecting, providing for, and educating their children, they inflict not only emotional and psychological wounds upon their children, but spiritual wounds as well.
- Sociological and psychological data shows us that children who grow up fatherless suffer emotional and psychological consequences that make them more prone to crime, poverty, and educational failure.
- But the worst consequences are the spiritual wounds. When fathers fail to live up to their responsibilities, they can distort the image their children have of God the Father, thus impairing their children's relationship with their Heavenly Father.

- Of course domestic bliss doesn't depend solely upon fathers. All members of the family must take on their share of responsibility in maintaining peace and harmony within the home. And this is where we must turn to our second reading.
- St. John reminds us today of the importance of living in a way that proves we are children of God, which means exercising above all else the virtue of charity. But more than just being charitable with one another, there has to be order to our families.
- It is St. Paul who, in his Letter to the Ephesians, describes for us the proper structure of family life, which is modeled on the Church. In short, husbands are called to lead and direct the family as its head, while wives, placing themselves under their husband's leadership and protection, are called to be the heart of the family.
- And the example of Jesus in the Gospel today reminds us that children are to be obedient to their parents in all things, always respectfully trusting in the authority of their parents.
- At the same time parents must make sure to treat their children well, not provoking them or causing them to be discouraged in any way.
- Yet even if our families are properly ordered, true love must govern all of our familial relationships.
- To love someone means that we will, that we desire, what is best for that person. But true love is also sacrificial, meaning that we must be willing to give of ourselves, to sacrifice our own wants and desires, for the sake of those whom we love.
- When it comes to family life, showing love for one another ultimately requires that each family member put aside all selfishness in order to care for the needs of the others.
- In practical terms this means that children should always share with their siblings, giving deference to their brothers and sisters. It also means that kids should be quick to obey their parents without complaint or hassle.
- For parents true familial love requires seeking first the salvation of your children, placing that as the highest good. Not what school they get into, not what team they play for. Nurturing a child's faith and showing him the path to salvation must be paramount!
- This requires that you protect your kids from the evil and harmful influences that are so prevalent in our society, especially in the various forms of media.
- It means that you teach them our Catholic faith, ensuring that your children go to Mass each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation, and that they receive the Sacraments.
- Skipping Mass on a Sunday because your kid has a soccer game just isn't acceptable! Think about what you're teaching your children if you do that!
- So bring your kids to Mass, teach your children to pray, and to love and honor God.
- For spouses, true familial love is best expressed in constantly looking for ways to serve your spouse, caring for their needs above your own. It means praying for and with your spouse. It requires warm affection and a ready forgiveness when necessary.
- Ultimately, true familial love demands that we be willing to undergo any suffering whatsoever to help ensure that our family members go to Heaven. It means that we be willing to die to self for the sake of our family members.
- My dear brothers and sisters, family life is one of God's greatest gifts to us. Let us strive to live it well, not simply for the natural pleasures that can be derived from it, but so that we can better prepare ourselves for eternal life with our heavenly family.