

Sunday Homily

Title Our Extended Family

Date: December 28, 2025

Sunday: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Scripture: Matthew chapter 2:13-15, 19-23

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Text: The novelist Saul Bellow borrowed a line from a Frenchman Joseph Joubert. The line is worth remembering: [：“We owe our lives to acts of love performed before us; love is the eternal debt of our souls.”:] We owe a debt of love to parents and grandparents and to our families who enriched our lives. We pay the debt to those who enhance it now, especially those who are young, whom we hope will carry on the succession of those who love.

Our faith, however, transforms the idea of family. St. Paul explored what the birth of Jesus does to us. He wrote in his letter to the Galatians: “God sent His Son...so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts crying ‘Abba, Father!’ So you are...a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Gal 4:4ff). Paul repeated this insight in his letter to the Romans: “You received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:15-17). He wrote it a third time in his letter to the Ephesians: “In love, [God] destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5). Paul was not the only New Testament author to assert this. In fact, there are fifteen citations in the New Testament that assert we are God’s children. St. John wrote: “To those who did accept [Jesus], he gave power to become children of God.” (John 1:12/13).

This feast of the Holy Family is not just about three people who lived two thousand years ago. I read the Bible for what it does in us. The Feast of the Holy Family celebrates Mary,

Joseph, and Jesus. But because God is Father of all, and Jesus is the brother to all, this feast includes us in God's family, celebrating our adoption as children of God. On this feast, the debt of our souls, the debt of love, expands outward.

This thought has incredible repercussions. New Testament authors understood the challenge of expanding the sense of family. The first Christians were converts from Judaism. The Jewish people divided the world into two parts, Jews and Gentiles. When St. Paul began inviting Gentiles to convert, the Jewish Christians had problems accepting them. Matthew responded. He started his Gospel with Jesus's family tree, the Lord's genealogy. Matthew traces Jesus's bloodline to Abraham through King David. Gentile Christians must have felt their inclusion. They lived in Jesus through baptism and Eucharist. Therefore, Jesus's family tree was their own. And it is our own! Because we live in Jesus through baptism and Eucharist, we are God's children just as Jesus is God's Son.

Matthew had not yet finished re-constructing our divine family. The Magi we celebrate next week are from the East, gentiles, non-believers. They did not know the faith tradition; they had to ask King Herod and his staff about the Messiah. These Magi came from part of the world where Israel's worst enemies came from, from Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. And yet, they recognized Jesus as the Messiah. So, these pagans, nonbelievers joined God's family and are brothers to us.

In today's Gospel, Matthew expands our household in one other way. When Jesus and his family are called out of Egypt, they went to Galilee. Galilee was the first region to be conquered by Israel's enemies. Over the centuries, many of those conquerors stayed in Galilee. Galilee was called pagan Galilee or Galilee of the Gentiles. Matthew himself wrote: "Galilee of

the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light" (4:15/16). People who differed, people of other nations, people of different religions: they are all part of Matthew's version of our extended family in God.

Later in Gospel, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us the repercussions of our divinely extended family. Christians cannot be angry with anyone (5:21) and Christians can have no enemies (5:43). Because we are "children of [the] heavenly Father" who makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, we must love even those who make themselves our enemies (5:43ff).

What, then, does the feast of the Holy Family do to us and in us? It reminds us that we live in Jesus, and therefore our families become part of his family. It reminds us that we are adopted children of God who is creator and Father of all. It reminds us that our divine family extends to the ends of the earth, where wise men from afar might be preparing their pilgrimage. Living in Jesus, we need to reflect on our soul's debt. We must expand our family to include our brother Jesus, his Father our God, and all those who join around the Lord's table: "We owe our lives to acts of love performed before us; love is the eternal debt of our souls."