

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

**The Feast of the Holy Family
of Jesus, Mary and Joseph**

Gospel Word
Matthew 2:13–5,
19–23

Sandwiched between Christmas and New Year's Day is the feast of the Holy Family. It reminds us that family is designed by God to be a primary place where we experience being loved. Being born into a family allows for a very basic human need to be met: that of being connected to other persons. Healthy connection creates the feeling of trust in others, and that trust spills over into every aspect of our lives.

Trust allows us to feel safe. Today's Gospel is about safety. It is about the precarious situation that was faced by Jesus and his family right at the beginning of his life. He came into a world out of love, but right away we are alerted to the reality of danger and evil. We see that the quest and retention of power over others can lead to disaster. Herod stands for all those people who rule over others and want to retain power at all costs. The story of the Holy Innocents and the need for the Holy Family to become refugees on the run shows us this dark side of power that is with us throughout human history.

Recall that Matthew's Gospel is addressed first to Jewish converts to Christianity. He will use his account of the life of Jesus to show that the story began not with the visit of the angel to Mary, but much earlier. It is traced back all the way to the call of Abraham and Sarah to leave the city of Ur and head into unknown territory where God's promise of a greater life will be fulfilled. Then there's the story of Moses who is in Egypt, living among his countrymen, many of whom have been enslaved by the Egyptians. We all know the story of how Moses led them to freedom in the Promised Land. So it should not surprise us to read about Jesus being called to the unknown, living in exile. He was following some of the same paths as did his ancestors in the faith.

-by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

Ask yourself how much the life of the Holy Family is like your own? This is a challenging question only because we have often glorified this family to the point where it is simply "different." We cannot identify with its life, the difficulties it faced and the troubles it experienced. And yet each of us is called on a faith journey and we don't always know where we are going. Life can be very hard at times. We deal with sickness, unpaid bills, and strained relationships with family, friends or coworkers. We have to make difficult choices. Even our cars and iPhones® can make life frazzled. There are times when we feel exiled. But like the Holy Family—in faith, we do what we have to do. We make the best out of limited choices. Somewhere out there might be an imagined idealized world that is free of worry and doubt, free of fear and difficulty. Most people never find that world. Sometimes it is just "one day at a time" for many of us. Every day is not a good day. We can pray to the Holy Family in those difficult times, asking for courage and perseverance. For most of us, our growth in faith is one step at a time—and every once in a while a leap.

One-line Prayer

God of exiles, help those families in our world who worry about their survival and hope to be safe for one more day. Amen.

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The Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Sandwiched between Christmas and New Year's Day is the Feast of the Holy Family. It reminds us that family life is designed by God to be the primary place where we experience being loved. Being born into a family allows for a very basic human need to be met: being connected to other persons. Healthy connection creates the feeling of trust in others, and that trust spills over into every aspect of our lives.

Trust allows us to feel safe. Today's Gospel reading is about safety. It is about the precarious situation that was faced by Jesus and his family at the beginning of his life. He came into the world through love, but right away we are alerted to the reality of danger and evil. We see that the quest and retention of power over others can lead to disaster. Herod represents all those people who rule over others and want to retain their power at all costs. The story of the Holy Innocents and the Holy Family having to become refugees shows us this dark side of power in human history.

A Gospel Word for the Home

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Recall that Matthew's Gospel is addressed first to Jewish converts to Christianity. He will be using his account of the life of Jesus to show that the story began not with the visit of the angel to Mary, but much earlier. It is traced back all the way to the call of Abraham and Sarah to leave the city of Ur and head into unknown territory where God's promise of a greater life will be fulfilled. Then there's the story of Moses who is in Egypt, living among his countrymen, many of whom have been enslaved by the Egyptians. We all know the story of how Moses led them to freedom in the Promised Land.

So it is not a surprise to read about Jesus following some of the same paths as did his ancestors in the faith. The flight into Egypt ensures the survival of Jesus and his family. Just as other events in the life of Jesus, it happens suddenly. It was not a passage booked in advance, but an escape from the tyrant Herod who wanted to protect his position by destroying all who might seek to take his place. That he totally misunderstood the purpose of the promised messiah is beside the point. He is power-hungry (like many others) and the lives of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph suddenly become very threatened and endangered. But they do what they have to do, like many families have had to do to escape political persecution.

Parent Survival

Parents do what they have to do, too. They make the best of limited choices. Somewhere out there might be an imagined idealized world that is free of worry and doubt, free of fear and difficulty. Most families never find that world. Certainly the Holy Family didn't find it either. For those who are active in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), there's a saying that keeps members sober: "One day at a time." Many parents say that as well, more often than they might want.

Family life can be very hard at times. There is sickness to deal with, unpaid bills to face, strained relationships to endure, and let's not forget that aging car that has to make it at least one more year. There are good days (we hope), but that's not the way it is every day. We parents can go to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and find those who know what it is like to be in distress. They felt the dangers associated with survival. They went through it. And when we face it, we can turn to them in prayer.

Car or Meal Talk

Share with your children the story of the flight into Egypt and connect that story with the many families who must flee for their lives in our time. For many families, our world can be a very dangerous place.

-by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

One-Line Prayer

God of Exiles, help those families in our world who worry about their survival, and help them be safe for one more day. Amen.