

Holy Family 2012
Father Frank Matera

Fathers, have you ever said to your children, “why are you doing this to your mother and me?” Mothers, have you ever said to your children, “why are you doing this to your father and me?” And children, have you ever said to your mother and father, “you don’t understand me. You never understand me.”

If these kinds of conversation occur in your family—and I would be surprised if they did not—then your family is very similar to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, as portrayed in today’s gospel. Mary asks Jesus, “Why have you done this to your father and me? And Jesus responds, “Why were you looking for me. Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Like every family, there were misunderstandings in the family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. There were misunderstandings that required Mary and Joseph to ponder and reflect about their extraordinary child. There were misunderstandings that required Jesus to be obedient to Mary and Joseph, even though he was the Son of God. There were misunderstandings as Jesus grew in wisdom and age.

This feast of the Holy Family, then, provides us with an occasion to reflect on contemporary family life in light of our Christian faith. And it provides me with an opportunity to address each of you, children and parents, in a direct and concrete way.

First of all, I want to talk to the young people of the parish, especially those of you who are teens, or will soon be teens. It is not easy to be a teenager today given all challenges and temptations you face. The greatest challenge you face—it seems to me—is the pressure that comes from your peers: that pressure to do what the crowd wants you to do rather than what you know you ought to do. When you follow the crowd, you begin to feel at odds with your family. When you follow the crowd, you do things you know are wrong.

So here is my advice. Choose your friends carefully. Don’t worry about how many friends you have. Don’t worry if people “unfriend” you. Just be sure that you have friends who will support you in doing the right thing. Remember this, and you will never go wrong: *If something is wrong, it is wrong no matter how many people do it; and if something is right, it is right even if you are the only one who does it.*

Mothers and fathers, although I do not have a family of my own, I have listened to you, and I realize how challenging it is for you to raise a family. Some of you are single moms or single dads. Some of you find yourself in very difficult circumstances. Others of you are having a tough time raising your children. My word of advice to you is word of encouragement. *Keep doing what you are doing. Do not grow discouraged. Your growth in Christian holiness comes from being a good spouse, a good mother, a good father.* Your way to heroic sanctity is the way of family life. Your spirituality is the spirituality of family life. If you make mistakes, and you undoubtedly will, acknowledge them and move on, but do not become discouraged.

Finally, I want to say something to you who do not have your own family. Some of you are young singles. Others of you are older. With all this talk about the family, you may be wondering where you fit in today. But you do fit it, and you do play an important role. For, even though you do not have your own family, you can and must support the families of others. By your volunteer work in the community and the church, you can be fathers and mothers to children in need of guidance. By being attentive to our children, you can be the brother and sister they have never had. Because family life is so important for our life together, let us pray for each other and for our families.

Jesus, Son of God, you chose to live in a family like our own. We ask you to bless and watch over our families this day. Our families are fragile and in need of your care, for we often fail in our duties as children and parents. Give our children the grace to grow in wisdom and age as you did. Give our parents the wisdom to understand the needs of their children as Mary and Joseph did. Watch over and bless the mothers, the fathers, and especially the children of our families. Grant each of us the grace to grow in wisdom, age, and favor before God. Amen.