

Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family

December 31, 2017

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My Dear Friends:

Today we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family, a feast that used to be celebrated during the octave of the epiphany. Because the Church is very much a family-oriented feast, renewed liturgy moved it closer to Christmas so that it now occurs on the Sunday between Christmas and New years.

A document of the Second Vatican Council says that the family is the foundation of society. It does not say that the democratic state is the foundation, nor the school, or the market place or the stock market. It didn't say that law and order was the foundation – but it did say that the family is the foundation of society.

What they were saying was “as the family goes so goes the world”. When the family is strong and loving, the world is strong and loving. When the family is weak and disorganized or falling apart, the world is that way too. When there is trust and loyalty and care between parents and their children, there is always high hope and the high possibility of that spreading beyond the home to the neighborhood, the country and to the world.

When speaking about families in this way we must be very careful not to imply criticism of families who do have problems. Most families have some problems. But many families have problems that are not of their own making and are the fault of no particular persons. As a matter of fact, many families are leading heroic lives in difficult situations – because many families are the victims of the evils in our society. There are many anti-family forces at work today. The extent of these evils is so vast it is impossible to exaggerate them. A very permissive society has done untold harm to traditional moral values and family life.

We could go on and on with facts and figures but the fact remains that any initiative to better things must begin in our homes to the extent that that is possible. God never calls us to do the impossible – but we know that a strong family life is his will for us. Of course, we are well aware that there is not a great deal that an individual can do – but here are some things that are very possible – because we do remain in charge of our inner lives. We can decide that people are more important than things. We can decide that families are worth more than careers. We can decide that we are more than consumers. We can decide that our children will be raised by us and not by their peers and their culture. We can decide that we have values worth handing on to our children; and that they would be better people for having them. We can decide that we are worth spending time with; and that our children would benefit by our presence. Or we can just sit back and let society make those decisions for us.

This family feast gives us much to think about – much to reflect on and maybe even move us to initiate a few changes. Today's feast is also an occasion to celebrate “the family”, helping us to recognize, appreciate and evaluate the treasure that is “family”. I would like to end with a little anecdote about “family”, an anecdote that says more than a thousand words. A lawyer lived a considerable distance from her elderly widowed father. Months had passed since they had been together and when her father called to ask when she might come for a visit, the

daughter detailed a list of reason that really prevented her from coming very soon e.g. a court schedule, meetings, new clients research etc. At the end of her recitation the father asked, "When I die will you come to my funeral?" The daughter answered. "Oh Dad. I am shocked – I can't believe that you would say such a thing! Of course, I'll come to the funeral!" And the father replied, "Good. Forget the funeral and come; I need you more now than I will then."