

FAMILY LIFE: FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY (A)

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Pictures and statues of the holy family of Nazareth may lead us to think that the family life of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus compared with our own, was picture perfect. In their simple but immaculate home, there was a place for everything and everything in its place. Joseph, Mary and Jesus seem so calm and peaceful and unruffled. They look like they never had an argument, a disagreement, or a misunderstanding. They didn't seem to have any money worries or any fears for their safety or anything else.

Fortunately the gospel stories about the childhood of Jesus tell us something quite different and bring us down to earth with a thud. This is particularly true of today's story from Matthew about the Flight into Egypt of those three asylum seekers, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Many of you are parents. Some of you may have been asylum seekers and homeless refugees, fleeing from murderous tyrants and threat of persecution. Some of you may have even seen members of your own family killed before your eyes. More than the rest of us, you may have shared in the anguish of the Family of Nazareth, forced to flee out of fear for their lives by the actions of murderous King Herod.

When I focus on the details of what Matthew actually tells us in his stories of the child Jesus, and when I read the bits between the lines, I can feel quite close to the Holy Family of Nazareth. They are real people, after all. They had their ups and downs as a family, just like your family and mine. They had their problems, they had their struggles, and they had their challenges. Just like your family and mine!. But they survived as a family. They survived, because there was enough love, enough acceptance, and enough forgiveness left to go round, and enough respect for both God and one another.

Let me tell you about how one particular family, a long way from here, who faced a real challenge which came their way. The mother in the family has written about it and is letting me quote her actual words. She says:

Our youngest daughter became pregnant (out of wedlock) and for our family this last twelve months was make-or-break time, emotionally, physically and faith-wise. But with God's help and

grace we have all come through this crisis in one piece. From anger to acceptance! From disappointment to unconditional love! From betrayal to peace! From hurt to holding this precious baby, the joy of all our lives now! God certainly moves in mysterious ways, and while this is not how we wanted to have our grandchildren, this little child of God is loved by us all.

So even in hardship love can flourish. It will flourish when we take the advice from our Second Reading and treat each other with kindness, gentleness, patience, compassion, forgiveness and respect.