

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sunday in the Octave of Christmas:  
The Feast of the Holy Family  
December 28, 2014

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Holy Church is our teacher. On Christmas Eve she gives us Saint Luke's lovely story of the birth of Christ. This is the story you know by heart. Over the centuries this narrative has provided the basis of countless expressions of faith in everything from lyric opera to school nativity plays. But that is only the beginning of our instruction.

On Christmas Day itself we get Saint John's *Prologue*. "The Word was God and the Word was made flesh." This is a different approach to the same Truth. No one makes a stage or concert piece out of John's *Prologue*! It is what we might call the "theological impact statement!" Then for the next three days we have examples of personal witness to Christ. These commemorations show theory put into action in a variety of ways, one of which will be the life you and I will emulate. *Witness* is the English word for the Greek *martyr*, and on three successive days we are presented with Saint Stephen, a martyr in will and deed, Saint John the Evangelist, a martyr in will but not in deed, and the Holy Innocents, martyrs not in will but in deed. These holy days after Christmas Day show us what St John's Gospel has just told us in the *Prologue*: the world does not know who Christ is, but anyone who *does* accept Him He empowers to become the child of God.

That brings us to today, the Sunday in the Octave of Christmas, The Feast of the Holy Family. The Church reminds us the Saviour was born into a family as a sign the family is the basic unit not just in society but first also in Heaven. Love does not exist in a vacuum. *There must be someone to love*. And so it is unimaginable that Perfect Love which is expressed eternally in the Holy Trinity would come into His created order and not have the love of family.

Forty-five years ago in a document of the Second Vatican Council called *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church already saw great dangers assaulting the dignity and integrity of the human family. The dangers were named: divorce, free love, and contraceptive devices. The Church saw the world economic, social, and civil climate as severely disruptive and hostile of family life. And is there anyone who believes things have become better for family life in the past four decades?

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Whether we live alone or not, the family is our *first school of holiness*. Very few souls are baptized and placed on a deserted south seas island! Almighty God places us in a family. The family is the first place a child has opportunity to put into practice the faith he is learning to profess. Later on we have opportunity to do this in an ever-wider forum. But it all begins in the same way as it did for our Lord Jesus when “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

The Feast of the Holy Family does not promote an idyllic scene at Bethlehem in contrast to our own family trials and tribulations. The Gospel tells us what the secular world does not: disruptions to family life, birth in emergency and crude circumstances, the killing of babies, refugees in a foreign land, the parents’ pangs of knowing they could not keep their child to themselves forever but must share Him with the whole world, and the widowhood of a young mother. When did you ever see those things portrayed in the Hallmark store or the windows at Macy’s?

Family was important to God Incarnate. When Jesus grew up there were so many things in His teaching that were put into the form of parables on family life. In Christ’s teaching Almighty God was making known to us the mysteries of His love. These stories are not for our entertainment. They are *parables we must enact*. That is why the Lord’s teaching is so powerful many people reject it. A demand is placed upon us. Jesus gives us the friendship of the Holy Trinity in a way that makes it hard for us to worship Him as Divine Love if we are being false to the human family around us.

By His wonderful birth at Bethlehem, Our Blessed Lord has sanctified the life of the home. He intends the family to be the first place we grow in the knowledge and practice of His love, for the fulfilling of His law that we share one another’s burdens.