

How to have holy families

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
or Colossians 3:12-21
Psalm 128:1-5
Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

The scriptures for this Feast Day instruct us on how to have holy families. The reading from Sirach tells children (young and old)

to "honor" and "revere" their parents, to be considerate of them when they get old and feeble and to be kind to them even if they fail to love us well. It does *not* say that we have to obey our parents *all* the time. This scripture never uses the word "obey".

We are to only obey God, and if a parent instructs us to do what God wants us to do (as in the responsorial Psalm), then by obeying Mom or Dad, we're obeying God, but if a parent disobeys God, we are not to follow him or her into sin. We can honor and revere our parents by respecting their personhood even while refusing to cooperate with their sins.

The reading from Colossians instructs us to "put on love, the bond of perfection", and to make sure that the peace of Christ controls our hearts. How? Saint Francis de Sales put it this way: "Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset."

Verse 18 is *not* saying that wives should do this by obeying their husbands as if in a child-father relationship. To understand this scripture, replace the word "subordinate" or "submit" with "accept his loving protection". God has put the husband in charge of providing protection for the family (which is why in the Gospel reading it's Joseph, not Mary, who was given the dream). This in-



cludes spiritual protection, teaching holiness and leading the family to heaven. In other words: The husband is in charge of providing God's radical love to the family.

Notice that the husband is commanded to love his wife. Why isn't the wife told to love her husband? Because by nature she's a nurturer and a care-giver. But the man, created to protect, is by nature a warrior. To be holy, the husband overcomes his innate urge to protect himself so that he can make loving sacrifices to protect his family – just like Jesus.

When a wife submits herself to the protection of her husband, if he is being the man whom God created him to be, she is placing herself into God's protection. And the husband is giving her Christ's radical love.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. Which of your family relationships needs to become holier?
2. How does the husband's protective nature imitate Christ?
3. How does submission to this protection nurture the marriage?
4. How is this similarly played out in a priest's relationship with his parish?