

*Every year, except when Christmas falls on Sunday, the Sunday immediately after Christmas is celebrated as the Feast of the Holy Family. The Holy Family is a great blessing for us, because it is a living window through which we can glimpse what it means to live as a child of God, and because it reminds us that we too are now members of God's Holy Family. Through our Baptism in the Holy Trinity, we have been adopted by God as his very own children, and He calls us to become ever more like his only begotten Son, Jesus, now made incarnate and given to us at his Nativity.*

*The Holy Family is also a gift from God because it reveals to us in a living parable the plan that our Father in Heaven has for our happiness. From the beginning God revealed marriage and the family as his plan for our life in God. Though Jesus is in his inner Person the Divine Son of God He is still expected to live his life as a member of the family in which He was conceived, born, and raised.*

*It is a mystery of God's holy will that Mary conceived Jesus in her womb without the participation of her husband or any man; for the holy Child was conceived in her by the power of the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. God blessed Mary with a husband, Joseph, who was humble enough to accept God's mysterious will regarding the conception of the Child and to accept his own part in serving Mary as husband and Jesus as father. Joseph loved Jesus as his own child.*

*How often must Mary and Joseph have puzzled at Jesus and his ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. We get a glimpse today in that incident when Jesus accompanied his family to the Temple. Perhaps Jesus also experienced on that pilgrimage what Jewish boys experience in their bar mitzvah, or for girls in liberal Jewish congregations, their bat mitzvah. It is the time when the child enters into adulthood and begins to assume his own responsibility for studying the Word of God, for understanding what God commands us to do, for participating in family life, in the world of human labor, and in society, and for doing the will of God in his own life.*

*As Jesus begins to take his proper place among his people as the One sent by God, we notice how He also understands that his Father in Heaven expects Him to obey his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, and without resisting or arguing with them, He quickly obeys them and goes home.*

*Unlike the prophet Samuel, whom his mother dedicated to the service of the Lord and left him with the priest Eli, Jesus spent his childhood and early manhood living and working with his parents in Nazareth. The Holy Family is unique in that Mary was a virgin, perfectly and completely dedicated to the will of God, and yet who accepted to live the life of a mother and wife.*

*Joseph, while being a devout and healthy Jewish man, accepted to live with his wife as a brother with his sister. Joseph knew the gift Mary had made of herself as a virgin, so that God might send the Messiah more quickly to his people and have mercy on them. Once he also understood that it was the Holy Spirit of God who had conceived Jesus in Mary's womb, Joseph sensed the presence of God in Mary, and was deeply moved to honor the divine presence.*

*Joseph was glad to love Mary as a brother loves his sister and he found fulfillment in laying down his life for love of her and of Jesus. There was never a more loving, tender, and devoted husband for his wife, nor father for his child. On her part, Mary deeply loved Joseph for the good man he was, and his willingness to support her in the vocation and mission God had given her to conceive, bear, and raise his only begotten Son as a man.*

*While the perfection of love that was lived out in the Holy Family can and does inspire us, it can also leave us feeling at times inadequate, remembering our sinful condition and mortal human nature. How can we ever get over our imperfection and find the freedom to live our life as fully as we can and follow Jesus with trust and without fear?*

*Pope Paul VI referred to the Holy Family as the Nazareth School of Life. He invited every Catholic to enrol in that school and learn all we can from contemplating Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in their family life. In reflecting on the Holy Family at the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960's the bishops of the Catholic Church pointed out the important role God assigns each member of the family. God calls on each family to be open to the value of each family member and to receive the participation of each one.*

*The road to happiness lies ahead of each of us, and Jesus continually calls us to follow Him on that road. It is not a road without suffering or great effort. Jesus said we must accept to carry the cross to follow Him. Jesus sent out his apostles and disciples two by two, fully intending them to experience the mutual love and support that the Father intends for every human being to*

*experience in their family of origin. God knows we cannot live life alone, nor come to happiness or fulfillment in isolation. If our life is to bear much fruit, as Jesus commanded us to do, then we must walk in the path He shows us.*

*In the face of the many challenges caused by the overabundance in our affluent society and our perennial human inclination to look after our own interests, marriages and families sadly experience obstacles and at times find it necessary to live out variations on this theme of the family. Without a doubt, God remains for them a loving Father and offers them the help He thinks it best to send them. Still, God has not changed his plan for the human marriage of one man and one woman for life, or for the family, in which children receive what they need to become fully human from the complementarity of a mother and father and their parents' mutual love.*

*What is it that God intends for the members of a family to give each other, and how do they develop more fully as human persons before God through the ways in which they accept to give of themselves for love of the other family members?*

*The husband and wife as parents provide their children, both boys and girls, with a full and complementary set of human traits by virtue of the complementary differences invested in them by God. Our Creator designed the family around the husband and wife as parents so that the children might take their cues for their own development from both their father and mother.*

*All men have doubts regarding their own adequacy as men and also as fathers, and when a man looks into his wife's eyes, he needs to see in her love and respect for him a reflection of the man he is called to be and her heartfelt encouragement for him to continue working out his own realization by serving her and being a stable and loving presence to their children.*

*All women have doubts regarding their own adequacy as women and also as mothers, and when a woman looks into her husband's eyes, she needs to see in his love for her how much he respects her for who she is and cherishes her for her respect, love, and encouragement of him, for abundant feminine gifts, and for her generosity in nurturing his life and the lives of their children.*

*Girls have in their mother a model of womanhood and in the love and respect shown their mother by their father that model is validated and made desirable in their eyes. Similarly, boys have in their father a model of manhood*

*and in the love and encouragement shown their father by their mother that model is validated and made desirable in their eyes.*

*Children are called by God to discover the value of their own life by showing respect and gratitude to their parents, and obeying them as they guide their behaviour and formation. Children of all ages contribute richly to the life and culture of their family and to the fruitfulness, fulfillment, and happiness of their parents by participating actively in their family activities and home life under the guidance and supervision of their parents.*

*Parents form their children for labor and for life in society and in the world and children first learn to hone their social skills and willingness to respect and appreciate others by relating to their siblings with love and respect and accepting to make room for them and share in activities with them in and out of the home.*

*Whenever anyone in the family, first and foremost the parents, insist too much on their own preferences and neglect the needs and dignity of the others in the family, they impose a heavier burden on everyone by not contributing in an equitable way by their presence, participation, love and respect of others.*

*The good news is that each family member, first and foremost the parents, but also each of the children, make a valuable contribution to the life and activity of their family and their home by their faithful presence, generous activity, enthusiastic participation, and joyful gratitude. Both parents and children become an even greater blessing for each other by their generous and loving daily prayers for the rest of the family.*

*No matter how imperfect we may find ourselves to be, and no matter how fragmented we may consider our family or marriage, it is never too late to appeal to God to help us make a generous contribution by our love and generous participation, and by our willingness to forgive.*

*As we celebrate with joy this Feast of the Holy Family we can reflect this week on the following question.*

What are some ways I have obeyed and shown my gratitude to my parents and if married to my spouse this past week?

How might I better obey and show my gratitude to my parents and if married to my spouse this coming week?