

HOLY FAMILY 2020
Gen 15:1-6; 21:1-3
Heb 11:8; 11-12; 17-19
Lk 2:22; 39-40

Today the Church honours the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus in order to point out to God's faithful that the modern western attitude that freedom requires we must not depend on anything or anyone including God, is absolute nonsense.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose power over love. Power and control makes demands on others, while its opposite, love, shares with others. Love requires commitment and fear of that is paralysing western culture. In his book, 'The Day is Far Spent,' Cardinal Sarah believes this fear is the root of the crisis of marriage as an institution in society as well as the crisis in vocations to ministry in the Church.

When God made an illogical promise to Adam and Sarah they trusted him. Abraham had no heir but God promised that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky. Sarah was an old woman but God promised that she would give birth to a son.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, faith is considered to be a positive human response to a message from God. This being so, faith is forward looking because as for Abraham and Sarah, promises are in the future. Faith is closely linked to hope that the future promise will be realised. It is also linked to patience or endurance because tenacity is required to hold on to the end. Faith requires us to hear, listen, accept, acknowledge and to endure in our interactions with God. We don't discover what God's will is for us and then choose to obey it or not. We choose to be open to God's will and only then will we know what the first step is. Once we have taken the first step, the next will be revealed.

Mary and Joseph were open to God's will, and despite the possibilities for adverse consequences within the Jewish community for both of them, they followed God's will. Mary and Joseph were faithful observant Jews. They were also obedient to the Law of Moses. Thirty-three days after Jesus was circumcised, Mary went to the Temple to undertake the purification rites following childbirth, and because Jesus was a first-born son, he was presented to God. In previous times this is how the priesthood was recruited, but as the priesthood now belonged to the Levites, the son was ransomed by the offering of a sacrifice. No such sacrifice was offered as a ransom for Jesus. Mary and her kinswoman Elizabeth were of the house of Aaron the high priest, so without a ransom, Jesus belonged to, and was dedicated to the service of God, just as Samuel was. This is why later on as a twelve-year-old he was found in the Temple going about his Father's business.

Between his Presentation in the Temple and the beginnings of his adult ministry, we read how Mary, Joseph and Jesus honoured God and each other. Mary and Joseph honoured Jesus despite not fully understanding his relationship with his heavenly Father. Jesus honoured his mother and Joseph by learning from them and being obedient to them. In their care and protection, Jesus grew physically, in wisdom and learning and in social skills as

well as in spiritual maturity. God's favour rested on him and as he died, he showed care for his mother by handing her into the care of St John and the Church.

The Holy Family is the model of family life and human relationships that God has given us. It is in these relationships that we lay the foundations for our own physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. If any of these are missing or distorted then our lives will be skewed.

We honour the Holy Family and give thanks that Pope Francis has dedicated next year as the Year of St Joseph.

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