

December 31, 2006

Feast of the Holy Family

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Good morning. Today, as we said in the beginning, is the Feast of the Holy Family and all of us are part of family, so don't dismiss yourself from this homily if you say you don't have a regular typical family. There is no such thing as a regular, typical family now days anyway, correct? You know, we are all children of parents, we all came from somewhere, right? We are all brothers and sisters, or cousins, or we belong to a parish family, or we have a single parent family, but we are all family, so don't dismiss yourself from today. But what God calls us to do on this feast is to become a Holy Family. And to become a holy family, you know, I have given a homily similar to this in years past, but we have changed it with the Missions, so I am going to give the homily I would normally give at Parish Missions for family. And so to do that we are going to go through the way we spell family – how do you spell family? F – A – M – I – L – Y ....boy, it sounds like you were partying last night – were you? You know, I'm still tired from Friday...anyway, FAMILY – first letter is “F” and to become a holy family – a family must be filled with faith and forgiveness. And when I am doing a Parish Mission, I tell the parents “your number one job is to instill faith in your children. Not just to make them millionaires, and they were really good, they are very successful in what they do – wooo – oh, they make a million dollars a year and they go to hell!! They weren't very successful! And so, your job as parents is to instill faith so that they can live forever!” And you can do that by being examples of faith for them. But my mother, before she did anything else – when I was baptized on her birthday – April 17<sup>th</sup> on Easter – she dedicated me to the Blessed Mother – so, you dedicate your child to God. They are not here for your image and likeness – they are here for His image and likeness – so you dedicate them to God. You take authority over them and you dedicate them to God! And then – you love them and pray for them and love them and pray for them and love them and pray for them – but you instill the faith of God inside of them, because that is the greatest gift you give! But also, the greatest you give is filled with forgiveness. Because, listen – nobody here – but throughout the years I have dealt with people and kids are no longer Catholics, because there parents were jerks. Because their parents were very Catholic and tried to shove Catholicism and Jesus down their throat, and so the only thing they did was scare the kids away from ever wanting to have a relationship with Jesus Christ! And so the other thing that is very necessary with faith is forgiveness! That we need to be people that forgive people in our lives that are not perfect – because neither are you!! Nobody is perfect and sometimes we get up and we have these goals for our children and our spouses that are just unreasonable and they don't meet that and we get mad! But it is not our job to judge – our job is to forgive! And again, as I have told you, you must forgive, or you go to hell – very simple! Your choice – you either forgive them, or you go to hell!

There should never be anything that you would not forgive your son, daughter, brother, sister, mother, father, cousin for – EVER! “Well, they killed my brother...” Who cares – they are in heaven – shut up and move on! And forgive them – it is not your option to ever not forgive! That is not your option – you are not God – GET OVER IT! So, when it comes to family – to be a holy family – it has to be filled with faith and it has to be filled with forgiveness! The second letter is “A” – that means it needs to be acceptance and it needs to be affirmation – that if there is any place in our life that we should feel accepted – it is in our family – as we are – not as we hope to be. Again, when we accept someone where they are at – that is what Jesus was best at, huh? But we as Catholics don’t do that sometimes – we think “well, I’ve got to challenge them...” I’m the biggest challenger in this church, and you know it! But you still have to accept people where they are, and then you challenge them to where God wants them to be! But unless a person really knows they are accepted – sinful and all – then we can go on from there. You know, Jesus caught the woman in adultery – He didn’t yell and scream “oh, I’m going to get you now...” He said “has anyone condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more.” So the first thing we have to do is make sure we accept our husbands, our wives, our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, our sisters as they are – not as you wish they are to be. That is where you meet them first. Again, the story of the man who is dealing with best friend – his friend is neurotic, and everybody is saying “you have to change, you have to change...and he is trying to change and he can’t change, and he is getting really mad, and finally his best friend comes to him and says “listen, don’t change – I love you as you are.” And miracle of miracles, what happened? He changed. And what gives people the ability to change is acceptance and love where they are at. Then we challenge them to go beyond. But you can’t challenge them unless you sit there and love them. And that’s where it comes to affirmation. When it comes to affirmation in families, we have to make sure that we are telling our husbands, our wives, our sisters, our brothers, our mothers, our fathers, our sons, our daughters what they are doing right! More than what they are doing wrong! So, I want you to think when you are examining your conscience tonight, look at how many times you yelled at the kids or how many times you told your spouse they weren’t perfect for your nice little thing, and this is very good – especially for people who haven’t been to church in a long time – and because the closer we get to Christ sometimes – or the closer we think we get to Christ – worse we get when it comes to our family and that’s the problem! So you have to sit there and think – when you criticize, do you also affirm your family? When you go to bed at night – did you do more criticizing or challenging, or did you do more affirming? You know, once I was doing a men’s conference and this kid with long hair and big black boots came up to me – and I thought I didn’t touch this kid at all – and he gave me this little thing in Latin that said “Peace Everywhere.” And then it says “maybe once in a million years, someone dies from too much affirmation, but every day some kid dies from lack of it.” Do we affirm the people in our life? As a family, we have to affirm them and accept them, or we are not really being Christ to them. So, we have to think about that. And again, if this is where you have been, well today is a new year, correct? Tomorrow begins a new year, so you can have great resolutions for what we are going to start doing.

The next letter is what? “M” You have heard me say this before – we have to make memories! And to make memories means that at the supper table – you have to have dinner together, you have to have a joyful time together. You know, that’s why I have this time with the priests once a year – you know we had 39 priests here on Friday! And you know, I don’t know if you know this, but there are some priests who hate my guts! They don’t like me! Can you imagine? Just like parishioners – it’s the same reality! But there are some priests who don’t like me, but once a year I invite everyone – especially the ones I know don’t like me – I send out 220 invitations – and the ones that don’t like me I write a personal thing on each one – “hey, I didn’t see you here last year – you are most welcome to come this year...” and you know that just makes them madder! But I sit there and say “listen, I want us to come together...” and we prayed in this church, and at 2 AM I finally got rid of the last person! We laughed and laughed and we had a fine time – making memories. What kind of memories do you make with your family – with your community? Are they happy memories? What do you do? You are going to have to do something to make that happen! So, you are going to have to make your family eat dinner together – no criticism at the supper table – no putting people down at the supper table – only joy – only affirmation! Make memories! And you know, sometimes people sit there and say “well, you know Father, I come from dysfunctional family...” we are ALL dysfunctional, as I said. Everyone here belongs to a dysfunctional family. You could even make an argument today that in the Holy Family it was dysfunctional. You listened to the gospel, didn’t you? Because here is – I don’t mean that literally, of course! But here is Jesus, He leaves the family – Joseph and Mary are all upset – they were looking everywhere for Him, and they come and they say “why did you do this to us?” “Oh, didn’t you know, I had to be in my Father’s house?” If I was Joseph, Jesus would have gotten a spanking! “Come here, you....” But, I’m not Joseph – it had to be hard to live with God! Come one – they had to live with Him. Not someone who thought they were God – He WAS God! Huh? So, it had to be....it wasn’t always “la, la, la, la, la....” You know, it was a hard time, even in the Holy Family. And so we have to sit there and make memories...we have to keep trying! That was a memory – it even made the book. And so, the next thing is “FAM...I” Families that are holy have to be filled with intimacy. You know what intimacy means. “In To Me See.” That means we really need to look into each other! We have to find out where each other is coming from. Again, in my family, just for this last Christmas – you know, the last two months have been the most stressful in my life – EVER so far – for whatever reason, it was just crazy. And so, I came home, I was trying to get everything done – my mother said we were having dinner at 4:30, and so I called her – I was still here wrapping presents – and said “mom, I might be late” “you can’t be late, everyone is coming over at 4:30...” “Ok.” So, I hurry up, I forget one of her presents, she picked it up yesterday... So, anyway, in the midst of all this, I walk in the house, I’m trying to get all of the presents in, Rudy is running around, people are calling me and I’m going nuts! So, after I come in she says “what’s the matter?” “Nothing” you know, I’m stressed! And so she comes in, closes the door and says “what’s the matter?” “In to Me See” mother. Everybody that wants me always wants me to do something. “Father, why didn’t you do this, Father can you do this, call me on the phone, you didn’t do this, you didn’t do that...”

It's never "Father, how are you? Are you ok?" It's always "gim mee, gim mee, gim mee...." And so, she could sit there and see my stress – my anger was much more. It was like "listen, I need to be given back to for just a second here, or I am going to go out of my mind!" So, there was intimacy and then that was freeing. Is there intimacy in your family? Do you sit there and if there is anger or something in your family say "oh, there is an anger problem in our family..." or do you see what it really is? "There is a hurt problem in my family." Are we families who have intimacy? Do we go beyond the external and find out what is going on inside? The next letter is "L." And of course we talked about that – it is love. And you have all heard my dad's story a million times – I have been preaching on it my whole priesthood – but it is really easy to preach about it – but it is really hard to live it, correct? You know, and again, for those of you who don't think I come from a family...my mother I have been working on – she is a German woman – she came up to see me yesterday, because she wanted her present – anyway – she came up to see the church and get her present! But, you know I have been working on my mother for years about this saying "I love you." Because as I have said before, we have to tell the people we love that we love them! We must! And so, if I am going to go around telling everybody to do that – I need to make sure that in my own family I am doing that! It is easy with my nieces and my nephew and everybody else – much harder with mother. And so, I decided about a year ago – nope, we are going to do it whether she likes it or not! It's that simple! And so, every time I talk to my mother, "ok, ma, God Bless you – I love you!" Nothing! "Ok, ma, God Bless you –I love you!" Nothing! She's German, right? So, it goes on, and on, and on! And so, I'm driving to Peoria, about two months ago when my big time started – and I said "ok, ma, I love you, God Bless you" – "oh, I love you too, Larry..." I almost wrecked the car! But now, every time I see her, "I love, you" – "I love you too, Larry." Now she says it first! But it took years! Before she left yesterday "I love you!" "I love you!" So, we have to persevere! So, one of the things you have to decide for the New Year – if I have been preaching this and you still haven't done it – then it is time! You never go to bed at night – you never let your kids walk out the door without telling them that you love them! Make it your New Years resolution. Last year I gave everybody homework and I asked that they say a rosary every day. I know that I did that every day! Did you say a rosary every day? Well, this year could be much better. Tell the people you love that you love them every day! Do it! Some of you it's going to kill you! Good! Its time! You are never going to be lying in bed when you are dying and say "oh, never should have told the people I love that I love them every day! What was the matter with me?" But you will lay there and think "boy, why didn't I tell the people I love that I love them every day." And please don't play that Catholic Christian card where you think you are so righteous so holy! Stop it! You be a person of love first! Did you listen to the second reading? "Be people of love..." That's what it is! And if you sit there and say "Jesus didn't tell me..." He sure got the loudest priest in the world to tell you to do it! Why? John, chapter 15 vs. 9 – "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you..." "Love one another as I have loved you." It is not your option to tell the people you love that you love them – it's not! It is the command of God! Now stop doing it your way, and start obeying the God of the Universe! Finally, the last letter is "Y."

It's all about you – it's not about me! That somewhere in our lives, if we are going to have a holy family – we have to make sure that my husband becomes more important than me – put his needs before mine. That my wife becomes more important than me – I put her needs before mine. My kids become more important than me - their needs come before mine! My parents come before me – their needs come before mine. That is what has to happen! My brother and sister become more important than me – it's all about you – it's not about me. So, to become a holy family – we need to be people of faith and forgiveness. We need to be people of acceptance and affirmation. We need to be people that make memories of joy. We need to be people who have intimacy – “in to me see” in our family. We need to be people of love where we tell the people we love that we love them and we need to be people where it is all about you – it is not about me. This is a lot of stuff to reflect on this Holy Family season, but it is a lot of stuff that we can think about before we go to bed tonight and make some resolutions as the New Year begins tomorrow, and say “this year will be the year for my family, and these are the things that I am going to do to make my family holy. Got it? Get it? Gonna do it? May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.