

**HOLY
FAMILY
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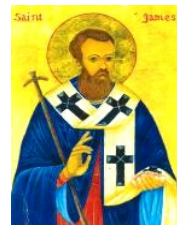
The Parish of St James



Coorparoo

An Augustinian Parish

Archdiocese of Brisbane.



Moderator's Musings

HOLY FAMILY – A REFLECTION!

Most of the things we do reflect our family background – how we celebrate Christmas, what we eat and drink and so on. On talk-back radio last Tuesday, a listener was recounting the family tradition of lining up annually for the Boxing Day sales. Hopefully our family customs extend to deeper things than that, especially as we continue our Christmas focus and pause to reflect on the Holy Family.

We don't know much about the Holy Family, yet what we know comes from the Gospel accounts and very clearly celebrates the unity and love so evident in the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

Pope Francis' recent letter, *Amoris Laetitia – The Joy of Love: On Love in the Family*, contains a remarkable collection of sayings on different themes that describe family life. Whether we feel we have faith or not, virtually all of us 'do family life' in one way or another. We may not always give it a faith meaning but naming what we are doing can lead us to faith, to quote the Holy Father, 'Begetting and raising... mirrors God's creative work' (AL n 29).

Some may feel a bit discouraged by the Holy Family, regarding it as the 'perfect' family. Many of us seek perfection in one way or another – sometimes through *perfectionism* which is a pretty futile search. There's plenty of talk in the media at present about the increased numbers of people having plastic surgery – actors are supposed to start having this at 30 whether they need it or not.... before it's too late – but perfection still escapes us because God did not give us perfect families or perfect bodies

It should be a relief that there's no such thing as the perfect family; we simply have to keep working at it because there's no sure form of 'plastic surgery' to make family perfect. The challenge today comes from our having to broaden our understanding of family because old models are being stretched. Blended families are more common and gay couples are seeking children too.

I'm not sure that Pope John Paul II had all these changes in mind when he proposed the Holy Family as a good model for us – how they 'travelled the same path as you do, amid joys and sufferings, prayers and work, hopes and distressing trials' as they sought to do God's will.

At the very least, it's a good reminder that we cannot afford to 'freeze' the Holy Family in time, as somehow the perfect happy family. Mary and Joseph faced many challenges because the family dynamic is very much present here as it is in our family too. Perhaps you have a favourite story about the Holy Family.

Some are attracted to the story of the teenage Jesus in the Temple, 12 years on from his birth and back in Jerusalem. We're told that Jesus 'progressed' steadily; his growth, like ours, was gradual, a tiny step at a time. If babies are physically demanding, then teenagers of all time drain parents emotionally and psychologically. Yet in a sense, that's the way it's meant to be.

It reminds us that we need to believe in our young people and their potential, even when they test us. I'm very grateful for my many years in our schools and the hundreds of young people I've known as priest, teacher and friend - in their highs when things were terrific - in their lows, sometimes when they needed tough love, and most knew it. In all that, I've had the privilege of seeing them grow and the joy of meeting them 10, 20, 30 years on. There's the odd one in jail and the occasional disappointment but the picture is amazingly positive.

You and I both know that family is a big challenge and it's easy to feel like you're on your L's for life – like Jesus' parents perhaps? One challenge is that each of us fills multiple roles in the family. For example, a mother can be wife, sister, daughter, aunt, and a father can be husband, brother, son, uncle – part of a very complex, family dynamic.

We can't choose our family but this is where we find the strength of family life. Families are challenged to stick together and somehow family works, because it has to – sometimes described as something both messy and wonderful... a gathering together of unfinished, wounded wayfarers who are committed to drawing out the best from each other.

Many today struggle with the Church and our failures but, Pope Francis reminds us that family is the *domestic church* and, 'The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches' (AL n 87).

Mary, and probably Joseph too, pondered on the experiences they had. A few points we might think and pray about...

- As parents - Trying not to be frightened to be a parent
- As children - Being open enough to respect our parents and their decisions
- As family – Being faithful to our family rituals which are so vital

Marking significant family events are often key moments in our life-journey to God. The words of 1 John 3:1 are prophetic, 'Think of the love the Father has *lavished* on us, by letting us be called God's children...' God's love is that tangible, actually visible, especially in the gift of family.

There is something about you and me – and our families – in the Holy Family. Like the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, both our personal and family stories are sacred and God's holiness and ours mingle as our stories unfold.

And so, if you think you're not the perfect family, then give thanks to God!

Fr Dave Austin OSA