



# Bringing Home the Word

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph | December 31, 2017

## Love, Patience, Forgiveness, Gratitude

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**W**hen we were married, my husband and I gradually grew in our relationship. Four of the characteristics St. Paul mentions in today’s reading from Colossians were particularly helpful for us: patience, forgiveness, love, and gratitude. They helped us overcome the challenges of building a life together, and each of our children gave us ample opportunity to practice them over and over again.

By God’s grace and with hard work, we’ve been together more than thirty

years. Sometimes I think, “How did we do it?” We did it together, and we did it with God, and I’m so grateful for my husband and for two wonderful daughters who come back home at Christmas and call just to say hello.

So it makes sense that we dedicate one Sunday to the Holy Family. We don’t know a lot about Jesus’ childhood, but today’s Gospel tells us that, as unusual as the circumstances were, Mary and Joseph worked with each other and with God to do the right thing for Jesus. They followed the prescribed law, they listened carefully to the prophecies and rejoicing of Anna and Simeon, and they raised God’s Son to adulthood—when he showed the world who he was.

Even after that, Mary was with him, loving and grieving for him even at the end. What parent would have done less? The Holy Family undoubtedly practiced love, patience, forgiveness, and gratitude with one another, even as the Lord taught us to do. We honor them by doing the same. +

## Sunday Readings

**Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14 or  
Genesis 15:1–6; 21:1–3**

My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives.

**Colossians 3:12–21,  
Colossians 3:12–17, or  
Hebrews 11:8, 11–12, 17–19**

In word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**Lk 2:22–40 or Lk 2:22, 39–40**

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.

*A day to honor  
a special family*

## A Word From Pope Francis

It is necessary to reaffirm the conviction that every family is the principal setting for the growth of each individual, since it is through the family that human beings become open to life and the natural need for relationships with others. Over and over again we see that family bonds are essential for the stability of relationships in society, for the work of education, and for integral human development, for they are inspired by love, responsible intergenerational solidarity and mutual trust.

—Address, Food and Agricultural Organization, June 20, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Does my family know how to encounter trying times gracefully?
- What attitudes or actions allowed the Holy Family to have peace amidst the crosses?



# Honoring Our Parents

By Kathy Coffey

*"Honor your father and your mother..." (Exodus 20:12).*

**W**hat nugget of wisdom does the Fourth Commandment teach us? Today some parents and children are estranged; others wish their parents were alive to honor them. But the following story shows how delightfully some children still honor their parents.

Jan celebrated her sixtieth birthday with friends, far from her children living in five different states. "No gifts," she had told her kids. "All I need are memories of you." Then the postal service delivered a special box. Within it were sixty slips of paper on which Jan's children had written sixty special memories. She read and cherished each one, mixing laughter and tears.

Why honor our parents? In the world of the Bible and in good homes today, parents provide images of trust, hope, and serenity that enable the young to face formidable obstacles. To their children they convey the message, spoken or unspoken, "You are loved. You are wonderful."

All humans are constantly making the passage from the known to the unknown. Parents who have endured disappointment, even tragedy, can help their offspring travel that passage with dignity. "We've made mistakes," they say. "We've lost jobs, health, or our dearest loves. But it didn't kill us. Something in people endures, continues to trust, and moves forward in confidence."

## Related Roles

Furthermore, parents are memory keepers. When their children hit snags, they remind them what glorious people they are. And if humor, perspective, or care packages from home can lighten the load, they contribute those, too.

The wisest parents honor their children in turn. They count on their children's good sense to pilot them through difficulties, so they restrain the "free advice." They clarify the boundaries of their role: providing safe harbors, but holding the ropes loosely. They encourage children to explore God's beautiful world, not burdening them with unnecessary anxiety. They recognize the arenas where the young have more expertise, inviting them to shine there.

Many parents struggle with handing on their faith to a generation that seems unenthusiastic at best. There, too, honor comes in. Realizing that the gift of faith, no matter how important, cannot be coerced or controlled, parents can follow the advice of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Agonizing over her sons' shenanigans, she once said, "What's a mother to do but pray and dote, pray and dote?"

If the roles of parent and child seem too idealized, we need only look to Jesus and his mother for role models. (Unfortunately, Scripture records little of Jesus' relationship with Joseph.)

## Learning From Jesus and Mary

The wedding at Cana provides the perfect example of their honoring each other. Mary wisely tells Jesus of the need: "They have no wine." Then she backs off. She trusts his instincts to resolve the crisis.

Despite his reservations ("My hour has not yet come"), Jesus in turn honors his mother. Whether he was responding to her, or to the couple's dire need, we may never know. Despite the exhaustion and pain of his passion, Jesus continues to honor Mary, making sure even from the cross that his beloved disciple would continue to care for her (John 19:26-27).

In Jesus' day, women with no son or husband for protection often became desperate beggars. Knowing that sad reality, Jesus makes sure that John will take her into his own home. St. Ignatius imagined that the first appearance of Jesus after the Resurrection, although not recorded in Scripture, must surely have been to Mary.

As parents and children who follow Jesus, we are called to do likewise. +

## PRAYER

Lord, Mary and Joseph helped you to grow in love and wisdom.

Surround me with loving and caring people to help me to be a wise, loving, and caring person.

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas,*

Rev. Warren J. Savage and  
Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

January 1-6

Mon. Solemnity of Mary:  
Nm 6:22-27 / Gal 4:4-7 / Lk 2:16-21

Tue. Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory  
Nazianzen: 1 Jn 2:22-28 / Jn 1:19-28

Wed. Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 2:29-3:6 / Jn 1:29-34

Thu. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton:  
1 Jn 3:7-10 / Jn 1:35-42

Fri. St. John Neumann:  
1 Jn 3:11-21 / Jn 1:43-51

Sat. Christmas Weekday: 1 Jn 5:5-13 /  
Mk 1:7-11 or Lk 3:23-38  
or Lk 3:23, 31-34, 36, 38