

Dear Brothers and Sisters



How would you describe your family? Caring? Loving? Well balanced? Neurotic? Sports-orientated? Upwardly mobile? Financially secure? Financially struggling? Dysfunctional? Middle class? Blue collar? Troubled? Peaceable? Tight-knit?

Chances are that not many of us would use the word “Holy” to describe our family.

Families may be many things, but they are not usually thought of as holy. If this is true, then today’s feast – The Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph – is meaningless. Something to be admired, honored, prayed for; but impossible to emulate.

Yet all of us, and our families, have a vocation to be holy. Holiness is not the reserved privilege of the select few; it is the universal patrimony of each individual and every Christian family.

A friend of mine, Fr. Tony, once met Mother Teresa of Calcutta. He asked her what he needed to do to be holy. She looked at him and said ‘you have to want it.’

She hit the nail on the head. We are not holy because we do not desire it. We don’t want it. Holiness is not high on our bucket list. Of all the things we wished for this Christmas, probably none of us asked to be made holy.

Not surprising really. Holiness is frowned upon, it is an anomaly, a relic of the Middle Ages. Holiness can be spoken of in church, or gazed upon in frescoes, or contemplated when the choir sings and incense rises, but it has no currency in everyday life. The thought of it is gone before we leave the parking lot.

How many of us worry if our children are holy enough? How many of us have a burning desire for our marriage to be holy? Who among us thinks ‘today my goal is to be holy?’

As a seminarian I spent a year in Arizona as part of an itinerant missionary team with a family who had twelve children. The dad once told me that his one wish for his children was that they became holy. More important than their grades, or their sports, or which college they went to, was his desire for them to grow up to be holy people. Sounds a little far out? A little fanatical? It’s not.

The Today’s Feast comes to help us. It lifts up the Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph as an icon of truth. The Holy Family is an image of what we are called to be. This calling is not of our own volition, our own doing. It is the doing of God.

God calls us to holiness not because we are good, but because He is good. We do not become holy because we are perfect, or without fault. We are not holy because we never mess up. Holiness means one thing: knowing that God loves you. God loves us the way we are. It is the experience of this love which frees us from our fears, anxieties, worries, doubts, sins, and all the other unholy things in our life. Our happiness, our peace, our sanity depends on this. This holiness is the secret of our communion, our relationships with each other, our love for one another.

We can rediscover this holiness today, the Feast of the Holy Family, when God speaks to our hearts. He will speak to your heart. He calls us to be his children, and in doing so teaches each of us how to be a parent, a grandparent, a spouse, a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, in the holy family to which we belong.

Fr. Sean