

The Feast of the Holy Family

December 26, 2010

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Good morning. The Feast of the Holy Family, hmmm. Yesterday of course as I indicated I got on the road late so never left Erie until about 1:30 and I got home to my family about 4 o'clock. Things started out pretty good. I was looking forward to going home because things have been busy. I have been on the road so much doing all of this stuff and getting ready for Christmas here and everything else. Oh to just have some peace at home. So all of the way home I am looking forward to this. What happens so often is we develop expectations and we have these examples of what a family is. We see the nice Christmas stories, It's A Wonderful Life, so we have these expectations every year when we go home to have the perfect family Christmas. That is why I always love the Christmas story because it is not a perfect family. Have you ever seen it? They play that twenty-four hours on TBS. The all argue and fight. After 50 years I should have known but I am building myself up. "Oh this is going to be nice to be with family."

So I got home and things started out well. We started to eat. And then right after we moved from the table and the dogs start fighting. So this was the first thing My two dogs started fighting, well my mother's dog started fighting with my dogs as a matter of fact. He is just a mean dog. So then the really started fighting so I push the dog out of the way then my step-father starts screaming at me. One of my screams but ten times worse. As he starts I bite my tongue and I remembered it was Christmas. We are not going to fight with my stepfather. But then my brother jumped in. Now there is this big incident going on in my family and I am thinking okay I can't stand any of this. I am leaving right here. But I didn't say a word. I kept my mouth shut. Then my sister called me over and told me something that one of the girl's had done. And now I am like ughhh. I don't need this stress. I have enough stress at my parish. I am going to go back to parish and I am going to relax. So I left home at 6:15. I was there for 2 hours and fifteen minutes. Got back into the car and back here in Erie by 8pm. I was frustrated. I went to bed frustrated. Called a friend of mine, frustrated; woke up this morning frustrated. Then I thought and now I have to celebrate Holy Family.

The reality is this when we deal with things that are not so holy in our own families and then when we come to the parish family and the parish family isn't so holy all the time, either. The pastor is a son of a so and so, I know. And how do we deal with all of this reality as I was reflecting on this morning. Somewhere in my own life I have to learn to accept my family as they are. Not the way I want them to be. I want them to go to church. Here I am a priest. I go around the world preaching, do you think that my family would go to church on Christmas Day? My mother did. My niece did. My one niece is getting married so she wants to make sure. Nobody else in my family went to church. I was sitting there fuming thinking, "Are you kidding me? I am a priest. I go all around the world and preach and my whole family can't go to church on Christmas Day." Hmmm.... That is not my point. My point is I have to accept them where they are. If they don't want to go to church they don't have to go to church. That kills me but if you are a member of the family you accept your family as they are not the way you want them to be. So

often we have these expectations we put on people but that is all about us when we have expectations, isn't it? It is all about me. If my family is not going to church that looks badly on me. So I get mad. I don't want to think bad about you. I want you to go to church and I want you to go to heaven. If that is the way the decide to live you have to accept that.

The thing about families is you have to accept people where they are, who they are, and don't try to form them in our image. Don't try to make them into what you want them to be. The second thing all families need of course is and the Second Reading talked about it, is forgiveness. After my step father yelled and screamed at me you can tell, it was like me when I do my stupid yelling and screaming, it is part of my family. A lot of you don't get it. I am the quiet one in my family. By far. The way we all get along with each other is we scream at each other. That is just the way it is. That is the way it has been my whole life, we all scream at each other just to say hi or whatever. "That was stupid! Why did you do that!" It is just the way it is. So after my step father went and screamed you could tell two seconds later he was upset that he had done that. So he brought me into the kitchen and he said, "You know Larry I am sorry." I said, "No Buck you are right." There was mercy there and forgiveness there. I still didn't want to be there, but we had peace. We had to learn to forgive each other. And isn't that the place to forgive, in the family? You have got to live there. Sometimes our feelings are most vulnerable in our families.

If there is anything that you and I have got to learn it is that if you are a member of a family you better learn to bring out a lot of forgiveness. To let go of the grudges. To let go of the simple things that hurt us and say, "You know, life is just too short. We have got to learn to forgive each other. We have got to learn to live with each other as each other is. That is part of what love is.

And that is what it comes down to in the end. All families have got to be a place of love. And when we talk about the love this is where it gets hard because love will kill you. When you decide that you are going to die for your family, that you are going to put your needs in front of yours and this is why I made sure we read the fullness of the Second Reading, where it talks about obedience, talks about love, talks about sub ordinance. Even when it talks about wives be subordinate to your husbands. And it says husbands love your wives which we didn't talk about before. That means that we both have got to give our lives for each other. When we are a member of a family it is about dying for the family. I purposely as I was fuming inside, my mother had no idea what was going on. She was in the kitchen. I didn't say anything. I didn't want to ruin my mother's Christmas. I didn't want to ruin anybody else's Christmas. I was fuming inside. I told everybody that I loved them, Merry Christmas, we will see you later. I have got to get back to Erie. It is starting to snow. So I made excuses. In spite of everything I had to make sure that I loved my family enough not to sit there and take my feelings, my expectations and my irritableness and push it on to them. I had to eat it and go home.

My mother called me afterwards, "Oh Larry did you have a nice trip back?" She had absolutely no idea that this had happened as it should be. When we love people we put their needs in front of our own. When we love people we are going to make sure that they are okay even if we are not. That is what it is. When we do this even though our families aren't perfect they can learn to become holy. No matter what holiness is real. It is how we dwell in an imperfect world, in imperfect parishes; in imperfect families.

And it is how we decide that I am not going to let my feelings affect everybody else as much as I can. We are all human. But we are going to learn to love and lay down our lives for each other. That is what made the Holy Family holy. They were more concerned about each other than they were about themselves. If we are going to take our imperfect families and make them holy it will begin when we accept people where they are and we learn to forgive them and we learn to put their needs in front of our own by being people of love. Got it? Get it? Going to live it? You better. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.