



## HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Cycle A  
December 29, 2013

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14  
Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5  
Colossians 3:12-21  
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

### Gathering

*(An unlit Christmas candle, crèche figures of Joseph, Mary and Jesus and a crucifix are arranged on a table covered with red cloth. As members arrive, they arrange the family photos they have brought with them on the table.)*

This week we consider the holy family of Nazareth and we reflect on the challenges they and we face in family life. Last week we stood with Joseph as he said *yes* to God when confounded by the news of Mary's pregnancy. How did you say *yes* to God in a difficult situation this past week?

### Prayer

*(The candle is lit. The leader calls members to rest in the presence of Emmanuel, God with us. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)*

Leader: We bless your name, O Lord,  
for sending your own incarnate Son  
to become part of a family,  
so that, as he lived its life,

he would experience its worries and its joys.  
We ask you, Lord,  
to protect and watch over this family,  
so that in the strength of your grace  
its members may enjoy prosperity,  
possess the priceless gift of your peace,  
and, as the Church alive in the home,  
bear witness in this world to your glory.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Catholic Household Payers and Blessings.  
Revised Edition, USCCB 2007.  
Used with permission.

*(Members join in singing. "Go Tell It on the Mountain." (The song may be found on the Internet.)*

## **HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL**

*(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.*

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

### **Reflection**

I see them every Sunday, this young family: mom, dad and five children, ages four to seven, two of them, adopted. It is clear that they are not of great financial means. Yet by the looks on their faces one would say they

lack for nothing. They are an inspiration to watch and hear; they are caring, loving, respectful. They engage joyfully in all the gestures and responses throughout the Mass; yes, the children also. In a time when the traditional structure of family faces so many pressures threatening its stability, this family's testimony of faith is a beacon of hope.

This week we celebrate the feast of the holy family. We tend to think of them as the perfect model of a family. And, yes, Joseph, Mary and Jesus are a source of hope for all humanity, especially today when family, the primary core of society, faces so many challenges. One could be tempted, however, to think that, being who they were, the holy family had no great difficulties or pain. We have evidence that this was not so in this week's gospel. Warned in a dream of Herod's desire to destroy the child, "Joseph rose and took the child and his mother and departed for Egypt." They began a journey to an unknown land, there to begin as a migrant family a search for employment, housing, security. It sounds rather familiar, doesn't it?

Life for the holy family was more difficult than for many a family in history. To look at them, however, one might suspect that it would be hard to tell if they were lacking for anything. One can imagine them in the synagogue every Saturday joyfully engaging in all the gestures and prayers of their time. "Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways." (Ps. 128:1) He is with all our families, in whatever challenges we may face.

### Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ Recall a difficult situation your family had to face.
- ◆ How have you sensed God's presence in your family?
- ◆ Who or what holds your family together?
- ◆ What is your experience of prayer in and with your family? How might it be enhanced?

### HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

*(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community*

*to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)*

## **Response in Action Suggestions**

- ◆ Host a special family meal sometime in the weeks ahead just because...
- ◆ Volunteer, as a family, at a local shelter and/or soup kitchen for families. Reflect together afterwards on the blessings of your own family.
- ◆ Attend Mass with family members this week. Go to breakfast or a meal together afterwards.

## **Prayer**

*(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.*

*Following this sharing, the leader invites prayers from members for their families. Members take turns announcing the names of family members for whom they pray. When everyone has had an opportunity to mention names, the prayer continues as follows.)*

### **A Family Evening Prayer**

All: Lord, behold our families...  
We thank you for the places in which we dwell,  
for the love that unites us,  
for the peace accorded to us this day,  
for the hope with which we expect the morrow;  
for the health, the work, the food, and the bright skies,  
that make our lives delightful;

for our friends in all parts of the earth. Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson