

Home for the

HOLIDAYS

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

CYCLE C

Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Colossians 3:12–21

Luke 2:41–52

GATHERING

(A lighted, festive Christmas candle and a bible, open to this week's gospel reading, are arranged on a table in the gathering space.)

God loves us enough to become one of us. This is the great gift of Christmas. And it is the gift that enables us to live as one family united in the love of Christ. *(As the session begins, members take time to share briefly what they are grateful for during this Christmas season.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The community joins in singing, "O Come All Ye Faithful" or some other appropriate carol familiar to all.)

Leader: Loving God, you call us to life in relationship. Help us to know ourselves that we may be compassionate to others. Forgive the many times we have failed to be forgiving to those nearest to us. Grant us the courage and humility to ask pardon. This we pray in the name of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

All: Amen.

Focus Question

Why do you need to be home for Christmas?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Commentary

Where did you celebrate Christmas? Most likely it was with family, immediate family, extended family, adopted family. Family members who haven't seen each other all year long, or who sometimes are not even particularly fond of one another, transcend their differences and the distances between them to be together at Christmas.

Today's first reading reminds us that it is in our family relationships that we receive the essential values and core life lessons. Sirach speaks of the honor and respect that are basic in relationships between parents and children. For the ancient Israelite, the honor due one's parents took priority over all human relationships.

The qualities described in Colossians that are necessary for healthy interpersonal relationships are first learned in our families. The need to forgive and be forgiven will test our love for one another. How often it is that in families, among those we love most, forgiveness is the most difficult.

In Luke's gospel, Mary, Joseph and Jesus show us that even *ideal* families have their problems. Parents, who perhaps should have been more vigilant, find their son missing. With worry and anxiety, they retrace their steps to find him. And the son, who should have let his parents know where he was, is caught up in a theological conversation with the temple teachers.

How much anxiety and upset is contained in the parents' question spoken by Mary, "Son, why have you done this to us?" Jesus, coming of age,

growing in understanding of his relationship to his Father, knows his first responsibility. But he returns home in obedience to his parents.

Whether we reflect on these readings as parents or children, they challenge us to re–think the values we have internalized and those we communicate to family members. What efforts do we make to relate to one another in healthy, life–affirming ways?

For each of us, coming home ought to be more than an annual event. When we seek to live in mutual respect, unconditional love and continual forgiveness, we can be *home* every day of the year.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions which follow.)

1. What values have your parents passed on to you for which you are most grateful?
2. What do you do to counteract the negative influence of media and society in teaching your children the value of obedience and respect?
3. How does being a member of this small Christian community strengthen your family life?
4. What effort do you make to relate to family members in healthy, life–affirming ways?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Suggestions:

1. If there is a member of your immediate or extended family with whom you haven't communicated during this past year, call or write to that person.

2. Visit someone who lives alone or is in a nursing home and is not visited often by family.
3. As a small Christian community, identify ways in which you can assist a single parent family. Volunteering to baby–sit might make it possible for a single parent to get away for a day, perhaps on a retreat.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The facilitator invites members to choose one family member for whom they wish to pray. After a few minutes of silence, members are invited to pray aloud for that person.)

Leader: Christ, our friend, teach us how to communicate with understanding and love.

All: Be with us each day in our families and communities as we grow in loving relationships.

Leader: Christ, our brother, you showed your love for Mary and Joseph.

All: Let us be generous in responding to those who fostered and nurtured us.

Leader: Compassionate Jesus, be with those families wounded by alienation and pain.

All: Help us to understand differences and support one another in suffering.

Leader: Loving God, bless all families this day and give them strength in forgiving and loving, so that their homes will be places of acceptance and joy. We ask this through the intercession of our family members who live with you in the communion of saints.

All: Amen.