

Reflection for the Feast of the Holy Family

O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Collect for the Feast of the Holy Family

This Sunday is the Feast of the Holy Family, which is a liturgical celebration that honors Saint Joseph, our Blessed Mother Mary, and the child Jesus. It was not until the 17th century that the Church started to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. This Feast was formally promulgated as a universal Feast by Pope Benedict XV in the year 1921. Originally celebrated on the Sunday after the Feast of Epiphany on January 6, but in 1969 the Feast of the Holy Family was moved to the Sunday after Christmas, enabling the Feast to be celebrated in the Christmas Season.

Knowing that before Pope Benedict XV promulgated the Feast of the Holy Family the Church already had Feast Days for St. Joseph, Our Blessed Mother and Jesus Christ, one can naturally wonder about the motivation and reason to have a Feast of the Holy Family. Each member of the Holy Family already had at least one day in the Church calendar that they were honored so pondering what motivated Pope Benedict XV in the 20th century, and for that matter what motivated the Church in the 17th century to promote and have the Feast of the Holy Family is something worth looking into. Our collect, this Sunday provides us with at the very minimum, a starting part to find the answer. I would venture to state that the collect this Sunday provides us with the reason for why the Church since the 17th century has celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family.

Before we look into the reason for having the Feast of the Holy Family, it would be helpful to first reflect on the reason for having Feasts and Solemnities in the Church. The Feasts and Solemnities that we celebrate in the Catholic Church are for the living members of the Church in this world not for the Saints that we honor. These Feasts and Solemnities at times are promulgated due to concerns that the Church has about society as a whole. Some of the Feasts like Corpus Christi, are promoting an important teaching or truth of the Church. The Feast of Corpus Christi promotes the miracle on the Altar, bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ. The Feast of the Holy Family as the collect states in our Mass this day “*O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family.*” As the collect points out the Feast of the Holy Family is a reminder to us of the example Jesus, Mary and Joseph are to Catholic families and to all people. The primary purpose of this feast is to present the Holy Family as a model for Catholic/Christian families. What we see in the Holy Family are three individuals that are totally open to the will of God. They are self-giving in their relationship with each other. The Holy Family is an example and role model for families and all people of how we should live our daily lives.

Today, on December 27, 2020 we discover ourselves just 48 hours, only 2 days removed from Christmas Day and we are in the middle of the Christmas Season that concludes with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on January 10, 2021. This Christmas Season which traditionally had ended with the Feast of Epiphany but has been extended to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, provides us with an opportunity to embrace the meaning and impact that the Birth of the Christ child has in our lives and in the world. Christ coming into the world brings forth the new covenant, a new way of life, and the hope of eternal salvation. The Feast of the Holy Family is a gentle reminder to us of the profound change that takes place with the birth of Christ. May this Christmas Season and the Feasts that are a part of it remind us that all is new, all is transformed, because a baby was born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger.