

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, 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 19th century that the Church started to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. It was in 1893 that Pope Leo XII instituted the Feast of the Holy Family as a Liturgical Celebration to be observed in any diocese that requested it. This Feast was formally promulgated as a universal Feast by Pope Benedict XV in the year 1921. Originally celebrated on the Sunday after the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, 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 Feasts/Solemnities 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 19th century to promote and celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family is something worth doing. 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 19th Century has celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family.

Before we investigate 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. Some of these Feasts and Solemnities have been promulgated due to concerns that the Church has about society and issues that we as humans are struggling with. Some of the Solemnities like Corpus Christi, are promoting an important teaching or truth of the Church. The Solemnity 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,*” is reminding 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 29, 2024, we discover ourselves just 4 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 12, 2025. This Christmas Season which traditionally has 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 in this Christmas Season, the Solemnities, and Feasts that we celebrate remind us that all is new, all is transformed, because a baby was born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, by loving parents.