



Contributed by Fr. Ray Reitzel, C.R.

Fr. Ray was born in Waterloo and is #9 in a family of 9 boys and 3 girls. One brother (Harry) is a C.R. priest, and two sisters are Notre Dame Sisters. He taught for 31 years at St. Jerome's H.S, in Kitchener, and at St. Joseph- Scollard Hall in North Bay. Then he served in 4 parishes for 17 years. He is now semi-retired and living at Resurrection Manor, in Waterloo, a residence for retired CRs.

THE HOLY FAMILY
December 26th, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

On this feast of the Holy Family, we picture the Christmas Crib, with Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus cuddled in a manger. The word 'manger' in French means 'to eat', already suggesting that Jesus in a few years will become "The Bread of Life" in the Holy Eucharist.

This feast day reminds me of my own family. I was born into a practicing Catholic family, # 9 of 12 children, in a neighbourhood that was more than 50% Catholic, about 8 blocks from St. Louis Church, served by Resurrectionist priests, next to the school, served by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. We went to the 8 a.m. daily Mass and ate our sandwich lunch for breakfast in our classrooms. Remember that, at that time, we fasted for Communion from 12 midnight. After learning some Latin responses, we served Mass, and sang in the boys' choir for funerals.

As a constant reminder of our faith, we had a large picture of the crucifixion on the kitchen wall at the end of the dining room table, which seated 14 of us. Walking into the dining room, on the doorway was a small holy water font, and we blessed ourselves each time we passed it. When we went up the attic stairs, where 6 of the boys slept, we would pass a picture of the Sacred Heart on the wall, reading "Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us!" In the morning on the way downstairs, we would pass another picture on the wall with our Guardian Angel watching over 2 children crossing a bridge. Passing these holy pictures each day certainly made an impression on us. We prayed the 'Morning Offering' before breakfast, and after supper we prayed the family rosary and other prayers, and recited the 10 Commandments once a week. Of course, we, and around 80% of Catholics, went to church every Sunday. Maybe World War II had something to do with it. I was in Grade 4 when the war ended, and I remember reading on the front page of the KW Record, "**3rd World War inevitable**". My one brother in the army, and another in the air force, were saved from going overseas.

When I entered the Resurrectionist Seminary in 1958, in London, the seminaries **were full** at that time. When we got our university degree, our whole class of 12, were sent to St. Louis, Missouri, to study Theology, to make room for the arrival of our new seminarians. And do you know why our seminaries were full then? None of us had a TV set at home. Soon the media world took

over, and distracted our youth from a spiritual direction in life. Vocations dropped drastically. In the midst of all these distractions today, you can imagine how difficult it would be to have a family pray the rosary together daily, or even go to Sunday Mass.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes)

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, we might contemplate the ways that we are called to embrace the theological virtue of charity in our own families, and in our world. We might reflect upon ways that we have been brought together: through our common prayer or worship as a family; those who have been excluded from the love of family and friendship; and the healing that is needed in our particular families and in our world.

- 1) Have you experienced an occasion when prayer and worship has helped to sustain bonds of love with family, friends, or even those that have hurt us?
- 2) Who does the theological virtue of charity challenge us to include, if we are to “love God above all else, and all else in God?”
- 3) Are there any hurts and wounds that need to be forgiven, in order to “love all else in God?”

The Table of the Word

There Is Something about a Child

St. Francis was inspired to help us to reflect upon the human nature of Christ through the creation of the first Nativity scene in 1223. At the heart of this scene is the infant Jesus, born into this world—God taking on human flesh—in the humble setting of a stable. Here we see the great manifestation of God’s love because God freely chose to enter into humanity in the vulnerable form of a baby. In Prague, Czech Republic, the Church of Our Lady Victorious houses the famous statue of the **Infant of Prague**. There are *several hundred thousand* pilgrims who come here *every year* to visit this church and pray before this statue. I have wondered about what draws us to the image of the Child Jesus. Perhaps, at the heart of everything, it is the understanding that this Child was given to us who, "being rich, became poor for our sake, in order that by His poverty we might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

Introductory Rite:

Leader: We celebrate the First Family of the Church: Jesus our Lord, Mary his mother, and Joseph her husband. They are a sign to us of God’s goodness at work in us as we remember, among other things, that we are all God’s precious children.

Lord Jesus , the Word made flesh among us,	Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus , born of the Virgin Mary as a model for humanity,	Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus , raised in wisdom and grace by Joseph and Mary,	Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray (together):

*O God, powerful Creator, in your wisdom and love, your Son,
begotten before the dawn of time, became in time, a member of our human family.
Give to parents the wisdom and wonder, to see the mystery of your will unfold in the lives of
their children. To daughters and sons give, with the increase of years, an equal measure of
growth in your grace. Together may we treasure in our hearts the love you have lavished upon
us, in choosing to call us your children. This prayer we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God which we hear proclaimed each Sunday, is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving)

FIRST READING (1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28)

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord." Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband: "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a Nazirite for all time."

When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, a measure of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore, I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord." She left him there for the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 3:1-2, 21-24)

Beloved: See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be, has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Luke 2:41-52)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Now every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when Jesus was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.

When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God’s own Word, God’s way of speaking to you today through God’s own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY

First Reading: We have here an excerpt from the beginning of the First Book of Samuel, a story that provides the background as to how Samuel became one of the great prophets of Israel—one who God used to select Saul and David as the first kings of Israel. Hannah is in dire straits as the barren wife of Elkanah, a good and holy man who loves her dearly. In that culture, it was a disgrace for a woman to be barren, so Hannah prays and promises God that if God delivers a child to her, she will, in turn, give the child to the Lord’s service. She then encounters the priest Eli, and explains to him that her prayer to God has been prompted by her sorrow and misery. He blesses her and prays that God will answer her prayer. God does, indeed, answer her prayer, and Hannah gives birth to her son Samuel. Hannah is then faithful to her promise: later on, she leaves the child with the priest Eli to be raised as a Nazirite, (one consecrated to God, who vows to drink no wine, and to live with uncut hair, in the service of the Lord). After doing this, Hannah must bear the difficulty of giving up her child. She is comforted in knowing that “God will guard the footsteps of his faithful ones” (1 Samuel 2:9). Her going to the temple to have Samuel dedicated to God is similar to all Christian parents who take their child to Church for Baptism, to have their child consecrated as children of God, and dedicated to God as Priest, Prophet, and King.

Second Reading: This first letter of John reminds us that **we are children of God**. God has visited His people, in the person of Jesus, to make this clear to us. God intends to include everyone, every human being, under the embrace of God’s hospitality. Jesus’s parables remind us that God, and we, will rejoice over the return of the ‘lost sheep’. In this “lost one,” we see, not a stranger, but a brother or sister. What is noteworthy in this reading is that we are called God’s children for no other reason than because God graciously and generously intends this for us: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God.” As God’s children, we are called to treat each other, not as strangers or enemies, but as brothers and sisters ... all of what the virtue of charity entails: loving all else, in God.

Many people are unaware that they have such a loving and merciful God. It is at Baptism when one **becomes ‘aware’** of this awesome gift of faith. that we have become one with Christ, and the children of a loving Father. However, the baptized child is not yet ‘aware’ of this. Hopefully those witnessing the baptism also become more aware of this phenomenon in their own lives. Sadly, many baptized persons do not really become aware of who they really are, **the children of a loving Father**.

However, we do not live in a perfect world. We are all sinners. We stumble and fall, and hopefully, believing in a forgiving God, have the courage to get back on track. Many stray from the Faith for three big reasons: distracted by worldly things, the media, clergy abuse, and also a lack of prayer.

Gospel Reading: Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. In the gospel we see Jesus grow up and spend His childhood as a rather typical Jewish boy. As a family, I presume they faithfully attended the synagogue service on the Sabbath day (Saturday). In the gospel, we see that they are faithful to their observance of traveling to Jerusalem annually for the feast of Passover. For safety’s sake, they travel in a “caravan” that probably included

many relatives and friends. On returning home, Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was not with their group. It would have been typical for a twelve-year-old boy, who was coming of age, to be with the men of the group, rather than his parents. We see that Mary and Joseph had typical parental concerns. Not being able to find Jesus for three days caused them “great anxiety.” In fact, these three days of sorrow foreshadow the three days of sorrow that Mary would experience at the time of Jesus’ death, when He would be in the tomb for three days. The finding of Jesus in the Temple, therefore, foreshadows the great joy of the Resurrection. Jesus’ response to Mary and Joseph when they find Him, “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” reveals that their role, as mother and father, although essential, was to be subordinate to the will of Jesus’ Father in Heaven.

The passage does tell us that Jesus “was obedient to them,” but this obedience was always connected to His perfect obedience to God. Likewise, our families are to be reflections of our relationship with God.

When we think of Mary and Joseph “in great anxiety,” and Jesus **being “lost,”** we can relate that to the **anxiety today:** with 45,000 foster children in Canada today; girls being kidnapped for sex slavery; children who run away from abusive homes; thousands of refugee children today; around 100,000 abortions in Canada in a year and in the States around 1,000,000; people who have strayed from the Faith. There is lots to pray for.

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or an idea newly fashioned.).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. (1 Samuel 1:20): *She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the Lord.”*
 - a. What have we asked of the Lord in our own family lives? Is there something in particular that we have repeatedly asked God to grant us?
 - b. What grace do we need to ask of God for each of our family members?
 - c. What grace do we need to ask of God for ourselves so that we can be a good and gracious family member?

2. (1 John 3:1): *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”*
 - a. What meanings does this reality have for you, i.e. being named “children of God”?
 - b. If we truly believe that we are “children of God,” what is the greatest challenge for you to see everyone else as a “brother and sister?” To love “all else in God?”

3. (Luke 2:51): *“His mother treasured all these things in her heart.”*
 - a. We hear this phrase attributed to Mary several times in Luke’s Gospel. What does this phrase mean to you?
 - b. What matters in family life have you been called to “treasure in your heart?”
 - c. Are there good matters and challenging ones?
 - d. What matters in our human family have you been called to “treasure in your heart?”

CARING-PRAYING TIME (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to 'outreach' to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a moderate pause between each of the numbered suggestions for reflection and action.)

1. Word for the Week: “*And this is his commandment: that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us*” (1 John 3:23).

2. Suggestion for the Week:

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, commented that no one on their death bed ever wished that they spent more time at work! Sometimes we can get our priorities out of balance. We need to think about how our family life can be improved with more time, patience, understanding, gentleness, kindness, compassion, attentiveness, care, and concern. Forgiveness is a key ingredient in the life of any family. It takes great courage to admit that we are wrong and to ask the forgiveness of one we have wronged or hurt. Likewise, it can take great courage to accept the apology of another and to allow for the restoration of harmony and peace. What concrete thing can I work on, to change my part in unhealthy family dynamics?

3. Intercessions: (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: *Let us pray in the name of Christ, whom we find in the needs of all the human family.*

That with Mary and Joseph we may search anxiously for Christ and may recognize the One we seek, we pray...

That the family of nations, all children of one God, may work together toward the common good, we pray...

That families troubled by misunderstanding, or broken by alienation, may find the healing they long for, and the harmony God wills for them, we pray...

That God may bless families with joy, and with the understanding that all households need each other, we pray...

That we may cherish our senior citizens, who enrich our communities and our families with their witness of faithful prayer, selfless service, and patience with growing disabilities we pray...

That God may grant patience, peace and hope to all who suffer a “lost one” in their families and friends, we pray...

Let us pray

*What love you have bestowed upon us, O good and gracious God,
in letting us be called your children! Let all who seek the face of Christ find him,
not only here, in this house of prayer, but in our households, large and small, where your love is
revealed, in our love for each other. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Emmanuel,
God with us, your Son who lives and reigns with you and with the Holy Spirit, God for ever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER...**

Celebrating the Word: Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (*Celebrating the Word* was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., deceased 2012). For information: website: www.resurrectionists.ca Email: provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca, The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).