

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given December 30, 2007
Feast of the Holy Family - Liturgical Year A

Families come in various sizes and descriptions. I imagine that few of them would claim to be holy. I'm not sure that Mary and Joseph would have claimed that title either. As St. Matthew tells the story, they might have claimed "refugee" as the adjective to clarify their family.

Our impressions of the Holy Family can be limited by the Creche or by the Christmas pageants – and of course by the Child who is not just Mary's child, but God's divine Son. But – this family, they are like us. They lived in a couple of places other than their hometown. Jesus learned about life from Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph learned about life from each other and even from their infant son. They had experiences of difficulty, even of great adversity.

Let's fill in the gaps that the Gospel offers. Going to Egypt, they would have found their way to a community where there were other Jewish people. But language and culture would have limited the work opportunities for Joseph. They would have learned to accept people quite different than themselves. They would have learned to depend on one another more deeply, than they would've at home in Bethlehem. And they learned to rely on and to trust God at a deeper level.

Their situation wasn't simply different – it would have changed them. Seeing the homesickness and fear on Mary's face would have deepened Joseph's compassion. Mary had to bear with Joseph's stumbling efforts to learn the language. But, every time they held the child Jesus, or heard him speak a new word, or watched him run and play with the Egyptian child next door – they would have been filled with gratitude to God.

All of their experiences helped them form and shape Jesus. He learned from Mary and Joseph how to live and how to love. Jesus gives human form and shape to God's divine love, so that God could offer his divine love to humanity.

Mary and Joseph's life together, their love for one another, and their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – these things made them who they are – and all of this would have had an impact on the Egyptian neighbors and friends. They didn't all connect to Judaism, but they could not help but see the wholesome nature of the life of the Holy Family and be influenced by them.

By living the life God had called them to live, by having Jesus as the center of their family's life – they influenced their neighbors and friends positively. That's the challenge the Feast of the Holy Family offers us. By living the life God calls *us* to – by keeping Jesus as the center of *our* lives, we can influence *our* neighbors and friends positively.

Our gathering at the Eucharist today and every Sunday is a sign of the centrality of Christ in our lives. His presence here in a community of faith, in the Word and in the Holy Eucharist enables him to influence us – so that we can influence others by our wholesome living – which is what holiness looks like in our world.