

## Holy Family – (Year B) – December 31, 2017

SIR 3:2-6, 12-14; PS 128:1-2, 3, 4-5; COL 3:12-21; LK 2:22-40

We've all heard the expression, "**Kids say the darndest things.**"

But a parish priest can *also* tell you: "**Kids [often] say the most *theologically astute things!***"

Sometimes "little kid" **questions** and **statements** about the Church are more theologically insightful than we so-called "mature" adults give them credit for.

For example, kids have come up to me after Mass and asked:

**"If God made everything, then who made God?"**

Some adults might dismiss this kind of question as silly or childish, but the question itself contains a **rather profound understanding** of the way things work in the natural world—an understanding that eludes even some of the most intelligent and highly-respected **atheists** of today.

What makes this question so **intelligent**?

It's that...even a kid understands that **nothing can create itself**, and that everything has to have a **cause**...*even if the kid cannot articulate the underlying principle.*

But there is also a **flaw** in the question, because the very **phrasing** of the question assumes—*incorrectly*—that God is just another part of creation instead of something—or some **ONE**—wholly **other than**...completely ***apart from***...creation.

God exists—and has **always** existed—outside the limits of time and space which define the created universe. So, he's not subject to the laws that govern the things we encounter in the natural world.

But the "intelligent" atheists often fail to make the important distinction—between Creator and creation. The "god" they argue against is something **different from**—and something significantly ***less than***—the God of Christianity—a mere caricature of the True God.

So, “**Who made God?**” is a good example of an intelligent “**kid question**”.

But there are also intelligent “**kid answers**” which, *even if not the responses sought by the questioner*, are, nevertheless, quite accurate.

For example, when I ask the younger kids in our **school** or in our **faith formation program** to name the members of the **Holy Family**, they will often say, “**The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**”. And while the answer I’m looking for is “**Jesus, Mary and Joseph**”, this “kid answer” is **technically...theologically speaking**...the most accurate answer possible.

In a homily given in Mexico in 1979, St. John Paul II said **this** about God:

**It has been said, in a beautiful and profound way, that our God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love.**

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790128\\_mexico-puebla-seminario.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790128_mexico-puebla-seminario.html)

So, we can see that this “kid” answer to the question, “**Who are the members of the Holy Family?**”, though *technically incorrect*, is quite *theologically astute*.

**The holiest of families is, indeed, God himself**—the *Holy Trinity*—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a revealed mystery that we can believe, even if we “**big kids**” cannot articulate the underlying principle.

Whether we’re talking about the **Holy Trinity** or the **Holy Family**, it’s the **one person**—the *Son*—who belongs to *both families*—who models for us the kind of relationship we should have with God.

No matter what Jesus was **doing**...no matter what he was *suffering*...his highest priority was **always** his Father’s will.

For example, after Jesus had been talking to the **Samaritan woman at the well**, he said to his disciples:

***My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.*** (Jn 4:34)

Much later, while in the throes of **agony in the Garden of Gethsemane**, Jesus said to his Father:

*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* (Mt 26:39)

In our **1<sup>st</sup> Reading** today, the author of the **Book of Sirach** writes:

*God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons.* (Sir 3:2)

**This was true, even for Jesus**, as his **foster-father Joseph**, and his **mother Mary** had *parental authority* over him. And he—even though he was the Son of God—**submitted** to that authority. He did so because he knew that the **4<sup>th</sup> Commandment**—to **honor one's father and mother**—was God's **will**.

Recall that, immediately after Mary and Joseph **found Jesus in the Temple** after a frantic three-day search of Jerusalem, the **Gospel of Luke** tells us that:

*And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them...* (Lk 2:51)

Jesus was 12 years old at that point. He had been raised by parents who had been obedient to God *even before he had been born*, and who **modeled** faithfulness and obedience to their Son in their home.

Consider Joseph's obedience.

The **Gospel of Matthew** describes Joseph as a "**righteous**" man. He planned to divorce Mary quietly when she was found pregnant without them having been together as husband and wife. After the angel of God set the record straight for Joseph in a dream, the Gospel reports that:

*When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...* (Mt 1:24)

Later, after the visit of the **Magi**, Joseph was instructed by God through an angel—again in a dream—to flee to **Egypt** to avoid the murderous wrath of **King Herod** who sought to kill their Son. Without counting the cost to himself, Joseph put the **welfare of his Son and wife** ahead of his own **comfort**...and obeyed God.

Two more times, an angel appeared to Joseph and told him, first, to **leave Egypt** and return first to his **hometown**; and later, to go *specifically* to **Nazareth**. In all cases, Joseph obeyed God's will.

How about Mary?

**Mary**, of course, submitted fully to God's will the moment she learned that she was to be the **Mother of God**. She too—*like Joseph*—abandoned her own future into God's hands without knowing exactly how things would unfold. God's fidelity to Mary was confirmed multiple times, as when she **visited** her cousin **Elizabeth** and Elizabeth called her the *“mother of my Lord”* (cf. Lk 1:43); and again, in **today's Gospel** where **Simeon**, inspired by the Holy Spirit, affirms just how influential her 8-day old boy was to be.

Mary even embraced what **St. Paul** articulated in our **2<sup>nd</sup> Reading** today in his **Letter to the Colossians**, where he wrote:

*Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.* (Col 3:18)

To our modern ears, this directive may sound **unacceptable**. My sister **Margaret** tells of a conversation at school with her fellow teachers some years back on the subject of **the relationship between husbands and wives**.

During the conversation, my sister said that her husband **Larry** was, indeed, the head of the home. A **much younger female colleague** berated her for essentially being a doormat for her husband. My sister said:

**“Of course, he's the head of the home. At some point, someone has to make a decision on difficult issues. But don't think for a moment that he would ever make a major decision affecting our family without talking it over with me and us coming to an agreement together. He respects me and I respect him. And that's why it works.”**

The problem, here, was not **my sister's choice**.

The problem was this **young “feminist's” misunderstanding of God's plan** for the family. And the key to understanding God's plan is to know what is *really* meant by **“subordinate”** or **“submissive”**.

Think again of Mary and Joseph. **Joseph received his orders from God** for the safety and welfare of his wife and child. Joseph followed God's orders and carried out his mission as **foster-father of Jesus** and **husband of Mary** faithfully.

To be “**subordinate**” is—we could say—to be “*under the orders of*”. To be “**submissive**” is—we could say—to be “*under the mission of*”.

So, as Joseph received his instructions from God, and no doubt discussed them with Mary, Mary conformed to the “orders” and “mission” that Joseph had received.

**To be a holy family today means rejecting society's short-sighted, misguided definition of equality.**

*Equality does not mean sameness.*

**Men and women are different, no matter what the societal brainwashers today say otherwise on the subject.**

Fathers and mothers have **different roles** in the rearing of children. Husbands and wives have **different responsibilities** within a family, based on the **God-given differences between male and female**.

Just as Mary and Joseph followed **God's directives** in the way they lived their family life, so too must spouses and parents today put obedience to God first if they, too, wish to be a **holy family**.

Let's listen again to St. Paul's words, especially *the last six words in the sentence*:

***Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.*** (Col 3:18)

Now, let's see what the **Church** says, *officially*, on this matter, particularly as to what is “**proper in the Lord**”:

***This subjection...does not deny or take away the liberty which fully belongs to the woman both in view of her dignity as a human person, and in view of her most noble office as wife and mother and companion; nor does it bid her obey her husband's every request if not in harmony with right reason or with the dignity due to wife... (CC, 27) For if the man is the head, the woman is the heart,***

**and as he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love (CC, 27)...*In fact, if the husband neglect his duty, it falls to the wife to take his place in directing the family. But the structure of the family and its fundamental law, established and confirmed by God, must always and everywhere be maintained intact (CC, 28).***

Those words were written in **1930**, by **Pope Pius XI!**

So much for women being **doormats**, huh?

Ultimately, if we want to know whose plan is best for the family—**God’s plan or society’s plan**—then we must consider these words of Jesus:

*For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit.* (Lk 6:43-44)

Statistically, the **divorce rate** for couples who follow the “secular gospel” regarding **sex, contraception and cohabitation**, is between **50% - 70%**. Conversely, *the divorce rate for those couples who follow God’s plan for marriage is around 4%*.

In the end, it’s **the family that conforms to God’s will** that bears the *fruit* of **happiness, love, joy** and the kind of **peace** that the world simply cannot offer.

When we think about the reason for the Church’s celebration of the **Feast of the Holy Family**, the key word for us is “**holy**”, which means “*dedicated to the service of God*”.

**The Holy Family was holy, precisely because Mary and Joseph put God first... even when doing so entailed great sacrifice and potential suffering.**

No family better exemplified this holiness than Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

And no family can go wrong if they, **like the Holy Family**, put God above all other considerations in their own homes.