

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is truly a blessing to be in the Christmas Season. Remember, though the world celebrates Christmas starting sometime around Halloween (isn't that crazy that decorations go up so early?!), yet the Church wants to focus on Advent during the preparation for Jesus' birth, and then truly rejoice for the many days of Christmas. The whole Christmas Season goes from the first Mass on Christmas Eve, through the Epiphany, and up to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (this year, January 12, 2020). That's 19 Days of Christmas celebration!

This weekend, we focus on the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In the Gospel, we hear how God warns Joseph in a dream that Herod wants to kill Jesus, and so they flee to Egypt, and then return to Nazareth after Herod dies. While most families do not have to flee their homes for safety, every family has to deal with struggles, hardships, and sacrifices that they did not foresee. This is what is at the heart of the meaning of **FAMILY: Forget About Me, I Love You**. We endure the struggles of life because we love each other.

Love looks like something. Many times, we think love is a warm feeling of affection. While love sometimes manifests itself this way, the real *feeling* of love is one of suffering. Don't let that scare you, rather, look to the incredible love of Jesus. His love was most truly manifested for us not when He felt good, but when *He endured the worst for us!* We see that love is most real, not when you make me feel good, but when I will deny myself for *your* good.

Instead of having a romantic understanding of the Holy Family (which imagines the Angels helping Mary do the laundry, while all are in a constant mystical state of being), we would do better to see the real sacrifices that Mary and Joseph made in order to protect and nurture Jesus. This is real love. Shortly after Jesus was born, they had to flee in the night (probably with very little with them) going to a foreign country. Even when they returned, they lived lives of poverty. Other than at the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary, we have no indication that she had any other mystical experiences in this life. We can see in their lives the struggles of not having needs and wants provided. As Jesus disappeared in the Temple for three days, we can see in Mary and Joseph the same fear of parents who can't find their children. We know that Joseph died before Jesus was crucified, and so we can see in Mary the struggle of those who have lost a spouse. And at the Crucifixion, we find in Mary the pain that any parent has when their child dies.

The Holy Family lived normal, everyday lives, with the usual suffering (and more). They truly are an image and model of how to live – not just by faith, but in all of the ordinary, everyday things of life. With their example, we can learn to bear the burdens of family life with courage.

As we each struggle with the hardships of life, let's look to Jesus, Mary and Joseph for guidance and prayers, that we may have the grace to love each other in the struggles, and keep our eyes fixed on that which is most important – love of God, love of each other.