

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we celebrate the Holy Family. This is a great opportunity to remind us that the family is a the core unit of society – as the family goes, so does society. And the devil *hates* the family. I don't use the word "hate" lightly – I use it intentionally, for he truly hates the family. Why? Because the family is a reflection of who God is, it is a participation in Divine Life. It is called the **Domestic Church** – the home Church. I know, you're thinking while the kids are screaming, "Don't touch me!" and the dog knocked over the garbage pail, and chaos seems to reign in the house, "I don't see anything Divine in this! Isn't God full of peace?!!" Yet, the very essence of God is Trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – and this Trinity is *relationship*! The heart of who God is, is relationship. Family is relationship. True, we are all part of dysfunctional families, but we are in progress, striving for holiness. The devil hates how the family reflect God's love, and so he attacks it with great malice.

So, what are some of the ways we can help make our families "holy families," to break off the attacks of the evil one? First, I would say that we need to have a real sense of what the family is supposed to be. Being a good, holy family doesn't mean we have all of our "stuff" together... we are broken and we will remain broken. It doesn't mean the kids will never fight, and we'll all be hunky-dory Pollyanna-ish. It means that we move through the brokenness and strive to love each other in our wounded and sinfulness. We don't have to be "perfect" (as the world understands it) to be holy.

The following suggestions come from a friend of mine – Fr. James Bromwich – who wrote a family rule of life. He marks five areas of family life we need to be striving to improve to build up our families. They are **Prayer, Family Life Together, Education/Teaching the Faith, Sacrifice/Fasting, and The Moral Life of the Family**. I don't have space to go into all of these areas today, but feel free to read the whole "Rule of Life for the Family" on our web site (www.stpatricks-pelham.com/from-the-pastor/). I will just touch on areas of **Prayer** and **Family Life Together**. As with all things, there's so much more that could be said or done!

Prayer is our relationship with God. This is more "caught than taught." Of course, we can learn to say prayers, but prayer is more than words – it is communion, it is raising our hearts and minds to God. A child who sees her parents praying, who sees it is important to them, will be much more open to praying. Baseline, of course, is attending Sunday Mass together as a family. At the Mass, we enter into the very gift Christ gives of Himself to us and, more importantly, to the Father. How can we enter more fully into Mass? Maybe during the week, we can read through the upcoming Sunday's readings as a family. Pray together in the car on the way to Mass. With little ones, no matter how small, when the Consecration comes, we can take them in our arms and quietly say, "Here's where the *miracle* happens!" With older children, everyone can have a Mass Journal, and you can discuss after Mass what spoke to us in the Mass – whether from the readings, the homily, the music, the prayers, or the silence.

Another important aspect of prayer is to **pray every day as a family**. Have set times and set prayers. Have a routine, while still leaving room for spontaneity. Establish habits that the children will come to expect. Don't back down to resistance. If your kids could get away with it, most would balk at eating their vegetables and going to school every day. Yet, you still make them do it because you love them. How much more to help them grow strong and learn for the things of *eternity*.

Family Life Together is so important. There is a spirit of division that is dividing families. Most often we'll recognize it under the title of "*busyness*". If you want your children to grow up to value what you value, you need to spend time with them. If there is nothing else you get from this article, take this to heart: **the family meal is the altar of the domestic Church**. It is *vitaly important* for the entire family to eat together regularly, at least once a day. Make sure you eliminate distractions – turn off the TV, and cell phones (don't just put them on silent... people will continue texting as they eat!). This is the place where you each share about your day. This is the place where fights are to be reconciled. This is the place where children ... and parents ... learn to listen to each other, and not just talk about what they want to talk about. This is the place where memories are made! Let this be a time of joy and laughter, and a time of getting to know each other. Share responsibilities of preparation and cleanup.

I hope that this has whet your appetite for more. Again, check out the "Rule of Life for the Family" on our website for more information and suggestions. May your family truly be a holy family!