



Homiletic Guide – Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It...

December 29, 2024 – The Feast of the Holy Family.

First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:20-22,24-28 or Sirach 3: 2-6,12-14 – The Lord sets a father over his children and confirms a mother’s authority.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 84 or Psalm 128 – Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord.

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-2,21-24 – Beloved, we are now the children of God; or Colossians 3:12-21 – Put on charity, the bond of perfection; children obey your parents.

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52 – Finding in the temple... “And his mother kept all these things in her heart.

The following notes are provided as a leadoff for your reflection—it is not necessary to address every bullet point in your homily. With that in mind, here are some thoughts to ponder:

- **Children are a gift that brings joy, responsibility, and sacrifice—for the good of the couple, the good of the children, the good of the parents, and the good of the world.**
 - Our culture increasingly views children as an obstacle to personal happiness and fulfillment. As it does with nearly all relationships, transactions, and material goods these days, the world expects us to ask, “What’s in it for me?”
 - Yet for Christians, children remain the primary sign of our relationship with God—that we are all children of the Father by adoption in Christ, his only begotten Son. (1 Jn 3:1-2) How great is our Father’s love for us, expressed in that gratuitous act on which the history of the universe turns! This love becomes the model for how we are to live our lives together as family. (Col 3:18-21) Especially when the circumstances of life bring suffering and sacrifice, love finds its meaning through forgiveness, mercy, responsibility, and acts of loving kindness.



- In the reading from 1 Samuel, Hannah had nearly lost hope of bearing children. Yet in her old age, she conceived and was filled with joy. In gratitude, she returned to God the son that had been given to her, to serve the Lord for life.
- At the start of the **Jubilee Year**, we are reminded by Pope Francis that embracing marriage and having a child are acts of profound hope that set a direction for our lifelong pilgrimage of faith, hope, and love as a family. (*Spes Non Confundit*, 9)
- The reading from Sirach reminds us that sacrifice is not a one-way street. Parents make sacrifices for the good of their children, but the relationship does not end when the child becomes an adult. Rather, the bond of family love is such that children are called to make sacrifices for their parents in their old age.
- **Marriage and raising children are bound together in such a way that it can truly be said that marriage is naturally ordered toward the mission of forming a family, thus becoming a domestic church.** (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50)
 - The Holy Family models for us the call and mission of family life. “Family, become what you are!” – a community of life and love (*Familiaris Consortio*, 17 & 21)
 - At its heart, the mission of the family is redemption: couples form each other in holiness, and together they educate in faith and virtue any children they may receive from God. There is no greater mission for parents than to lead their children to the Father’s house. See this month’s bulletin insert.
 - The boundaries that define married life—that it is the lifelong, exclusive and faithful union of one man and one woman, naturally open to bearing children—are designed by God to strengthen families to fulfill their mission. This witness to love becomes a light for the world.



- Not all married couples are easily able to conceive a child—a reality that represents a hardship for many, especially as first marriages increasingly occur later in life. Some couples are called to form their families through adoption or fostering, and an “expanding fruitfulness” in the words of Pope Francis calls all married couples—with or without children—to care for the young, the poor, the outcast among them. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 178-184)
- Contemporary medical treatments provide some possibilities for those who struggle to conceive, but Catholic couples should only employ methods that are respectful of God’s plan for human procreation and the dignity of children, even at their earliest stages of development. See the *Seven Considerations While Navigating Infertility, or Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology* for detailed answers to common questions about the moral issues at stake.
- **Through the liturgy of the Eucharist, Jesus calls and leads all families to the Father’s house.**
 - “As Christians, we are also members of another family, which gathers around the family table of the altar to be fed on the sacrifice that came about because Christ was obedient unto death. We should see our own families as a domestic Church in which we put into practice the pattern of self-sacrificing love we encounter in the Eucharist. Thus all Christian families open outward to become part of Jesus’ new and larger family.” (Cong. for Divine Worship, Homiletic Directory, [121](#))
 - Through the opening rites, we encounter and greet one another as a family in the Lord, recognizing that He is truly with us when two or more are gathered in His name (Mt 18:20). Indeed, we recognize Him in our sisters and brothers in the assembly, and in a special way in the presiding priest. (*Lumen Gentium*, 8 and 10)
 - Aware of our own shortcomings, we seek forgiveness and reconciliation through the Penitential Rite as preparation for our encounter with the Lord. Likewise, families grow in love at home with phrases such as “I’m sorry,” “please,” and “thank you.” (Pope Francis, *Address to the Pilgrimage of Families*)



- In the Liturgy of the Word, we encounter Christ in the Word. The priest or deacon, who bears the scent of the sheep (assembly) from pastoral accompaniment and untold hours of listening to their needs, then fans the flame of Christ's light so that they too may exclaim with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "were not our hearts burning within us while he... opened the scriptures to us!" (Lk 24:32) Families likewise strengthen the flame of their love by thinking of one another, praying for each other, and helping one another on a daily basis.
- In the general intercessions and offering of the gifts, families offer themselves and their cares along with the bread and wine. Through the words of the Consecration, we gaze in love on Him through whom we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28) In astonishment, we acclaim this great Mystery of Faith made present on the altar (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 6 and *Desiderio Desideravi*, 24-26), which parallels the awe we feel at the audacious mutual consent of the wedding vows whereby two become one for life, or the moment of first realization that a brand new, unique human being is forming in the womb.
- All of this leads up to the encounter with Christ truly present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. Like a newborn child comforted into blissful rest in his mother's arms, or a toddler joyfully thrown into the air by her father in perfect trust that she will be caught, we come forth as a Christian family to give ourselves completely and without reservation to the One who has done the same for us, superabundantly, to bridge the gap between the human and the divine.
- From this encounter with the Risen Lord, we are sent forth as families—domestic churches—and all together as one family in Him, to build the Kingdom while he prepares an eternal dwelling place for us in the Father's house! (John 14:2) Thereby we discover what it truly means to become a holy family, following the example of the Holy Family.



- The ***Radiate Love Marriage Initiative***

- The Catholic Church throughout California is progressing along the year-long *Radiate Love* initiative to deepen our appreciation for the gift of Marriage.
- Highlight any activities that the parish will be sponsoring in the coming months. **Emphasize that *all* are invited to explore the monthly resources on the website**, especially those for marriage enrichment or designed for faith sharing at home.

Note for homilists: This Homiletic Guide is intended to help you encourage your people to invest in their marital relationship, share the faith with their children, and open their hearts to recognize the ways the Lord is leading them to radiate love out to the world, especially through the witness of a commitment to family life that leads to growth in holiness as the domestic church. The Marriage Fact Sheet 2024 offers some important background information for your review, but not necessarily to include in your homily. The social trends regarding marriage in California are not great right now, but it is important to be positive, practical, and personal.

This Homiletic Guide is one resource among many others designed for your parish ministries or your parishioners' home use. You may want to take some time to familiarize yourself with the resources for December (bulletin insert or announcement, prayer card, blessing, intercessions, videos, etc.) on the *Radiate Love* website: www.radiatelove.info. In particular, be sure to make use of the Intercessory Prayers and the Blessing for Safe Travels for Families after Communion at all weekend Masses.