

The Holy Family

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Lectionary17:

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14
Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
Col 3:12-17
Mt 2:13-15, 19-23

Possible preaching themes

- The nature of attachment theory, especially between parents and children.
- The power of adoption and the nature of stepparenting.

Possible scientific resources

1. On attachment theory and family bounds
 - a. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337>
 - b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0sKY86Qmzo>
 - c. <https://www.britannica.com/science/attachmenttheory/Individualdifference-features-of-attachment-theory> .
2. The process of stepparenting
 - a. The psychology of adoption
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/adoption>
 - b. The hidden impact of adoption <https://www.family-institute.org/behavioralhealth-resources/hiddenimpact-adoption>
 - c. parenting after adoption
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/> .

Homily outline on parenting and family bonds

- ✦ The concept of family goes beyond blood:



- ✦ Experiences of adoption and foster parenting demonstrate that it is about establishing bonds and relationships.
It is what Vatican II calls the “domestic church” (Lumen Gentium, n. 11).
- ✦
- ✦ The feast of the Holy Family provides opportunities to talk about the importance of parenting in all of its diverse forms, e.g., stepparents, foster parents, etc.
- ✦ Mary
- ✦ She is a well-developed figure in the Catholic imagination as Mother of the second Person of the Holy Trinity.
- ✦ She is celebrated for her remarkable and wholehearted commitment to God’s plan for our salvation in Christ.
- ✦ The fiat of Mary is the reference of our own Fiat to God’s will.
- ✦ Without doubt Mary shaped the life and mission of Jesus.
- ✦ Joseph
- ✦ A more hidden figure but very important in God’s salvation plan
- ✦ Like Mary visited by Gabriel, he was also visited by an angel confirming that he too was chosen by God
- ✦ The archangel Gabriel appears to Joseph as well
- ✦ Joseph was also faithful to God’s plan
- ✦ As his protector and head of the household he also undoubtedly shaped the life of Jesus.
- ✦ In December 2021, Pope Francis proclaimed a year dedicated to Saint Joseph: "St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all,"
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html .
- ✦
- ✦ Parenting can be stressful
- ✦ Even in nuclear families with biological offspring, parenting is challenging.
- ✦ Psychologists even recognize the category of “parenting stress”:
- ✦ the feeling as a parent that you cannot cope with a situation, the demands are too high, and you don’t have the resources to respond
<https://parentingscience.com/parenting-stress/> .
- ✦ In single parent families, or families with adopted or foster children, that stress can be higher.
- ✦ While attachment is a normal expectation between parents and children



- ✦ it is not a black and white affair, and adoptees face extra difficulties in successful attachment relationships
<https://www.familyinstitute.org/behavioral-health-resources/hiddenimpact-adoption> .
- ✦ Attachment is complicated as children discover or want to explore relationships with their birth parents and/or biological siblings.
The Christmas season can be a particular time for family stress
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/brainflapping/2017/dec/20/festive-stress-why-the-christmas-season-can-be-anything-but-merry> .
- ✦ Because of workloads and time demands
- ✦ Family estrangement
- ✦ Financial restraints
- ✦ Expectations around gifts, especially by children.
- ✦ The Holy Family was not a stress-free family:
- ✦ Mary was pregnant by a mysterious source.
- ✦ Joseph considered divorcing her.
- ✦ They had to make a long trip to Bethlehem while Mary was in the late stages of her pregnancy.
- ✦ The life of their newborn was threatened by King Herod.
- ✦ The young family had to flee to Egypt.
- ✦ They even “lost” Jesus in the Temple on a family pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- ✦ Pope Francis noted: In the Gospel, we see that even in the Holy Family things did not all go well: There were unexpected problems, anxiety, suffering. The Holy Family of holy cards does not exist,"
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/francischronicles/evenhol-y-family-felt-stress-pope-tells-families> .
- ✦
- ✦ Grace and generosity in the midst of imperfection:
- ✦ The image of a perfect family is a myth and actually can be destructive
<https://www.mentalhelp.net/relationships/the-perfect-family/> .
- ✦ The grace of the “domestic church” is not the grace of a flawless family unit
- ✦ rather it is the grace of God’s presence in every family despite its flaws.
- ✦ The Holy Family provides an image of family diversity:
- ✦ A husband and wife who never consummated their marriage bond
- ✦ A son with no biological father
- ✦ A stepfather and stepson
- ✦ The death of the stepfather at some stage, leaving Mary a widow.
- ✦ Each family is its own configuration of grace.
- ✦ The mission is to find the grace in the imperfections



- ✦ **To embrace the beauty and the flaws that make each family distinctive.**
- ✦ **Families with adopted children or foster children, households with grandparents or other configurations of “extended families” ✦ Are distinctive images of God’s own generosity.**
- ✦ **Jesus himself understood that his “mother and brothers” are the people who do God’s will (Mark 3:31-5).**
- ✦ **In a similar way, each family is invited in the image of the Holy Family similarly to open themselves to such inclusiveness and generosity**
- ✦ **According to their own means and circumstances**
Doing so can enhance the grace and growth of the nuclear family itself.

Tags: adoption, grace, family, psychology, stress

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way’s sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.