



# Bringing Home the Word

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph  
December 30, 2018

## The Holy Family's Example for All Families

By Mary Katharine Deeley

An old joke portrays an Irish couple with several children listening to the priest extolling the obedience of Jesus, the patience of Mary and Joseph, and exhorting his congregation to be just like them. When the Mass was ended, the couple turned to each other and one muttered to the other, "Sure to heaven, they were patient—they and their one." The joke highlights one struggle for many parents: keeping patience while children learn the lessons of life. It's a

### Sunday Readings

#### Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Those who honor their father atone for sins; they store up riches who respect their mother.

#### Colossians 3:12–21

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

#### Luke 2:41–52

[Jesus said,] "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

job that may seem easier with one than with many.

Today, though, the Holy Family offers an example that applies to all families, whether large or small. Since Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph knew that one day he was going to have to follow his own path. They couldn't choose it for him; they could only prepare him as best they could. After they found him in the Temple and he told them, "I must be in my Father's house" (Luke 2:49), which can also be translated as "I must be about my Father's work", they knew he was growing into adulthood and that his time was coming. However, Jesus returned with them because it was not yet time for him to leave, and he remains obedient to them as he always is to his heavenly Father.

All of us who are parents know that we cannot dictate what our children can or should be. We can only help them discern what God has called them to be. In the meantime, we give them the best foundation we can give by praying with them, talking to them, and modeling our own response to God's call. +

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## A Word from Pope Francis

Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod's implacable violence. This last was an experience that, sad to say, continues to afflict the many refugee families who in our day feel rejected and helpless.

—*Amoris Laetitia*,  
March 19, 2016



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- As a parent, am I doing all I can to help my children discern God's calling?
- Instead of "helicoptering," do I give my children the space to discover their own paths?

# How to Really Forgive

By Fr. William H. Shannon

*If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:14–15).*

Every day I say a prayer at least seven times which, if I truly thought about its full meaning, would scare me half to death. I say the Lord's Prayer, in which I ask God to treat me the way I treat others. I suspect—though don't like to admit it—that I secretly hope that God will treat me much better than I treat others.

I'm not a nasty person; at least I don't think I am. But there are times when I treat others rather shabbily, times when I find it hard to forgive. Oh, I can go through the external motions of being gingerly polite, but rancor may still be in my heart. So let's admit it: It takes courage to say the Lord's Prayer.

In this text from Matthew that we are reflecting on, Jesus is blunt: If you forgive, God will forgive you. If you don't forgive, God won't forgive you. That's it. Forgive, or else.

What does Jesus mean by such strong words? First, let's be clear about what he doesn't mean. He doesn't mean that ours is a God of retaliation, a God who tells us, "I'll show you. If you don't forgive



I will get even. I won't forgive you either." The God Jesus reveals loves us and continues to love us, no matter what we do.

The point Jesus is making is more subtle. He is telling us that God, much as God might want to do so, cannot forgive us if we don't forgive others. He is telling us that forgiveness cannot be received by an unforgiving heart.

## Receptive Hearts

Outside my office window is a cement sidewalk. I think to myself: *How nice it would be if I could look out and, instead of seeing slabs of concrete, encounter a colorful group of lovely flowers growing in the middle of that space.* I might even ask a friend with a green thumb to plant such flowers there for me. Alas, as much as he might want to please me, it's impossible for my friend to do so. The concrete is too hard to receive the roots of the flowers.

Likewise, a hardened heart can be no more open to forgiveness than concrete is to flower seeds. We need to have our hardened hearts softened and opened by God's grace so that God's loving forgiveness can flow into us, then through us to others.

## Gift of Tears

Do you remember the story of the Israelites in the desert protesting to Moses that they have no water? God ordered Moses to strike a huge rock with his staff and, behold, water gushed forth in abundance. Early Church writers often prayed for the gift of tears that would open their hearts and enable them to receive God's loving forgiveness.

In *The Roman Missal* there is a beautiful "Mass for the Forgiveness of Sins," known more colloquially as the "Mass for the Gift of Tears." The opening prayer is strikingly beautiful:

*Almighty and most gentle God, who brought forth from the rock a fountain of living water for your thirsty people, bring forth, we pray, from the hardness of our heart, tears of sorrow, that we may lament our sins and merit forgiveness from your mercy.*

The situation may well arise when this lovely prayer will prove to be helpful for any of us. +



*Lord, through your Word we receive the knowledge and wisdom of God. May your Spirit lead me to your sacred Word and guide me in my search for knowledge and truth.*

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 31–January 5

**Monday**, Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas: 1 Jn 2:18–21 / Jn 1:1–18

**Tuesday**, Solemnity of Mary: Nm 6:22–27 / Gal 4:4–7 / Lk 2:16–21

**Wednesday**, Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen: 1 Jn 2:22–28 / Jn 1:19–28

**Thursday**, Christmas Weekday:

1 Jn 2:29–3:6 / Jn 1:29–34

**Friday**, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton:

1 Jn 3:7–10 / Jn 1:35–42

**Saturday**, St. John Neumann:

1 Jn 3:11–21 / Jn 1:43–51