

Homily Outline for the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Cycle B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
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- I. For some time now, I and other homilists have been pointing out that our secular society celebrates the Christmas season exactly the opposite of the way the Church celebrates Christmas.
 - A. Department stores and other commercial enterprises put up their Christmas decorations and start promoting their Christmas sales right after Halloween, if not even earlier in the Fall season. Their Christmas displays then come down promptly on December 26th.
 - B. In the Church, we have four Sundays of Advent in which we prepare for Christmas, which does not begin until December 25th, and continues liturgically until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Some people, like me, keep their Christmas decorations up until February 2nd, the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, which is the last time in the liturgical calendar that we celebrate a Feast Day of Jesus as an infant baby.
 - C. This year, Lent will begin with Ash Wednesday on February 14th, when there will be another disconnect with secular society, which somewhat ironically will be celebrating the feast day of a saint, Saint Valentine's Day.
- II. In this regard, it was interesting to see an article in last Friday's issue of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL entitled, "Make Christmas Medieval Again: We have it backward. Dec. 25 is the start, not the end, of the yuletide season," by Joseph Bottum, director of the Classics Institute at Dakota State University and poetry editor of the New York Sun.
 - A. In his article, Joseph Bottum writes:

We've twisted Christmas so many times, so many ways, it's a wonder the holiday survives at all. . . . Our trouble these days is that it's taken over the wrong season. The yuletide is supposed to start with Christmas, not end with it. . . . Advent – from the fourth Sunday before Christmas to Christmas Eve – is a . . . time for reflection and confession to prepare believers for the immensity of the birth in Bethlehem. But over the past 150 or so years, Christmas has eaten up Advent . . .

The celebrations have reached so far up the calendar that Christmas arrives as an exhausting end of the season rather than its penitentially anticipated beginning. . . .

The actual Christmas season moves from Christmas to the Feast of St. Stephen on Dec. 26. And then the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the children slaughtered by King Herod. Then the Feast of the Holy Family, . . . the Feast of St. Sylvester. The Solemnity of Mary, the Feast of the Holy Name, and all the rest. . . .

But with Christmas, we have substituted a modern festival for a medieval one. . . . A secularizing impulse tried to save the festivities by giving us nonreligious tropes that could slip past the wall of church-state relations: Santa and Rudolph. Trees without Christian decorations. Candy canes. Cards that say, "happy holidays." School concerts that promise "winter carols." Frosty the Snowman, may God have mercy on us all. . . .

Fortunately, Christmas is enormous enough, extreme enough, insurmountable enough, that it can survive even its transformation into a modern holiday. . . .

Still, Christmas would be even better if we remembered that the celebration naturally extends after Christmas, not before. . . . We could stand a little more medievalism in our lives. Just in time for Christmas.

- B. It is refreshing to see the authentic celebration of Christmas being promoted not just in a secular publication, but in a commercial journal like THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
- C. I suspect that things will not change, however, as long as customers encourage the consumer frenzy of the Christmas shopping season. Perhaps one answer is for us who believe in the true meaning of Christmas not to buy into the consumer mentality of the secular world.
- D. We should remember that the original Santa Claus was Saint Nicholas, a bishop who obeyed Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor." Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need and his love for children, not for buying the latest and most fashionable items to give to his friends.

- III. Today we continue our celebration of the Christmas season on this Feast Day of the Holy Family of Nazareth.
- A. St. Teresa of Calcutta told the story of a little girl she found on the street. She took the child into the Missionaries of Charity children's home and gave her clean clothes, good food, and a nice place to stay. The sisters tried hard to make the girl happy. After a few hours, she ran away, and it was a few days before Mother Teresa found her again. She brought her back to the home, but the little girl ran away again. The sister who followed her discovered that the little girl was fleeing back to her mother, who was so poor that she lived in the street under a tree and had meager food. When asked why she ran away, the girl replied: "I could not live without my mother. She loves me." The whole time the child was with the Missionaries, she did not smile. But with her mother, she was smiling. Why? Because they were family (taken from *Mother Teresa: No Greater Love*).
- B. Mother Teresa's story is a good example of a strong parent/child relationship.
1. Families in which parents value their children and children revere their parents will be abundantly blessed by God.
 2. The mutual love that families share in their homes should extend outward, to others, as an example of God's love, which is what Saint Nicholas did.
 3. We must show this in all that we do and say to each other and to those outside the family.
- IV. As we honor the Holy Family today, let us consider our own families and the gift we are to each other despite hardships, disappointments, or disagreements. May our hearts be filled with gratitude as we prepare to unite as one in the Body of Christ.
- V. May God give us this grace. Amen.