

Homily. Feast of The Holy Family 2024

'God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor God's ways (of doing things) our ways.

Modern families can be complex and come in all shapes and sizes. We have single parent families, foster families, families of same sex couples, families where the parents are married, co-habiting families, families where parents are divorced, integrated families where the children of the couples are from different marriages....and it goes on.

In The Bible, believe it or not, it's a similar story. Samuel's mother, the barren Hannah in today's First Reading, was one of two wives of Elkanah. Solomon, the son of David, was the fruit of an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Joseph, of Technicolour Dreamcoat fame, was sold into slavery by his 11 brothers. Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel, according to Holy Scripture, had many half-brothers and half-sisters. Abraham, our 'Father in Faith', slept with his slave girl Hagar and she bore him Ishmael, later Sarah his wife conceived and bore him Isaac in her old age.

The Holy Family, in today's Gospel, is also a far from straightforward family. Jesus is not the product of a union between Joseph and Mary but 'conceived by The Holy Spirit.', You can imagine the gossip and shame in Nazareth, as Mary's pregnancy became obvious. Jesus, at 12 years of age, causes his parents great worry and extreme anxiety when he remains in Jerusalem after The Feast of Passover. His absence was unbeknownst to Mary and Joseph, his foster father, each thinking Jesus was with the other.

Holy Families today do indeed also come in 'all shapes and sizes'. Therefore, we must be careful not to stereotype what constitutes a holy family based on what we consider to be normal. God, despite Abraham's affair is remembered as the Father of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. David, despite his crimes of murder and adultery, is considered the ancestor King of Jesus, our Divine Saviour. Hannah, despite her husband's bigamy, is remembered with Ruth, Esther, Rebecca etc. as one of the great Old Testament women.

Jesus' 'chosen family' was equally far from what many would consider holy or normal, if there is such a thing as normal? Peter, the hot head who 3 times denied Jesus; Mary Magdalen a former prostitute; Matthew the hated tax collector; the ambitious and career minded, James and John; Simon the former violent revolutionary; Thomas the weak in faith doubter and Judas the betrayer who didn't believe he could be forgiven.

Yes Jesus, Mary and Joseph are The Holy Family par excellence, despite the challenges facing Mary and Joseph, but let's not forget that holiness and God's plans can unfold in what most would consider the least likely of families. 'God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor God's ways (of doing things) our ways. So, maybe when things get complicated and even difficult in our families, it may just be that God is working his plan in the inevitable 'messiness' of our life!