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"The joy of forgiveness"

In his homily at the Mass on 27 December for the feast of the Holy Family, Pope Francis stressed the "great formative role played by the family in the pilgrimage of everyday life."

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Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 27 December 2015

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

The biblical readings which we just heard presented us with the image of two families *on pilgrimage to the house of God*. Elkanah and Hannah bring their son Samuel to the Temple of Shiloh and consecrate him to the Lord (cf. *1 Sam* 1:20-22, 24-28). In the same way, Joseph and Mary, in the company of Jesus, go as pilgrims to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover (cf. *Lk* 2:41-52).

We often see pilgrims journeying to shrines and places dear to popular piety. These days, many of them are making their way to the Holy Door opened in all the cathedrals of the world and in many shrines. But the most beautiful thing which emerges from the word of God today is that

the whole family goes on pilgrimage. Fathers, mothers and children together go to the house of the Lord, in order to sanctify the holy day with prayer. It is an important teaching, which is meant for our own families as well. Indeed, we could say that family life is a series of pilgrimages, both small and big.

For example, how comforting it is for us to reflect on Mary and Joseph *teaching Jesus how to pray!* This is a sort of pilgrimage, the pilgrimage of education in prayer. And it is comforting also to know that throughout the day they would pray together, and then go each Sabbath to the synagogue to listen to readings from the Law and the Prophets, and to praise the Lord with the assembly. Certainly, during their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, they prayed by singing the Psalm: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the

Lord!' Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem (122:1-2).

How important it is for our families *to journey together towards a single goal!* We know that we have a road to travel together; a road along which we encounter difficulties but also enjoy moments of joy and consolation. And on this pilgrimage of life we also share in moments of prayer. What can be more beautiful than for a father and mother *to bless their children* at the beginning and end of each day, *to trace on their forehead the sign of the cross*, as they did on the day of their baptism? Is this not the simplest prayer which parents can offer for their children? To bless them, that is, to entrust them to the Lord, just like Elkanah and Anna, Joseph and Mary, so that he can be their protection and support throughout the day. In the same way, it is important for families to join in a brief *prayer before meals*, in order to

thank the Lord for these gifts and to learn how to share what we have received with those in greater need. These are all little gestures, yet they point to the great formative role played by the family in the pilgrimage of everyday life.

At the end of that pilgrimage, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was obedient to his parents (cf. *Lk 2:51*). This image also contains a beautiful teaching about our families. A pilgrimage does not end when we arrive at our destination, but *when we return home and resume our everyday lives*, putting into practice the spiritual fruits of our experience. We know what Jesus did on that occasion. Instead of returning home with his family, he stayed in Jerusalem, in the Temple, causing great distress to Mary and Joseph who were unable to find him. For this little “escapade,” Jesus probably had to beg forgiveness of his parents.

The Gospel doesn't say this, but I believe that we can presume it. Mary's question, moreover, contains a certain reproach, revealing the concern and anguish which she and Joseph felt. Returning home, Jesus surely remained close to them, as a sign of his complete affection and obedience. Moments like these become part of the pilgrimage of each family; the Lord transforms the moments into opportunities to grow, to ask for and to receive forgiveness, to show love and obedience.

In the Year of Mercy, every Christian family can become a privileged place on this pilgrimage for experiencing *the joy of forgiveness*. Forgiveness is the essence of the love which can understand mistakes and mend them. How miserable we would be if God did not forgive us! Within the family we learn how to forgive, because we are certain that we are

understood and supported, whatever the mistakes we make.

Let us not lose confidence in the family! It is beautiful when we can always open our hearts to one another, and hide nothing. Where there is love, there is also understanding and forgiveness. To all of you, dear families, I entrust this most important mission -- the domestic pilgrimage of daily family life -- which the world and the Church need, now more than ever.

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