

Homily for Holy Family Sunday

Let's start off with a little guessing game this morning. I'm going to give you some hints, and I want to see if you can guess the family I'm thinking of. The first hint is – it's not any of you. Next hint – some of the favorite phrases of the members of this TV family would be “D’Oh” and “Ay, Caramba”. Final hint – the mother has a tall, blue chimney as her hairstyle. Do you know which family it is? Of course, it's the Simpsons! I suspect most of you have at least heard of this show, if not seen it. But for the sake of those who have not been graced with laughing at this crazy family – it's basically a cartoon that pokes fun, in a light-hearted way, at just about every aspect of American life. Not to mention the longest-running American animated program on TV.

Well, a while back, the official newspaper of the Vatican, the L'Osservatore Romano, congratulated the Simpsons on its 20th anniversary, dedicating a whole article entitled, “Aristotle's Virtues and Homer's Doughnut.” Believe it or not! The article went on to say that although there was some reason to criticize the show's “excessively crude language, the violence of certain episodes or some extreme choices by the scriptwriters”, overall the show is based on “realistic and intelligent writing”. Noting the show's very frequent commentary on religion, especially Homer's religious confusion and ignorance, it acts as a “mirror of the indifference and the need that modern man feels toward faith”.

So, why am I bringing up the Simpson's, America's favorite fictional family? Well as you know, today is the Feast of the Holy Family – a time for us to celebrate and to honor the family of our Savior, Jesus, His immaculate mother, Mary, and His loving foster father, St. Joseph. And no, I'm not going to try to compare Bart and Marge and Homer to the Holy Family! But isn't it true that it's often pretty easy for us to relate to the craziness and dysfunction of that family – the yelling, the pettiness, the disrespect. After all, isn't that why we laugh at it, because on some level we identify with it?

Perhaps the hecticness of your family is visible to everyone here at Church – like when you feel like your child is the only one squawking or misbehaving, and so you have to get up in front of “everyone” to tend to them. Or perhaps the chaos is only visible at home, where rudeness and bickering are confined to the safety of your four walls. Yes, but here you are anyway. And sometimes, it might just feel easier to give up that hope for a greater semblance of peace, or to give up that wish not to feel “hypocritical”, or even to give up that quest to become more like the Holy Family. And yet, here you are anyway.

But, you know, the Holy Family might not be that different from many of our families. There was definitely the uncertainty of how to raise their firstborn – after all, He was Son of God. There was absolutely the frustration of trying to understand Him when He was on the cusp of being a teenager – remember today’s Gospel, when Jesus was lost in the Temple at 12 years old? And there was definitely the pain of watching their child go through the agony and suffering caused by the wrong choices of others.

My brothers and sisters, Blessed Theresa of Calcutta – Mother Theresa – was known to say that God does not so much desire success or perfection in what we do; rather it is our faithfulness that pleases Him most. And when it comes to our families, rather than seeing the obstacles and struggles as signs of defeat, we are challenged today to see them as opportunities to persevere through in order to be faithful. And that’s one of the distinguishing features of the Holy Family – their faithfulness to God and His will!

So yes, God’s plan for family life is absolutely a lofty goal – but it was realized in the life of the Holy Family. And while, we may find our families tending more toward Homer’s than that of Joseph’s, we can’t give up the goal of holiness. This is the Year of Mercy, after all – a time to not just experience God’s mercy towards us individually, but also a time to share that forgiveness, compassion, and grace with those people we’re stuck with – our families. And may the peace of the Holy Family be with your families throughout this new year to come. God bless you.