Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you” (Matt 2:13).

Feast of the Holy Family

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; *Mt 2:13-15, 19-23*

During his papacy, Pope Francis has often focused the church on the importance of the family, with two synods and a key papal letter on love. The message has been clear: As the family goes, so goes society. The Holy Family therefore becomes a key point of entry into the question of how the image and likeness of God is the ultimate imprint of the life of the Trinity on all of creation, and in a critical way, on human beings in families.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus hardly seem like the kind of family we can imitate, so extraordinary are the circumstance of their lives. The theology of the Christmas story makes us hesitate to apply their example to our ordinary experience. Yet their story also depicts a whole range of challenges that place them in the thick of the common human struggle.

It is as though we read about them every day in the news: couples in poverty, homeless and on the move, under government scrutiny, exposed to the elements, lacking basic healthcare, dogged by uncertainty and threat of violence, forced to flee and to live as refugees in exile from their homeland.

Joseph supports his family with physical labor. Mary is a wife who is widowed. Jesus departs to take up his life’s calling as a preacher, facing suspicion and resistance. He eventually suffers betrayal and abandonment by his closest companions, ejection from his religious community and a horrible public execution by the state as a subversive.

It is as though solidarity with the human condition required that this family bear the full burden of suffering so that no other family might say, “They could not possibly understand our loss or our challenges." Dramatic in scope and intensity, the issues confronting the Holy Family make them mentors for us all.

Joseph stands with every father and husband who must negotiate the demands of marriage and parenting. Mary stands with every mother who has lost a child. Jesus, though divine, models human development more completely than any person who has ever lived, at a depth we can only imagine. His human identity emerged from engaging the same temptations and struggles we all face.

Whatever our own situations, we celebrate the Holy Family by opening our hearts to be dwelling places for the ultimate Holy Family, the Trinitarian God. It is where diversity is united in love, where all brokenness is healed, where community is nurtured and relationships are affirmed by compassion, reconciliation and mercy.

Life is a journey and, as pilgrims on our way to God, we can have no better companions than the Holy Family.