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Pope Francis greets visitors in St. Peter's Square gathered to pray the Angelus prayer on the feast of the Holy Family, Dec. 29, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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The Holy Family, though made up of saints and God incarnate, faced real challenges and offers a model for navigating the "dramatic" moments that test all families, Pope Francis said.

Marking the feast of the Holy Family Dec. 29, Francis reflected on the day's Gospel reading from St. Luke in which the 12-year-old Jesus goes missing from his parents and is found in the temple of Jerusalem.

The account, the pope said, "appears to be the story of a family in crisis, a crisis of our times, of a difficult teenager and two parents who are unable to understand him."

Yet the Holy Family is a model of how families can overcome such challenges "because it is a family that converses, that listens, that talks."

"Dialogue is an important element for a family," he said. "A family that does not communicate cannot be a happy family."

Francis noted how upon finding Jesus in the temple, Mary "does not accuse and does not judge, but tries to understand how to accept this son who is so different by listening."

In St. Luke's account of the incident, Mary says to Jesus after searching for him for three days, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."

"It is good when a mother does not start with a rebuke, but with a question," the pope said.

Jesus replied that it was unnecessary to look for him, since he was in his Father's house. However, the Gospel account goes on to state that Mary and St. Joseph "did not understand what he said to them."

That confusion shows "that in the family it is more important to listen than to understand," Francis said. "Listening is giving importance to the other, recognizing his or her right to exist and think autonomously. Children need this. Think carefully, parents: Listen to your children who need this."

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The pope said mealtimes in particular "are a special moment for dialogue in the family."

"It is good to stay together around the table and to speak," he said. "This can solve many problems, and above all unite the generations."

Francis encouraged parents and children, and grandparents and grandchildren, to speak to one another and urged them to "never remain closed in on yourself or, even worse, with your head turned to your mobile phone."

"Talk, listen to each other, this is the dialogue that is good for you and that makes you grow," he said.

The pope said that while the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is holy, "we have seen that even Jesus' parents did not always understand him."

Likewise, he encouraged families to "not be surprised if at times it happens that we do not understand each other," and to consider if they have made a genuine effort to engage in dialogue.

"What we can learn from the Holy Family today is mutual listening," he said.