

# February is a Time for Getting to Know The Holy Family

by Mary Clifford Morrell



For the month of February, Catholics honor the Holy Family, in a frequent teaching of Pope Francis: “Today our gaze on the Holy Family lets us also be drawn into the simplicity of the life they led in Nazareth. It is an example that does our families great good, helping them increasingly to become communities of love and reconciliation, in which tenderness, mutual help, and mutual forgiveness is experienced. Let us remember the three key words for living in peace and joy in the family: “may I,” “thank you” and “sorry” ... I would also like to encourage families to become aware of the importance they have in the Church and in society. The proclamation of the Gospel, in fact, first passes through the family to reach the various spheres of daily life.”

Children are familiar with experiences of love and forgiveness, caring and helpfulness within their own families. They are also familiar with anxiety, anger, disappointment and fear. What they know about the Holy Family may not be enough for them to think of Mary, Joseph and Jesus in terms of a real family, like theirs, who experience the ups and downs of family life.

The fact that the month of the Holy Family comes so soon after Christmas means [households] can make use of the image of the Nativity which is fresh in the mind of [everyone]. If they haven’t seen one at home, they have likely seen one in [their home parish, the front of the many different denomination churches and homes around the neighborhood]. This may be the only scene they’ve ever envisioned of the Holy Family, but that holy night was just the beginning of their family life together.

Imagine the day-to-day life of the Holy Family, from Jesus' birth in Bethlehem until his death and Resurrection. Imagine the life of the Holy Family as they live their own lives as a family. Read Scripture, especially Matthew 2:13-23, where an angel appears to Joseph in a dream instructing him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the baby Jesus to escape King Herod's wrath or, Luke 2:41-52, the story about Jesus remaining behind in Jerusalem after the family travels there to go to the temple. Think about how every family, even the Holy Family, experience difficult situations and how they handled those difficulties.

Pray. As observant Jews, Mary, Joseph and Jesus would have followed Jewish law and offered formal prayers in their home several times a day, in addition to praying always in their hearts. One of the daily prayers, said morning and evening, would have been the Shema in the Book of Deuteronomy. Chapter 6, verses 4-9 (printed below) are good for [one] to read, too, to gain a better understanding of what was important to the Holy Family. The first line is a profession of faith: "Hear O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

### **The Holy Family Prayer**

Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, bless our family. Graciously inspire in us the unity, peace, and mutual love that you found in your own family in the little town of Nazareth.

Mary, Mother of Jesus and Our Mother, nourish our family with your faith and your love. Keep us close to your Son, Jesus, in all our sorrows and joys. Joseph, Foster-father to Jesus, guardian and spouse of Mary, keep our family safe from harm. Help us in all times of discouragement or anxiety. Holy Family of Nazareth, make our family one with you. Help us to be instruments of peace. Grant that love, strengthened by grace, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass. May we always have God at the center of our hearts and homes until we are all one family, happy and at peace in our true home with you. Amen.

From the Missionaries of the Holy Family

### **The Shema**

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for ornaments between your eyes. And you shall inscribe them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).