

HOMILY
The Feast of the Holy Family
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Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

In a rare personal interview granted shortly before her death, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis remarked: *“If you bungle raising your children, I don’t think whatever else you do will matter very much.”*

For a woman whose wealth, background and connections could have given her a ticket to anything she set her mind to, her statement may seem surprising. Despite all the possibilities she could have pursued for herself, Mrs. Kennedy was convinced that family was ultimately the most important thing in her life. To her credit, she lived by that conviction.

Healthy families are essential to the well being of society. As anyone can attest, during the past quarter century the family is coming on some hard times:

- There’s an ever-increasing rate of divorce (more than one million per year in the United States).
- A steady rise in the number of single-parent households.
- One- third of all school-aged children live with one parent.
- In more than 50 percent of all households, both parents must seek employment outside the home.
- More than 20 per cent of American families change their residence annually or more often.

As a result, we have suffered a breakdown of sorts in areas like education and family life as well as in our attitudes to life and values and living styles.

Alert to the needs of the people and the signs of the times, the Church gathers us together for a celebration of family. But today is not a time to bemoan the obvious difficulties that threaten every family, but to accent the positive qualities that every family enjoys. Today is not a day to look back at how things use to be in the “good ole days.” Today affords each family a fresh chance to look at how things are and to look at the direction in which the family would like to grow together.

In his book, *Parenting from the Heart*, an author by the name of Steven Vannoy discusses the various messages which family members import one another. He explains that there are really only two kinds of messages—hurtful ones (those that belittle or diminish) or love messages (those that reinforce others’ goodness, their talents and possibilities).

When our children are young, we focus on every little misstep they take. What a difference a parent can make if they treat a child, not as they might be at that moment, but as they know they can become...if they give the child messages that can build up rather than tear down...messages, which coax toward growth rather than crush the spirit. These provide the healthy framework within which much mutual love and respect can flourish. It was just such a healthy framework that today’s Second Reading wished to recommend to the Christians at Colossae.

Father Charlie Irvin, who writes in *Faith Magazine* and who visited our parish last year, offers something to think about as 2007 begins:

*“If you have something to tell someone, ask yourself:
Is it kind?
Is it true?
Is it needed?”*

Suffice it to say that if every family member kept this uppermost in mind and heart, the inclination to bicker, berate, and/or belittle would probably be curtailed or eliminated.

One advantage to living in this century is that we have a choice. Before the 19th Century, people could not be individuals. Now we know that we are simultaneously individuals and part of a family. It is our privilege and responsibility to honor both sides of our being.

Keeping the family together is about trying to stay in touch. Parish ministers will tell you that people come to them speaking with regrets like these:

When I was young, my mother was going to read me a story, but she had to wax the bathroom floor and there wasn't time.

When I was young, my grandparents were going to come for Christmas, but they couldn't get someone to feed the dogs and my grandfather did not like the cold weather and, besides, they didn't have time.

When I was young, my father was going to listen to me read my essay on "What I Want To Be When I Grow Up," but there was Monday Night Football and there wasn't time.

When I was young, my father and I were going to go hiking in the Sierras, but at the last minute he had to fertilize the lawn and there wasn't time.

When I grew up and left home to be married, I was going to sit down with Mom and Dad and tell them I love them and would miss them, but my best man was honking the horn in front of my house so there wasn't time.

Into our hectic world, Jesus comes, and still invites us to exercise the spirit as well as the mind and the body. The best way we exercise the spirit is by giving attention to things of eternal significance, such as listening, loving, and learning from the least expected places.

How often have we said, “I can’t believe it’s been so long!” And then we promise that we’ll make a special effort to not let that happen again. Strange that in a world obsessed with communications, it has never been harder to stay in touch, to build and maintain real intimacy, real life-sharing.

In closing, remember no family is perfect, and we are often hurt by conditions within a family. Imagine for a moment that all your immediate family members have been killed in some tragedy or accident. Would you really miss them? What will you have lost by their passing? Who would you wish and what would you have wished to say to them before they suddenly left? What events in the past year might now appear in a different light? And so here we are in our hectic world and Jesus and his family come to share their story with us. And they invite us to exercise the gifts of every day -- the spirit as well as the mind and the body and the heart. And the best way that we can exercise that spirit is to pay attention and to really be present to those closest to us by listening and loving and learning our family is the best gift of all.

May God bless you and keep us his family we pray, forever and ever.

Amen