

Timothy J. Grassi

## Holy Family (B) 2020

Jesse Jackson tells the story of a visit he made to the University of Southern Mississippi. While touring the campus with the university president, he saw a towering male student, six-feet, eight-inches tall, holding hands with a fidgety coed barely three-feet tall. What a contrast, six-feet, eight-inches tall and only three-feet tall. His curiosity piqued, Jackson watched as the young man, dressed in a warm-up suit, tenderly kissed the tiny coed, and sent her off to class. The president said that the student was a star basketball player. Both parents had passed away when he was a teenager, and he made a vow to look after his sister. Many scholarships came his way, but only Southern Mississippi offered one to his sister, too. Jackson went over to the basketball star, introduced himself, and said he appreciated the way he was looking out for his sister. The athlete shrugged and said, “Those of us who God makes six-eight have to look out for those He makes three-three.”

When I think of the Holy Family, I always think of the quality or qualities that make the Holy Family, “*holy*.” The quality of all qualities in this regard is love. The Church very appropriately places the Feast of the Holy Family immediately after Christmas for good reason. On Christmas, what happens is that Love incarnate enters into our world. In the scriptures, St. John says, “God is Love.” So, what that means is that when Jesus, Almighty God, Who created all things chose to become a creature and enter our world as a man, Love became physically visible, because “God is Love!” So, “Love” penetrated a family. Of course that love was manifested in the actions of the Holy Family. Like the Love of St. Joseph to take Mary as his wife even though she was with child; or the acceptance of having to travel to Jerusalem for the census and being stuck with only a stable to give birth in; or as we heard in the Gospel, the obedience of Mary and Joseph to present their child in the temple as prescribed by the law; or their willingness to flee to Egypt to escape Herod’s terror and the killing of the innocents. These are some examples of the common thread of sacrifice, manifesting love in the Holy Family.

What about our families today? Do we love within our families? Is the common thread of sacrifice manifesting love prevalent in our families? I’m often amazed to find out that some of the people that I find so helpful and willing to do anything for you are the same people that won’t do anything for their spouse or the sibling or even their parent. They will quickly exercise love outside the family, but within the family they are a totally different person. Listen to what the first

reading has to say, “Whoever honors his father atones for sins,... he stores up riches who reveres his mother.”

I’ve seen people make all sorts of sacrifices outside the family, but within the family it’s all about “ME,” and THEY all have to make the sacrifice for me. I’ve seen husbands bend over backwards to help others in various ways, but they can live completely oblivious to the opportunities to help their own wives. I’ve seen siblings and even spouses treat each other like they each were universes unto themselves so that galactic battles arise when those universes collide and neither is willing to sacrifice for the other. I’ve seen people who could be tender and understanding to everyone outside the confines of their own home, but within the home, tenderness and kindness cannot be seen. Let’s not forget sarcasm either. How often do families have this constant sarcasm that is exchanged between all the members of the family, especially between spouses? The concept of sharing is seldom seen in families anymore. I think that’s one of the fruits of few children. When families were bigger, sharing was necessary.

You know, we can blame the breakdown of the family on all sorts of things like contraception, abortion, political agendas, same sex unions, gender identity, gender inequality, feminism, machismo or any number of other influences that can be identified as contributing to the breakdown of the family. And indeed, all these things do contribute, but none of them would make a difference if the true spirit of love was the thread woven through the entire family. A love that is manifested by sacrifice of each individual within the family. A love that is manifested when a 6’8” basketball star can sacrifice a dream to be tender, loving and present to his 3’3” sister. Those are the ingredients for a holy family. I’d like to close with something I think speaks volumes in this regard. It’s written about children, but it would work equally well if you were to substitute spouse or sibling in place of children as it applies to you.

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.  
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.  
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.  
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.  
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.  
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.  
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.  
If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.  
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.  
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.