**Solemnity of the Holy Family – 2014**

**December 28/28, 2014**

**Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14; Col 3: 12-21; Luke 2: 22-40**

The ways of the world and the ways of Christianity. The ways of individualism and autonomy and the ways of relationship and family and mutual responsibility. The ways of “me” and the ways of “us” and community.

In so many ways I have been reflecting on these questions in the last few years. More and more, I see the effects of the “ways of the world” are having on families, how families live, how they come together, yes, even how they are now defined. That which is given to us today in the Gospel as a model for family life is increasingly being ridiculed in modern society. If not ridiculed, then at least considered a sort of nice Christmas season ornament. The idea that family consists of a man and a woman coming together with a sacrificial love for one another, uniting their lives as one and in that love bringing forth children whom they raise and nurture, that definition of family is considered more and more as unrealistic and even in some quarters disrespectful and prejudiced.

How can this be? How have we come to this point in our thinking about family and our experience of it?

Nobody’s family is perfect. We all know that. They can’t be, not this side of heaven. None of our families are as holy or as happy or as secure or as stable as the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. This side of heaven we are imperfect people in an imperfect world using imperfect means in our attempt to become perfect. But God has a plan and we have to listen to Him. Christianity teaches us how to be a family and the world tries to make us individuals and the two don’t go together well.

We are not autonomous individuals in this world. We need each other. The world would want us to think we can make it on our own. The world would want us to think that the model for health and maturity is individuality, that what is important is self-determination, knowing yourself well, setting your own course in life, being assertive, and defining yourself. The world would say that what is true is what you decide is true, that you should be independent, self-sufficient, owe no one anything, and at all costs, be free.

The fact is, my friends, we are not independent autonomous individuals, nor should we be. We are human beings, human persons made in the image of God. We are deeply embedded in relationships and we are dependent on each other, we need each other. What we do, we do not do in isolation or secrecy; rather what we do has profound effects on one another, especially our families.

That which is threatening families today is the world’s attempts to get us to buy into the idea that life and love and marriage and family are all about “me;” that life and love and relationships are defined by me; that when life or love or relationships do not mesh with my definition, my way of thinking, my needs or my desires, or my perception, then that life should end, that love should die, and that relationship should be terminated. That is the reason for the acceptance of abortion, the high rate of divorce, euthanasia, and the redefinition of marriage that is sweeping the nation.

We are not autonomous individuals, independent beings. We are human persons deeply embedded in relationships, in family. This is the Christian view. Who we are is not defined primarily by us. It is defined by our relationships: by our families, by our parish, by our community. We need each other in this way. What I do, how I feel, what I believe, and what I value has profound effects on others.

My friends, we were created for others. We are for others. Ultimately, we are God’s, and we were created to be a gift to someone else. This is why a man gives himself to a woman in marriage. That is why a father and mother give themselves to their children. That is why children give obedience and respect and love to their parent and care for them in their old age.

Let us pray:

*O Jesus, give us the grace and the understanding we so desperately need to be family*

*To be Christians in name and in truth*

*To strive to be families modeled after you Holy Family.*

*May we always remember that who we are and what we do has profound effects*

*On our husbands and our wives, on our children and our parents.*

*Mary, Pray for us!*

*St. Joseph, protect us!*