

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

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Holy Family – Dec 28, 2025

“Out of Egypt I called my son..”

Question of the Week: How have you been thwarted in a plan yet found it to be part of the plan?

- **First Reading: Siracusa 3: 2-7, 12-14**

God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons..

- **Responsorial: Psalm 126**

R: Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways

- **Second Reading: Colossians 3: 12-17**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

- **Gospel: Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23**

“Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Reading 1: Respect for Parents

Jesus, son of Sirach, wrote his wisdom treatise (also known as "Ecclesiasticus" or "Book of the Church") as a text book to train young men entering the bureaucracy in Jerusalem. Authored prior to the Maccabean revolt against the Syrians in 180 B.C., the book contained praises for wisdom and advice for the moral life, especially interpersonal and family relationships. These verses addressed the duty a son owed his parents.

Notice the verses expound upon the Fourth Commandment. A brief reflection on the list of the commandments revealed the esteem placed upon the extended family as the pillar of society. Honoring one's parents was the most important of the commandments that

addressed human affairs (more important than murder, theft, adultery, and bearing false witness). Sirach seemed to state that honoring parents was a sign of righteousness. It forgave sin [3:3]. It was a means of divine blessing (children and prayers heard) [3:5]. It was the guarantee of a long life and temporal power [3:6-7]. Even the patience required for the care of elderly parents strengthen character. And God would also look upon the son offering such care with compassion [3:12-14].

Ancient cultures like that in Judea were family-oriented and elderly-centered. Our American culture is just the opposite. What was a common necessity then is now considered optional. Yet, the advice given in Sirach is as meaningful today as it was over

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two millennia ago. Honoring parents creates strong families and strong societies.

The fourth commandment is based upon a deeper command from God: love others as self. Love assumes and builds up respect. How have you shown love and respect to your family members? How have you expected such treatment in return?

Psalm: Family Blessing

How is your family a blessing to you?

This short psalm was a beatitude for the humble, Law-abiding family man. The man in awe of the Lord would prosper, have a "proper," child-bearing wife (hidden in the family's compound), and children who would surround the father at the table. (Notice the two agricultural analogies: the vine represented the fertile wife bearing many children and the olive plants represented the productive off-spring to bring the father wealth.) The form of Psalm 128:1b-4 was "A-B-A," where the man feared the Lord (1b and 4) would prosper with wife and many children.

This man would receive the blessing of the Temple and share in the festivities of Jerusalem. The end of the blessing wished the man long life to see his grandchildren.

The invocation of "Shalom" for Israel concluded the psalm.

In context, this "song of ascents" was prayed over the pilgrim at sacrifice in the Temple. The priest who received the offering blessed the faithful man. 128:5-6 indicated this blessing may have been invoked before the

pilgrim left. In any case, the psalm presented the ideal lay man: prosperous, yet humble with a faithful, fertile wife and many children. In the eyes of the psalmist, this pilgrim would see his grandchildren and live to a ripe old age.

Notions about the ideal lay person have changed. Women have an equal place with men. Children are treasured and nurtured, not exploited for their productivity. Yet, the idea of family as a blessing remains. God uses the family to bless parents. Every parent prays they will see their grandchildren. (Some of us actually reach that point!)

When I was an undergrad, a professor once proclaimed, "There is nothing like a marriage based on faith and a faith-filled family." I couldn't agree more. Both are pure blessings.

Thank God for the blessing of your family. Ask blessing on your immediate and extended family.

Reading 2: What We Bring to the Lord's Table

3:13 "act graciously...treat you graciously" The Greek verb for "act graciously" is literally "give grace." Clearly, there is a difference between the gift of God's life and the acts that result from that life. In other words, Christians should act as graced-filled people. Because conflict and controversy were implied, the verb can be translated as "forgive." So, the translation would be: "Forgive each other, if someone fights with another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, you should also forgive."

The letter to the Colossians has some controversy. Who wrote the letter to this once

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glorious, but declining city? Some biblical scholars have argued against Paul's authorship, based upon theological concepts, writing styles, and vocabulary that were different from the main body of his letters. Nevertheless, people and events noted in the letter clearly placed authorship in the later part of Paul's life or in the years after his death (65-70 AD).

Colossae and its outlying region had a sizable Jewish population. An unnamed cult within Judaism exerted some influence in the community. The author (whether Paul or a contemporary) urged the faithful at Colossae to resist the teachings of this cult. Three teachings stand out. First, the faithful should be circumcised (2:11). Second, they should observe Jewish holidays and dietary laws (2:16, 21). But, there was a third and strange teaching this cult promoted: the worship of "angels" (2:18). While Judaism recognized the power of spiritual beings (2:8, 20) as forces in the universe, it never insisted upon "self abasement or angel worship." This evidence pointed to a group within Judaism that held a heavenly hierarchy not unlike the Gnostics, who claimed salvation based upon secret wisdom handed down through such a hierarchy. The author clearly stated that salvation came through Christ. His death and resurrection made practices of the Law and the worship of heavenly powers irrelevant (2:14-15).

How should Christians respond to the gift God offered us in Christ Jesus? First, the author listed Christian virtues and lifestyle (in opposition to the vices listed in 3:5-9). But, note the author seemed to address the community as a whole. The compassion and forgiveness in 3:12-14 expressed how the

church at Colossae should act. It should have the reputation as a community filled with love.

Next, the author seemed to address the community in worship. Christ called them into one body (assembly). So, the church should be a eucharistic ("thank-filled" in English) people [3:15]. 3:16a-b listed the proclamation of the word and homily. The community's response was song [3:16c]. 3:17 summed up the worship attitude of the assembly: give thanks to God through Christ ("offer eucharist") for everything said or done.

Have you ever questioned the reputation of the church where you worship? What do outsiders think of your community? Beyond the quality of church leadership lays a deeper question. What do we, the faithful, bring to the table of the Lord? The author of Colossians gave a clear outline how the community should answer the question: virtues and attitudes to be found in worship. How we measure up indicates how the church is seen by others.

What do you bring to Mass on Sunday? Baggage and a fighting spirit? Or a thankful heart? Honestly reflect on the quality of your worship. Ask God to heal the hurt. Place all burdens in his hands. And thank him for his grace.

Gospel: Change After the Holidays

Do you look forward to the end of the Christmas season? Why?

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The end of the holidays. For some, this time means relief and letdown. For others, it means a time of uncertainty and loneliness. Our individual feelings might be fixed. Certainly, the season after the holidays marks a change in mood and schedule.

Sometimes, however, stressful events like the holidays can have lasting effects. Situations can spin out of control. Or, conditions can drastically change. Consider the life of the Holy Family after the birth of Jesus as an example of life changed.

With the use of men's evil, Matthew viewed the life and movement of a young family as God's will. A dream, a forced move, and a return all pointed to the identity and destiny of a young Jesus.

2:15 "Herod's death" is literally "the end of Herod."

"I called my son out of Egypt." is from Hosea 11:1. The prophet referred collectively to the nation of Israel in the Exodus. In addition, Egypt was a place of refuge for Israelites even before the Babylonian exile. In the time of Jesus, a large population of Jews lived in Alexandria and the area along the Nile.

2:22 Herod Archelaus was the son of Herod the Great. He ruled Judea from the death of his father (4 B.C.) to his removal by the Romans for gross incompetence (6 A.D.).

2:23 "HE will be called a Nazarene." No reference exists for this verse. Matthew could have made a play on words here. A "nazir" was a Hebrew term for a holy person consecrated to God. Isaiah 11:1 called a future Davidic king a "nazir."

In a stylistic fashion, Matthew explained how Jesus moved from Bethlehem to Nazareth. Matthew was not concerned so much with geographic relocation, but theological relocation. For Matthew, the Hebrew Scriptures foretold the movement of the Messiah. Even his backwater hamlet had theological significance. For Matthew, the name "Jesus of Nazareth" pointed to the identity of the Christ.

Matthew 2:13-23 connected the revelation of baby Jesus as the Messiah (to the Magi) with the beginning of his adult ministry (the appearance of John the Baptist). The scene opened with the dream of Joseph and the command to relocate in Egypt. The missing verses (2:16-18) refer to the death of the innocent children at the hands of Herod. The final scene described the move to settle in Galilee. Each of the three sections had a common thread: a scripture was fulfilled.

The opening and closing scenes also had parallels: 1) the appearance of the angel in Joseph's dream, 2) Joseph's response, and 3) a quote from Scripture. The angel presented God's message to a righteous man. Joseph, husband to Mary, received the message and moved, just like his famous name's sake. Joseph, the son of Jacob, entered Egypt under force and rose to prominence with his ability to interpret dreams. His remains returned with the people in the Exodus. In 2:15, Matthew quoted Isaiah 11:1: a "son" that referred to Joseph's spiritual progeny, the people of Israel. Thus, Matthew connected Jesus to the Exodus as the one who would represent the people, and foreshadowed his personal exodus for Israel on the cross.

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The quote in 2:23 presented some problems, however. As mentioned in the notes above, no such verse existed in the Hebrew scriptures. Possibly, Matthew had a word play in mind between the town "Nazareth" and the Hebrew word "nazir," meaning "consecrated to God." Samuel (1 Samuel 1) was the prime example of a nazir, one whose life was given to God from birth.

Other themes foreshadowed the ministry and life of Jesus. As the family lived on the move, so did Jesus in his adult ministry. Just as the family faced the threat of violence, so did Jesus in his visit to Jerusalem. This mobility and life under threat were God's will, just as the angel revealed and Scripture confirmed.

God revealed a life of pressure to the Holy Family. Have your post-Christmas experiences been pressured? Have they taken a downturn? How can they be God's will?

While our post-holiday downturns may not be as traumatic as the upheaval the Holy Family suffered, we can still sense some of their anxiety. And, we can have hope that our downturns, like theirs, have a place in God's plan. If Joseph can hear God's voice even in his sleep, why can't we catch wind of God's will? Don't God's angels serve us as much as a Jewish carpenter, so long ago?

Review the holidays. Place the joys and sorrows of the holidays before the Lord. How do you see God working with you this past season? How is he working with you now?