

Holy Family Sunday, Dec 30th
December 19 & 30, 2018

Kathy Osbelt
All Saints Parish, Syr., NY

Feast of the Holy Family

This is the first year I actually watched The Grinch all the way through. You know the story. Mayor was angry that the Grinch stole Christmas by taking all the presents, the food for the feast even the Christmas trees. But it was a little Whoville girl who proclaimed that they did not need these to celebrate Christmas. They already had reason to be happy, for they had one another. They had family to love and cherish, to rejoice in.

Missionary Oblate Father Ronald Rolheiser writes that family life is sacramental life. That a child's first baptism is the journey home from the hospital. The family home the first church, the family table the primary place of Eucharist. The family living room is the first sanctuary and the reconciliation with each other after petty arguments and hurts the ongoing sacrament of reconciliation.

But this sacramental experience is not to be romanticized. There are for every family the serious struggles and misunderstandings, the demanding challenges, anger, selfishness, control tactics, tensions, lack of communication, and unfortunately, even pathology. It takes hard work to keep that live a sacramental experience.

Our first reading today speaks of how we are to do that work. We are to take care of our elderly parents. When we do we are given blessings in surprising ways. When we care for family members we receive forgiveness of sins, spiritual treasures and even answered prayers. To have a sacramental family we must honor, revere, receive, comfort, taking care of, and look with kindness toward each member of the family.

You might say to me, yes, but you don't have a teenager who is seeking his/her own identity. The parents of the 12 year old Jesus who was found in the Temple could say the same thing. Mary and Joseph experienced anxiety over Jesus for three days.

I received a Christmas letter from a friend this year. In it she says: "In 2019 we will have four teens living under the same roof!!" She goes on to tell of each one's accomplishments: "I've been awarded the title 'meanest mom in the world.' Molly just informed me that she has listened to over 29,000 minutes on Spotify so far this year. Kate has been working hard on new muscle groups in her face which enable her to give us facial expressions of total disgust while at the same time rolling her eyes. John is clearly preparing for life as a politician given that he manages to successfully evade all direct questions about his life, especially 'Have you done your homework?' Missy continues to believe herself in a management training program and does her best to boss her siblings." Yet this mom and her husband deeply love their children with great tenderness and compassion. They are a sacramental family.

As the New Year arrives many people talk about resolutions...often diet, exercise, start a hobby, learn a language...

Did you know 80% of resolutions fizzle out by week #3?

Here is a question that might challenge you to go deep with the New Year's opportunities: Who? is the question.

Who is my family? My spouse, children, uncles, aunts, cousins? Is my family next door neighbor, work colleague, team mates? Is my family in the inner city? Is my family member the one in prison, the homebound person, the men at the Ox? Are my family members at the border, or are they lawmakers. Are they those who are suffering from a fire and a tsunami? Why did we clap on Christmas Day when that list of all who are welcome in this church was read? Are they all my family?

In this New Year, can we push out the edges of our family photo, can we include many more than those of my blood line? Where will we get the grace and motivation for expanding our heart? St Paul wrote: "the Word dwells in you." So we have all we need to move in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness in loving others.

In regard to our becoming a sacramental family and spreading the Who of our family members let us take advice from Thea Bowman when she said: "I think the difference between me and some people is that I'm content to do my little bit.

Sometimes people think they have to do big things in order to make change. But if each one would light a candle we'd have a tremendous light."