

12/31/17..... Holy Family B

-- Americans tend to be individualists. We want to pursue our own dreams, and we generally resist traditions. One way this comes out is in the large number of people who describe themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.”

-- But it’s human nature to develop traditions to tie us together. That’s particularly true for families. Those who don’t develop or nurture traditions aren’t very strong.

-- Israel of 2,000 years ago reinforced family and religious ties by their rituals of life and faith. Life and faith were tied together; they weren’t separate categories. And so the Holy Family participated in those rituals.

-- Jewish law provided that the firstborn son would be dedicated to the Lord. And so Jesus was. Most likely his mother and father weren’t the only family participants.

-- Extended family was much more important then than now. And though they’re not mentioned, no doubt other family members were present. After all, families typically lived together in a “housing compound.”

-- In Jesus’ case, though, we hear of the participation of the greater family of faith. They’re represented by two older people, Simeon and Anna. They are elders with great faith and perseverance.

-- Not only do they prophesy Jesus’ role in salvation history. They echo the faith of many ancestors before them. Abraham is the prime example of this faith. He was the “George Washington” of their people.

-- His role is highlighted in the first two readings. And God’s word gives us important lessons for our own lives as people of faith.

-- The first lesson is that we need our rituals of faith to ground us. They are not empty rites or boring prayers, if we pay attention to them and try to understand them. They help us ground our relationship with God.

-- They also show us that our faith is not just a personal communing with God. In other words, it's not enough to be spiritual but not religious. We are connected to a community of faith, just as Jesus and his family was.

-- The second lesson is that we should appreciate the wisdom of our elder members of our families and Church community. They have sustained their faith and the faith of the Church over the years. We should appreciate their contributions and give their advice serious consideration.

-- That can even become an issue in the Church. For example, I think of some (not all) younger priests who too easily dismiss the concerns of more experienced priests in setting the direction of the Church.

-- God calls us to belief in his saving power as individuals, but not just as individuals. God calls us into a family relationship... in our physical families and in our family of faith.

-- We are not lone individuals seeking the face of God. We need to do this together. The Holy Family realized this fact. May we heed their lessons.