



From the Pastor
The Holy Family of Jesus,
Mary and Joseph - B
December 31, 2023

MEALTIME. The Bible does not record any **Holy Family dinners**, but they must have enjoyed countless meals together. Many artists [as seen above] have used their skills to

depict what **Sacred Scripture** did NOT need to say: that **Jesus, Mary and Joseph** ate together as a family. Like all observant **Jews**, they would have eaten the **Passover** or **Seder Meal** and all other required religious celebratory meals. While one reason for this was that they needed earthly nourishment to maintain their physical nature and stay alive, they also needed the pious, customary, religious rituals to sustain their spiritual nature. So do we!

FAMILY MEALS. Study after study, from secular and religious sources, have shown that the family that regularly eats together stays together. **Father Patrick Peyton** [01-09-1909 - 06-03-1992] popularized the phrases "**The family that prays together stays together**" and "**A world at prayer is a world at peace**" decades ago. Among the many benefits of family mealtimes are lower rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, tobacco use, and early teenage pregnancy; higher rates of resilience and self-esteem; and closer interpersonal relationships as family members 'share their story' with one another; it even boosts the vocabulary in younger children.

THE GOOD NEWS/BAD NEWS. During the dreadful COVID lockdowns, many families were 'forced' to dine together - and came to like this custom which many have thankfully continued. However, the not-so-good news is we have yet to return to the pre-COVID level of communal activities. Educators report more behavioral issues as children struggle without socialization skills; our society seems to have become ruder, even toxic; and **church** attendance and activity is down in numbers. Sadly, some still 'attend' services 'virtually' rather than 'in-person.' Some consider being an 'observer' to be just as good as being an 'active participant.' Far too many deprive themselves of the spiritual graces that come to us through the **holy Mass**, the **Sacraments**, pious devotions and rituals that sustained and deepened people's faith through wars, disasters and other calamities.

MAKE WEEKLY MASS A MUST! In retrospect, we should never have allowed churches to be closed, services cancelled, and other so-called 'non-essentials' be forbidden - while liquor stores and other places deemed 'essential' were allowed to be open. As a **Faith Community**, we will pay the price for this for years, if not for generations. While we cannot change the past, we can learn from it - and make every effort to make the present and the future better than before. If, like me, you are also not too successful in keeping **New Year's** resolutions, at least we are trying! And since we are all 'practicing **Catholics**' - and practice makes perfect - no one should ever stop practicing!

CHILDREN AND HOLY MASS. While it is true that before they reach the 'age of reason,' commonly considered seven, children are not obligated to attend weekly **Mass**. However, as all parents know, establishing healthy routines is crucial for a child's proper development. While illness and caring for an infant dispenses adults from this serious obligation, some use these - and many other excuses - to 'excuse' themselves from weekly worship. Leaving all that aside, all parents need to reflect on the harsh words our **Lord** said when some tried to keep the kids away from Him: "**When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me."** [Mark 10:14] I shudder to think of what **Jesus** would say to those who do not provide for their child's faith formation!

As I hope you know by now, we are in the last leg of the three-year **National Eucharistic Revival**, promulgated by the **Bishops** of the **USA**. Their goal is to reawaken, deepen the understanding of, promote the more vibrant celebration of, and encourage the more proper reception of the **Great Gift of Eucharist**. And as important as shared meals are with family and friends, it is one of the central ways by which **Jesus** commanded us to remember **Him**: "**do this in memory of me.**" [Luke 22:14 - the only evangelist to include these words in the Institution Narrative] which **Saint Paul** echoes two times: "**Do this is in remembrance of me.**" [1 Corinthians 11:25b & 26b] Are we fulfilling our **Lord's Last Supper** request by participating in **holy Mass** and regularly receiving **Holy Communion**?

In Christ,

Father Mark

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