

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY (12/27-28/2008)

Genesis 15/1-6 and 21/1-3, Psalm 105, Hebrews 11/8-19, Luke 2/22-40

Some years back, while I was enjoying a six-month sabbatical, I set myself the task of writing about my Mother and Father; I hoped to record their story, their arrival in this country as immigrants from Ireland, their family and their accomplishments.

(I must confess that, after the initial retelling of Patrick and Mary O'Malley's life and times, the story began to be more my story than theirs! But so it goes.)

I ended up with a large volume, some 230 8x11 pages, single spaced.

Later, copies of my sabbatical *piece de résistance* were made by my niece, and the rest of my family has subsequently had an opportunity to explore the past with me.

Their memories of past events often have been quite different than mine.

Let me assure you that, while I hope mine was the story of a "holy" family, it was not the story of a perfect family; there are no such entities.

For me, "holy family" means a family striving to make sense out of life, striving to be obedient to the Lord, striving to live out of the Holy Spirit.

The operative word is "striving"; as we say, no one does it perfectly.

Too much opportunity for evil, too many distractions, too many unfulfilled dreams and hopes.

What is your family story? Take time to think about it and pray about it today.

My guess is that many of us will have a fairly edifying tale to reflect on, but some will have little but sadness and sorrow in our past.

Still, we are what we are.

Are there any similarities between the trials and travails of the original "Holy Family" and those of our families?

In today's Gospel, Luke tells how Mary and Joseph happily brought the child to the temple for the usual ceremony for a Jewish male child.

There they met two elderly people, Simeon and Anna.

The child was seen by the older couple to be a special child, as indeed are all children.

But Simeon warned the boy's parents: "*This child is destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be contradicted, and you yourself a sword will pierce...*"

A disturbing bit of news, to be sure, for Mary and Joseph.

Right from the outset, then, it was clear this was no ordinary child, but one whose future was in the hands of God, and whose life would be a force to be reckoned with.

When we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family; we stress both aspects of that title.

They were a "family" and we all know intimately what that means.

They were also "holy", deeply concerned about the child and his future, and determined to do all they could to provide for their child before God.

In one way or another, we all belong to the "holy family" of God; we are children of the Father.

May we give thanks today for our own family; and may we strive always to model our families after the loving, caring, concerned and sometimes apprehensive original Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and the child.