

## Homily

### Feast of the Holy Family B 12.31.17

Father Todd Molinari

Dear Friends in Christ,

We begin our celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family by listening to the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, chapter 2: “When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord...” Today, as we celebrate the eight days or octave of our Christmas Season of joy and gladness of the birth of the Word made flesh, our Savior Jesus Christ, we pause to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. This is indeed a wonderful time to commemorate the Birth of our Lord and how the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph cooperated with God’s plan of salvation - and how God invited Simeon the righteous and devout man of the Lord and the prophetess Anna - to partake in the beginnings of the fulfillment of God’s plans to save us. They were able to recognize the presence of the Lord in the newborn infant because they were attentive to the visions and promptings of the Holy Spirit; they were attentive and ready for the presentation of the Lord in the Temple. They had the awareness and the responsiveness because they were already so close to God. And we look to Joseph and Mary, even though it required great sacrifices from them and many trials and persecutions, they too were faithful to God’s interventions in their lives, no matter how many disruptions and inconveniences it caused them. Yet this is why these readings call all of us to reflect on our mutual responsibilities within our own families as we reflect upon how the Holy Family, Simeon and Anna were listened to the guidance of the Lord and followed it, each in their own way.

There are indeed many challenges for our families in these times; this feast shows us there is hope and that God will never abandon us. There is always a way to remain faithful to God as well on our part. We only need to look at the many challenges and difficulties families face in our own age: The reality of abuse and violence within marriages and families; the inroads made by sinful attitudes and behaviors that have been allowed to enter into the sanctity of the home; the infidelities and lack of communication; the weakening of the practice of faith; and the dereliction of responsibilities of some fathers and mothers to be the parents God has called them to be. We may be tempted to look down on families that struggle, or more often just

look away because they remind us of our own painful difficulties we face in our own families, or perhaps moralize and think “well, that’s too bad” or, “isn’t that a shame” yet we don’t have a convincing solution beyond simplistic guilt or a vague sense of unease. Indeed, this celebration highlights for all of us the challenges to living faithfully our calling as families but it also highlights the complexities we often face.

What can the Holy Family, Simeon and Anna teach us on this feast? It is obedience. We often think of obedience as hearing and following through a command. That is one way, albeit a very limited way to understand obedience. Obedience in the Christian sense means to listen with keen attentiveness to another in such a way that we are fully present to the person. It literally means to “draw your ear close to what another person is saying to you.” It is an aspect of being truly human, and without it neither the family nor individual persons can flourish – it is what enables us to be who we are as individual bearers of the word of God, which can only be fulfilled in a communal way, starting with the family. The Gospel shows us that each was obedient in their own calling – the Holy Family on the one hand, and the married elderly priest and the widow who was a prophetess. Because each of them were attentive listeners to the Word of God the Lord was able bring them together in a mysterious way to bring fulfillment to his promises. In contrast, how often you and I try to figure everything out, or take the attitude that we really won’t give of ourselves to God and His Will for us unless or until I can control everything and dictate everything to God beforehand?

Notice that the obedience, or sacred listening, that we hear proclaimed today is not an unthinking or love-less listening or rote following of external commands. Rather it is a free response of discovery to an invitation by God who loves Him. As we prepare to take leave of the old year 2017 as it passes on to the waves of the past and greet the new year, let us look to Simeon and Anna – so faithful, never giving up on the Lord and His promises for Israel – their faith was firmly planted on the realization that their own personal destinies were somehow wrapped up in the promises that the Lord was bringing to fulfillment. So it is true in our ourselves and our families – let us be attentive to the faith that helps us stay attentive to the Lord in the pathway each of us follow and how that enables the family to be faithful to God as well.