

## "A Dream of Family Holiness"

Homily of December 29, 2002

by Fr. Gerry Murphy

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A few nights ago I had a very interesting dream. I dreamt I was back home in Ireland strolling through St. Stephen's Green, a beautiful city center park in Dublin. It was a gloriously sunny day and all the shrubs, trees and flowers were in full bloom. Many people were milling around, chatting easily on their lunch break or simply enjoying the tranquil solace of the park. A wonderful air of contentment seemed to pervade the entire place, and just then I noticed coming toward me a young woman whom I instinctively recognized as Mary the mother of Jesus.

'Mary!' I gasped, as she reached me, 'is that really you?'

'Yes,' Mary replied, 'I am the mother of Jesus and the mother of all humankind.'

'Wow! I can hardly believe it,' I said, 'and this is so providential - my meeting you like this - because I really need your help right now.'

'Oh really?' Mary responded, 'in what way exactly can I help you?'

'Well, it's just that I've got to preach next weekend on the theme of The Holy Family and I'm not sure how to approach it. I have many questions and not too many answers.'

Mary gently motioned me to sit beside her on a park bench just beneath a tall overarching oak tree. 'O.K.' she began, 'what is your burning question?'

'Well, Mary, it's like this,' I replied, 'it seems to me that most families today do not match the simple, intact model of family you, Joseph and Jesus represent. Today there are so many single parent families, children of divorced parents living alternately with both parents and a whole host of other blended family situations. Given this complex variety, Mary, what message can we take from your Holy Family and make present in our homes?'

'The essential message you make take,' Mary began, 'is that the center of my family or any of those family configurations you just mentioned ought to be the same, namely, my son, Jesus.' 'Because,' she continued, 'for a family to demonstrate true holiness, all its members must be loving in their attitudes and actions towards each other. My son, Jesus, always put the love and care of others first in his life - especially his concern for the outcast. There are many lonely, unloved and outcast family members sadly adrift in the world today. You need to bring them back into the fold of familial love and

forgiveness.'

'So, love is the essential ingredient that holds families together, Mary?'

'Yes, my son, and here is how to bring the Love of God into your family: begin by prayer for yourself and your family to clear all angers, hostilities, and fears from within. Ask God to help you open your mind and heart each day to receive his love, to allow his love to pour through your family.'

'And,' I asked, 'once this basic ingredient is present will all else necessary for wholesome family life follow?'

'It will follow,' she said, 'if everyone is committed to forming and maintaining a united family - one which will see the good in each person and magnify that good. Then once the commitment has been made, honor it.' 'Bring too,' she continued, 'the following elements into your family unit: humor, joy, love, understanding, compassion, kindness, respect for each individual, and peace.'

'Thank you, Mary' I said, in a kind of dreamy stupor, still amazed at how I happened to bump into the mother of Jesus in St. Stephen's Green, not to mention having this profound conversation with her.

'My son,' Mary said quietly, so as not to jolt me out of my reverie, 'before I leave I would like to give you a message to take to parents.'

'By all means, Mary, what is the message you would like me to give them?'

'Well,' Mary began, 'I would like you to give this message to parents: Tell them that, as parents, they are co-creators with God in bringing new life into the world, and that they need to continue to co-create and cooperate with God in nurturing this new life to wisdom and maturity. Secondly, they need to be faith and prayer centered people. Remember, Abraham, the father of nations, was tested many times, and that it was by faith that he set out without knowing where he was going. So it is with parents. It takes faith and courage to raise a family, as no one knows what the future will bring. But God is always near, helping, blessing and protecting. A holy family is a family of faith, where love and tenderness abound; where each one feels secure because others care about them; where each one feels confident because others believe in them; where each one feels hopeful because others encourage them.' 'And lastly,' Mary continued, 'tell parents that if they are to pass on their faith to their children they must be good storytellers.'

'Really?' I asked, a little confused. 'How so?'

'What I mean,' Mary replied, 'is that parents should share with their children the stories of their life experiences told through the eyes of faith. For example parents should tell their child the story of the night she was born or the story of how they chose his name. In relating these stories to children you help them to grow in wisdom and courage and they will come to know who they are.'

'Mary, I don't know how to thank you for your beautiful words and motherly wisdom, and I'm wondering if I could ask you just one more question before you leave?'

'By all means,' Mary replied, 'ask whatever you wish.'

'O.K.' I said, 'what I would like to know is: did you and Joseph have other children besides Jesus?'

Mary paused for a moment, smiled and replied: 'Jesus was our first child and he was conceived and born in the unique and special way your scriptures describe it. But he was not our only child. Jesus had four brothers - James, David, Daniel and Jacob, and three sisters - Elizabeth, Ruth and Mary Martha.'

With that my alarm clock went off and I was no longer conversing with Mary, mother of Jesus, in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.