Homily, December 27, 2009
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
1Sm 1:20-22, 24-28, Lk 2:41-52

A few years ago, my wife came home from work to find our youngest son hosing off the porch. As she got out of the car, he turned off the hose and said, ‘well I think I got rid of the blood.’

He paused for just a moment and went on, sensing by the look on Janet’s face that he had better hurry up and explain the rest. “Ann caught her toe on the edge of the step when she was running up the stairs in her flip-flops.” (Remember that kind of weather!)

“She really laid-open her toe,” he went on. “There was blood everywhere. We wrapped it up and Nick drove her over to the doctor’s office. They’ll probably be back pretty soon.”

One of the many blessings in our family is that my kids don’t just take care of each other, they like each other. That doesn’t always happen. I wish my brothers and sisters got along as well as my kids.

My three kids are very different people. They were very different academically, they made very different friends; they are choosing very different careers. If they hadn’t grown up together, I doubt they would have ever become friends, simply because friends need to have something in common.

That is one reason why the Church holds that family life is so fundamental, not simply to the faith, but to society. In our families we learn to love and respect those who are different from us. Obviously family members share common traits and experiences, but it is usually the differences that make family life so interesting.
But because each member of the family is so different, there will always be trouble. Indeed, family life is where we learn to practice the works of mercy:

- To instruct the ignorant;
- To counsel the doubtful;
- To admonish sinners;
- To bear wrongs patiently;
- To forgive offences;
- To comfort the afflicted;

And it’s were we begin to understand what Paul wrote to his troubled and divided community at Corinth:

> Love is patient; love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

What we learn growing up in our families ought to influence our relationships throughout our lives. At least, that is the hope and prayer of the Church. “In our brothers and sisters,” says the Catechism, “we see the children of our parents,

- In our cousins, the descendents of our ancestors,
- In our fellow citizens, the children our country,
- In the baptized, the children of our mother Church,
- And in every human person, a son or daughter of our heavenly father.”

Regardless of our age, our place in the family, our position at work, or our status in society, it is this fundamental relationship to God that forms the basis of our faith. God, someone has noted, has no grandchildren: we are all first generation.

Our relationship to God is so primary, that the Church says that it should even supersede the fourth commandment. The honor due our parents requires our obedience to them, but not when we are convinced in our conscience that it would be morally wrong to do so.
We learn in our families not to be too possessive of others. As much as we love them, we also have to respect their individuality and free will. That is perhaps the hardest lesson -- especially for parents.

Our family relationships are foundational and formative, but that means they cannot be exclusive. They are a beginning, not an end. The ones we love will also love others -- and the bonds of love they have with others, will often be stronger than the bonds that hold them to us.

And Jesus said to Mary and Joseph, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

There will always be one relationship that takes precedence over all others. It’s something we can learn from Hannah and from Mary and Joseph.