

Saint Elizabeth Roman Catholic Church
Upper Uwchlan Township, PA
2014 FORTY HOURS DEVOTIONS: TMM HOMILIES

Sunday Evening: *The Holy Family- A Model for Family Life*

Introduction: In connection with our spiritual preparation for the *World Meeting of Families* next September, we set aside time during this year's Forty Hours Devotions to reflect together on the theme of *Family*: tonight, we consider the *Holy Family*; tomorrow night, the *family of faith* that is the Church; and on Tuesday evening, the *human family*.

Like many of you, I grew up with a heavily idealized image of the Holy Family: I mean really - with a divine son, an immaculate mother and a just father, how could anything go wrong, right? Yet if you listen closely to tonight's Gospel passage, you may even pick up a subtle hint that there were moments of misunderstanding, disagreement and maybe even a little parent-child tension within the Holy Family itself!

During a recent retreat at Wernersville, I chose for daily spiritual reading selections from a wonderful book by the Jesuit Father James Martin entitled: *Jesus- A Pilgrimage*. In each chapter of the book, Fr. Martin describes a location he visited on his multi-week pilgrimage around the Holy Land and offers simple reflections on the associated Gospel passages.

When he visits Nazareth, Fr. Martin explores the everyday life of Jesus prior to his public ministry. In his reflections, he reaches beyond the traditional image of a just too perfect holy family to encounter a child Jesus who needs to learn as he grows up, just like you and I do. Jesus grows into adulthood in a very human manner, following the example of his parents and imitating their attitudes, behaviors and values. So the Gospel of Luke tells us: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom" and again: "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man."

In daily life at home and in the village of Nazareth, Jesus grows into a steadfast, responsible, hardworking, honest, prayerful, compassionate and loving person; under the guidance of Mary and Joseph, Jesus develops an intimate responsiveness to God that shapes his entire life. Fr. Martin wisely concludes: "a family need not be perfect to be good!"

On the occasion of his own visit to Nazareth in 1964, Pope Paul VI had this to say:

“Nazareth is a kind of school where we begin to discover what Christ’s life was like. Here we can observe and ponder the simple appeal of the way God’s Son came to be known,... And gradually we may even learn to imitate him...”

Pope Paul continues:

“In Nazareth we learn about family life, for Nazareth serves as a model of what the family is called to be. May Nazareth show us the family’s holy and enduring character as a community of love and sharing, beautiful for the problems it poses and the rewards it brings...”

So tonight, as we sit quietly before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I encourage you to reflect upon the home life of Jesus in Nazareth. And let us pray that through the intercession of Joseph and Mary, our own families may truly become more like the holy family, united in respect and in love.