

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY



I always feel a special connection between the Feast of the Holy Family and our parish here at St. Martin's Parish. It is very clear how important family life is to you. Our parish does have a family sense where one can feel very much at home. However, my sense of connection goes back almost thirty-five years ago. I was a young priest, teaching at our High School Seminary. Since the students went home for Christmas break, we teachers were free for two weeks, one of the well-earned perks of being a teacher. Since St. Martin was then, as it is now, a very busy parish, and the priests here were eager to take a few days with their families, Father George Keaveney CSSR would invite me to come to the parish from my family home in Brooklyn to say some Masses between Christmas and New Year's. I believe that the first time I ever came to St. Martin's was a on the Feast of the Holy Family, which is the Sunday that falls between Christmas and New Year's. My family liked to come with me, not so

much because they were eager to hear me peace, my mother always thought of Long Island as the country. As a girl raised in the country hills of Clare, Ireland, she loved to go for drives in Long Island. Obviously, even then, Bethpage was not a rural setting, but they insisted on coming. So, my mother, Dad, sister, and her three little kids, who know have children of their own, would pile into whatever car I was driving at the time and head for St. Martin's.

At that time, most of our Redemptorist rectories were very private. Lay people stayed were not invited into our dining room or living room unless there was some very special occasion. Gratefully, that has changed today. However, when we came to the rectory my family was immediately invited in for breakfast. Amy Dane cooked a lovely breakfast and was so very welcoming to my family. She continues to exhibit that beautiful spirit of hospitality. Since I was saying two Masses, my family would relax and enjoy the breakfast in the rectory. Whatever priests, deacon or staff member who happened to come through the kitchen or dining room was very gracious to the visitors from Brooklyn.

After celebrating my assigned Masses, Mom always wanted to go to Zorn's in search of the perfect chicken. The kids would go to the animal farm that was on the grounds and delight in the Turkeys and geese. We would often buy some food and have a kind of picnic in and around the car. Perhaps, we were inventing tailgating! The weather always seemed to be good and the day was a something that our family enjoyed. Of course, with six people in the car, including three little ones, there were some fights and arguments about windows and seats and who hit whom. I was anxious to get home and watch the Jets while my mother was mentioning a side trip to Montauk which I gently (editorial license perhaps) was about three hours away. We sometimes compromised on Riverhead because my family had once summered there many years ago.

I like this memory. I think that message I preached on the Feast of the Holy Family then is pretty much h same as the one I preach now. Family life is the place of the greatest joy and happiness in our lives. Yet, family can break our hearts and leave us wounded for life. We do

not choose our families. I certainly believe that there are no perfect families. Looking for perfection in others will only cause others frustration and ourselves disappointment. Family life does not come naturally. A person must work to be a good member of a family. I am convinced there is no more essential quality for family life than the ability to forgive and let go of past hurts. I, as I am sure is true for you, have encountered many families who have fallen into anger and disappointment. I often find that families do like to sit and remember the past as I did in the article. We hold those memories precious. However, I wonder if when they are happening if we do not realize how special that time is. Every day can be a day of making good memories.

I have always admired the spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am happy that our parish hosts several programs of AA. Most of us know that great wisdom of the serenity prayer. It is prayer with such wisdom. I believe it is a prayer that is truly in line with the Gospel of Jesus. I am convinced its guidance could be a powerful way to enhance our own family life. Here is the prayer in its entirety.

The Complete Serenity Prayer!

God,

**Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the Courage to change the things I can
and the Wisdom to know the difference.**

**Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.**

Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it.

Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;

**That I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.**

Amen.