

There's some members of the Knights of Columbus who are outside after Mass passing out these little cards. I'd like to ask each of you to pick one up as you're leaving, please.

Today is the feast of the Holy Family. Actually, the title in the Missal of the Church is the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. It's an old feast. Over the course of centuries, the Church has added to our calendar between Christmas day (so the day after) and New Year's (December 31st), a number of feasts that really have no very obvious connection to the events of the season, but are somewhat related. For example, the day after Christmas is St. Steven the Martyr, who was the first martyr. Present at his stoning was a young man named Saul, who was very anti-Christian, and eventually became Paul who eventually was great missionaries of the Church. We have the celebration also of St. John the Evangelist. Clearly, John was part of the redemption story. He was the youngest of the apostles, a teenager in all probability. We also have the Holy Innocents, and now the Feast of the Holy Family.

The Holy Family is put up to us as a model. None of us is in a position to emulate any of the members of the Holy Family. There's no way we can ever achieve or imitate what they would model to us. Jesus is God. We can't measure up to that. Mary is a woman who was conceived without original sin. We're not going to measure up to that. And Joseph was a person selected by God to be the foster father of the Messiah. We're not going to measure up to him, either.

The main purpose of the feast today isn't so much to give us models we can imitate but to draw our attention to the fact that the family is the bedrock of society. In today's world, that bedrock is being damaged. It's under attack. Everybody is not actually living in a family. Children grow and leave home, so we have empty nesters. Spouses die, so we have people who are widows or widowers. You have young people graduate from college and have not yet found a life partner. Many people, about 40% of Catholics, end up divorced. And so the very fabric of our marriage and family life, the bedrock of society, gets shattered in many, many respects. That doesn't mean the Feast of the Holy Family is unimportant. It's very important. It should bring our mind to what the family as a bedrock of our society is all about.

So if you would, please, pick one of these Holy Family cards from the Knights of Columbus, and take it home with you. There are some prayers on there you can say. But more importantly than anything else, the picture that's on the front of the card is a reminder that the family is a key. We have a role - making sure that we do what we can to foster the goals and ideals of our individual families, and the goals and ideals of all families throughout all of society. We can help and encourage other people to sustain their families, and the families of all of our society. And believe me, in today's world, that is rather important. We're not going necessarily to change all of society. But we can have an impact on the people with whom we interact on a regular basis. And they can, in turn, influence others.

Our society today does not really value family. Our society today is basically torn apart by the incivility that exists in public life, and particularly in political life. That there is so much incivility that there's almost no way that people can really work together in any kind of harmonious mode. That's really what's missing today. We need that harmony, that civility, that support, because that's the thing that will enable people to live according to the message of the Gospel. And the truth of the matter is we all, married or not, have a role to play in preserving

families. So today, when you take one of those cards home with you, use it as a reminder in the next couple of days to get into the habit of saying a prayer to the Holy Family asking for their intervention, asking for their support, and their graces to help people live according to the plan of God for our families. That way we can build our families. That way we can help build our society into a more solid, well based, functioning society. That way we implement to some degree the message of the Gospel in our own lives and in the lives of those with whom we interact on a regular basis.