

There are many different ways to understand what, or who a family is. . .

One of the definitions in Webster's dictionary is simply: Persons related by blood or marriage.

Michelle Blessing, a mental health professional writes: Family is a single word with many different meanings. People have many ways of defining a family and what being a part of a family means to them. Families differ in terms of economic, cultural, social, and many other facets, *but what every family has in common* ---is that the people who call it a family are clear that those people are important to them in some way.

Writer, Jim Butcher kind of echoes that when he says: When everything falls apart, burns and crashes – the people who stand by you, without fleeing or flinching: they are your family.

Deb Caletti says: Family are those who put their arms around you and love you ---- when you don't act so lovable.

And who can forget Mrs. Doubtfire saying at the very end of that movie: There are all sorts of different families. Some families have one mommy, some families have one daddy, or two families. And some children live with their uncle or aunt. Some live with grandparents, and some children live with foster parents. >>

And some live in separate homes, in separate neighborhoods, in different areas of the country – and they may not see each other for days, or weeks, or months. . . even years at a time. *But if there is love*. . those are the ties that bind, and you'll have a family in your heart, forever.

Or two more: Your family is where you go to find light when all grows dark. (Pierce Brown).

Family is where you are loved the most--- and often times act your worst. (Marjorie Hinckley)

Yes, there are many different ways to understand what, or who, a family is. . .

St. Luke's definition of family in the Gospel today isn't a bad one: a place where one can grow and become strong, become filled with wisdom, and where we come to know the favor of God is upon us.

Families are a place where we grow and become strong: physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Families are a place where we become filled with wisdom: of how things work, of what life is about, about what we need to value in order to have joy in our lives.

And families are a place where we come to know the favor of God is upon us: because we are created in the image and likeness of God and come to know that nothing can separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus.

St. Paul wants us to also know that families are those places where we learn compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Where we learn to forgive and strive for perfection and where the peace of Christ can control our hearts.

In short, families are the places where we can become **holy** --- which is why the Church refers to the family as the Domestic Church. . .

As writer Rick Riordan says in his book, The Sea Monsters: Families are messy. And sometimes the best we can do is to remind each other that we are related for better or for worse – and try to keep the killing and the maiming to a minimum. . .

Yes, family life is messy, and it's not easy – as I'm sure most of us know.

And so today, on this Feast of the Holy Family – which I know well for pastoring the parish of Holy Family for 9 years – we **don't** get to celebrate every year because of the quirks of the calendar --- as a parish we want to give you some things to help your family grow in holiness this coming year.

Frist, through the generosity of our Knights of Columbus council – a booklet called: The Family Fully Alive: Building the Domestic Church. It is filled with prayers, meditations, and activities to enrich our family life. Thanks to the Knights for providing one of these for each family. . .

Next, as an insert to the bulletin – a St. George/St. Jude prayer calendar. You are asked to pray for those indicated on each day of the month – so for instance on the 1st day of every month – you pray for the Parish Council, Peace in the World, and for mothers.

On the 14th of the month: those seeking an annulment for their marriage, Sunday fellowship hosts, the poor, and the needs of our city. . .

So maybe at dinner, or at the beginning or the end of the day – just ask the members of your family to pray for the particular people listed for that day.

I, for one, think there is power in prayer – and to have all of us in the parish praying for the same people every day can, and will be, a powerful thing for us in the year to come.

Next, some cards in the gathering space for you to pick up --- that has questions to begin and end your day ---- just another way of staying focused and reflective throughout the day: So: how can I make a positive difference with my life today? How was today an adventure and opportunity? What do I need to thank God for at the close of this day?

On the back of that, just as a reminder as we go through our day: the corporal and spiritual works of mercy: feed the hungry, visit the sick, forgive offenses willingly. . . just in case we are at a loss as to how we can put our faith into action every day. . .

Then finally, for those of you who are interested, again available in the back of the church --- a guide for reading the whole Bible in the course of the year. So every day, there are listed sections for scripture for you to read – and if you are faithful in doing the reading everyday --- you will completely read the bible in one year. . .

Author Richard Bach says: The bond that links your true family is not one of blood – but of respect and joy in other's lives.

Saint John Paul II wrote: The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.

In 2018, let's make our family, however we may define it--- one in which each person is respected and loved – so they can grow and become strong. Become filled with wisdom. And come to know that favor of the God is upon them. Happy New Year!