

Holy Family 2017

12/31/17

Normally, on this holy Family weekend, Deacon John would be preaching. Seems logical that a family man would preach about families. But, since he is still recuperating from his knee surgery, I did not think it right to make him hobble up here to preach. That said, I am obviously a family man myself, which means I too can speak about families. And once again, I put together what I thought was a pretty good homily about families. Then Saturday morning I read the Day 29 reflection from Robert Strand's wonderful little book, Moments for Christmas. It goes like this.

Warden J. Scudder tells of a friend riding on a train next to an obviously troubled and anxious young man. Finally the boy blurted out the story that he was a convict returning from prison. His crimes had brought shame on his poor but proud family, and they had never visited or written him during the years he was away. He had hoped this was only because they were too poor to travel the long distance and too uneducated to write. However, he could not be sure they had forgiven him.

The youth went on to explain he had wanted to make it easy for them. He had written them a letter asking them to put up a signal when the train passed their little farm near the outskirts of town. If they had forgiven and wanted him to return home, they were to tie a white ribbon in the big apple tree near the tracks. If they did not want him back they were to do nothing and he would stay on the train, go West, and lose himself forever.

Nearing his home town, the youth's suspense and discomfort grew to the point where he could not look. His new-found friend offered to watch for him so they traded places. A few minutes later he put his hand on the young former convict's shoulder and whispered in a broken voice: "Look, it's all right . . . the whole tree is white with ribbons!"

Later, this friend told Warden Scudder, "I felt as though I had witnessed a miracle!" There is something exciting and miraculous about a forgiving kind of love. This is the love that somehow manages to bridge over the troubled waters of a broken past. It's always amazing.

My understanding is that this story was also the inspiration for a very popular song a few years back. Perhaps you also remember the words and melody of the song, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree."

There is a tremendous cry from humanity for a forgiving kind of love. You seem to hear this wistful cry coming from all kinds of sources. The question may not be articulated, but the unspoken refrain goes like this: "Does anyone care enough about me to love me with an unconditional kind of love" Can I be forgiven?" I'm most delighted to tell you that that kind of love is yours for the taking from Jesus Christ! Just ask Him. So, this holiday season, forgive someone you should have forgiven long ago. So ends the reflection from Robert Strand.

Fr. Joe Robinson reminds us that most often, we imagine the Holy Family as living a charmed life without problems or stress. Well, if we think about it, the problems began even before Jesus was born. Joseph was about to break off the engagement to Mary when he found out she was pregnant and he knew he was not the father.

We need to remember that any holy family is not a family without problems or heart aches. It's how we deal with those problems that really matters. We must be faithful to God at all times and we must deal with each other with the fairness, kindness, patience and love Paul spoke of to the Colossians.

I'd like to tell you that my family was free of worries and problems, always fair, kind, patient and loving to each other. But then I would have to go confession. Because my family was no different than any other, no different than yours or the Holy Family's.

And so, I would invite any of you who are struggling with family to use this feast and the coming New Year as a chance to begin the healing process. Please don't wait until it's too late and the reconciliation finally takes place when you meet in heaven. Why not create heaven right here on earth?