

## From The Pastor

It is always an adjustment when a new person joins a family. Whether through birth, adoption, or assimilation, receiving a new member into a family calls for special care and attention. Each member of a family carries a role, and has an influence on the whole. Whether quiet or loud, helpful or resistant, pleasant disposition or something other, every member of a household makes their presence felt.

Through the Feast of Christmas God has joined the human family. What influence has this new member had upon us? As families in faith, how has the person of Jesus, God, made a difference in your households?

Today's Feast of the Holy Family invites us to ponder the effect and reality of God living within our homes through the people who dwell there. As I have reflected before on this feast, we run the risk of isolating the grace and presence of God exclusively to the family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Rich and unique as this family was, it does not imply or suggest the absence of the Lord from our families. Quite the opposite.

When God became flesh, entering a human family through Mary and Joseph, all families were made holy in a way they had not been before. All the imperfections, dysfunctions, addictions, and woundedness not withstanding, God is present in each and every family. We cannot exclude ourselves just because our family seems way out of bounds on the holiness meter.

A family is holy because God is present, not because everyone is always at peace, with no messes to ever clean up. Family life is vulnerable. Life happens in virtual reality in the family home. Perhaps, we would want to say it is a little too real at times. Whatever your case may be, notice the action and the stance of God as he becomes flesh through the Virgin Mary. God who is Almighty, Transcendent, and totally other, becomes completely vulnerable in his human condition.

We do not typically think of God as vulnerable. God is God. How can God be out of control and subject to the wiles and uncertainties of life? Is this not what the Incarnation means? To take on flesh is to accept vulnerability. God is most vulnerable as an infant child, and while he is naked hanging on the Cross. This is essentially true of all of us. Infants are infinitely vulnerable and totally dependant. Negative things happen that can last throughout life when infants are not cared for and loved. What human being is not vulnerable and dependant when they are dying, and losing a grip on all they know and love?

The human family is now different because of the Word Made Flesh. God is the fullness of what it means to be holy. For God to become human and join our family is to bring holiness into the human condition. The effect and the influence that God has on the family is peace and forgiveness, love and acceptance, healing and redemption despite the pain and brokenness seen in most families.

We are resistant to this word. We doubt its possibility, and resist the faith and trust demanded in the messiness of family life that God can somehow be present. It is hard to believe that in the abuse and neglect and various pains found in family life that God remains present, but it is true. Is this not the joy and the promise of salvation? Isn't this why, year after year, we make as big a deal as possible about the birth of Christ? This is the reason why the feast and celebration of Christmas is so essential, because we are all so vulnerable and dependent on love. God wanted to be immediately present in the reality of our limitations and need.

You know this does not mean bad things will never happen again. Yet, it does mean that there is nothing God cannot heal and redeem in the human\divine person of Jesus. This feast begs us to realize how close God is to us, especially in the midst of our deepest pain, as well as in the gratitude and thanksgiving of our greatest joy. Families are like that: the best of times and the worst of times. Mary and Joseph knew that. The flight into Egypt and back was no walk in the park. Nor was it a great joy to walk back to Jerusalem gripped with fear looking for a lost twelve year old. Mary found no consolation watching her Son die on the Cross. But she believed. She trusted. She said yes to God when he first called, and she learned to trust that with God all would find justice.

Heavenly Father, send the Spirit of Jesus into our family homes, and into the hearts of all who dwell there. In the face of rebellion and resistance, sow seeds of wisdom and forgiveness. In the face of doubt and uncertainty, anxiety over the future, sow seeds of hope grounded in faith and trust. When the pain of human sin and brokenness cause abuse and neglect, defend and protect the vulnerable and dependant. Father, through your Son, make our families a place of love and welcome grounded in forgiveness and acceptance. In the model of the Holy Family, bring us all to our heavenly home.

A very blessed, holy, and prosperous New Year to all of you.  
Father John Esper

