

Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family

When my mother and father celebrated their forty-fifth wedding anniversary, I wanted to create for them a remembrance of our life as a family. It was a difficult time as my sister had died just a few years before.

I gathered all the photographs that I could find of our family. Carefully I put them together so that these remembrances of the past would trace the history of my family. I ended with a wonderful collection of photographs of the four of us that ranged from when my sister and I were infants to a wonderful photograph of the four of us at my ordination.

When it was finished I gave it to them and they loved it. They would watch it over and over again. It was probably the most meaningful gift I ever gave them.

But one thing from this collection of photographs was missing. And I suspect that what I found lacking is also lacking in photographs of any family. For photographs capture moments of happiness and great life events...birthdays, graduations, weddings.

But there were events in my family's life, in every family's life, that are not captured in pictures. These are moments of pain and

difficulty. These are moments that are not pretty. These are the moments that every family struggles through.

It is in these moments of struggle, disappointment, disagreement, hurt and mistakes that my family and every family discovers the grace of God at work. For it is in these experiences that the bond of being a family is perfected because God is at work in our lives. These are the moments that make us a family.

The Gospel today tells of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous wrath. The Gospel is telling us of the struggle of this Holy Family to survive an experience of fear and of facing the unknown. But through this moment the grace of God was at work strengthening them and deepened their love and their compassion as a family.

That same grace, that same love of God, is at work in our families in times of difficulty and pain. That same grace sustains us in moments that we don't find in photographs. And in those moments we learn that the miracle of Christmas is far more profound than Christmas gifts and Christmas celebrations. The miracle of Christmas is the miracle of God's love found in the struggles of our families that fuse us together and strengthen our love for each other.

As we gather with our families this Christmas season, may we re-discover our families as harbors of forgiveness and understanding and as places of unconditional love, welcome and acceptance. For this is the true gift we give each other this Christmas...and every Christmas.