

The Holy Family was a refugee family. There is little doubt about this. We hear in today's Gospel that King Herod was determined to kill the Christ-Child. So, an angel appears in a dream to Joseph and tells him to take the Child and His Mother and flee oppression.

In the world in which live, today's families like the Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, have been displaced from their homes because of war, political unrest, economic inequality, and abuses of human rights. What the Gospel offers us is the ideal model for our daily living and for the life of our families.

Some of us during the holidays can't seem to *get enough* of family; some even seem to *have enough* of family; some even ache for family members who have gone before us, or live too far away for visiting.

Christmas can bring out the best in families, and the not-so-best as well, reminding us of the problems in our families: the estrangements, the grudges, the unsettled arguments that divide and keep us from being one. All the while, Christmas has a way of opening our hearts to God's poor who are homeless, hungry and forgotten. This festive season highlights the great divide that keeps the poor *poor*, and the rest of us *not poor* the rest of the year.

And the joy and peace of Christmas arrive against a background of war, terrorism, and international tension. And so, what does it mean to welcome the Prince of Peace while the helpless cry of all creation is not heeded. As saturated with ancient cultural norms, the sage Sirach offers a plan of family behavior good for any generation. Good behavior is grounded on honor, respect, prayer, reverence, obedience, care, kindness and consideration of others. These are virtues meant to establish a loving, united household of peace and joy.

St Paul calls us to "*put on*" these virtues, to wear them--form fitting in all sizes--heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness of those who offend us, gratitude, and a willingness to let Christ rule in our hearts. Let these find a home in human hearts. True Christmas gifts all year round. I believe that God the Father, the Gift-Giver, won't mind us re-gifting one another, and society as well.

The Eucharist we celebrate and receive nourishes these virtues in our hearts, in our households, in our fraternities, and in how we shape the world around us. May our Altar, Jesus' family Table, and our household's tables, be places where all are welcome. The plight of the Holy Family continues to this day, fleeing threatening, unpleasant, and destructive forces. The Holy Family is white, black, brown; Christian, Jewish, Moslem and every other religious sect and dialects on earth. May peace reign over all.