

## Healing Our Families and Growing in Holiness

**1 Sam. 1: 20-22, 24-28; Ps. 84; 1 Jn. 3: 1-2, 21-24; Lk. 2: 41-52**

George Burns was a comedian and actor who was born in 1896 and who lived to be one hundred years old. As often happens to people of advanced years, George was asked: 'What is the secret of a long life?' to which he answered: 'One important thing is to have a large and caring family...in another city.' This answer was always good for a laugh, but, as with most good comedy, there is a kernel of wisdom and truth in it.

George was referring to the tension and discord that tend to spring up in families. Dealing in close quarters with family members presents many opportunities to 'step on each other's toes'.

This Sunday, in celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family, the Church invites us to reflect on our own families. Perhaps, for many of us, our families are breeding grounds for discord and disharmony.

In the Gospel, we learned that the Holy Family was not above having some of the same experiences that all families encounter. There was willfulness and lack of communication when Jesus decided to stay in Jerusalem causing Mary and Joseph to search for Him for three agonizing days before finding Him in the temple. Mary admonished Jesus strongly but then she 'treasured these things in her heart'. And Jesus, for His part, went back with His parents to Nazareth and was obedient to them. This incident was resolved without discord by both the parents and the Son yielding.

For us, incidents within our families can cause great rifts. However, we need to recognize that these damaged relationships allow us to grow in holiness when we reach out to try to heal these rifts. By repairing damage in our families, we become more holy or more saintly. We are rebuilding the basic building block of the Church and of society. This is what God wants us to do.

What does 'growing in holiness' mean? Matthew Kelly in his book entitled: *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic* gave us a simple explanation. Matthew suggested substituting the phrase 'becoming a better version of oneself'. When we do good and put the teachings of Jesus into action as we do when we try to repair our damaged families, we are becoming better versions of ourselves.

Often, when it comes to repairing the damage to relationships in our families, our pride gets in the way. We say that the other person should be the one to make the first move since he/she was the one who caused the rift in the beginning.

We know that God's ways are not our ways. God does not care who makes the first move. If there is discord between two family members, they both need to work toward reconciliation. It does not matter who starts the process. God showed us the way when He made the first move to achieve reconciliation with His people by sending His Son, Jesus, to suffer and die on the Cross. God was pro-active and sent His Son to redeem the world while mankind was still mired in sin.

So as we come to the end of 2021, let us resolve to make 2022 a year of healing of damaged relationships within our families. Let us ask God for the grace to reach out to our family members and heal the wounded relationships so that we can all become better versions of ourselves. By doing this, we will be reconciled to one another and be free to enter into the fullness of life that God wants for each of us.