

I wonder if we have a mistaken notion that everything was perfect and easy in this family we call Holy.

Can you imagine the fright and terror of having to flee from a mad king that is intent on killing your young son – and who is willing to kill all the first born male children in the area, just to get him?

Can you imagine the joy and fun of traveling to the big city of Jerusalem when Jesus was 7 years old? This is his first trip to the Temple. Imagine sharing the sights and sounds, the activity and the energy of the big city. And then while traveling back home, you back discover that Jesus is missing. For three days you search, all the while Mary & Joseph's heart are being ripped apart. Finally when they find him in the Temple they hear Jesus' strange response: "didn't you know that I had to be about my father's business?"

Or can you imagine when, as an adult, he puts down his carpenter tools and wanders the countryside as an itinerant preacher? Large crowds follow him at first, but then things change. Your son is arrested, condemned as a criminal and then brutally put to death on the cross. And then three days later — the mystery of the resurrection.

But think also of the times that aren't recorded in scripture:

Imagine the joy Mary and Joseph shared when Jesus took his first steps, spoke his first words;

Imagine all the times they gathered around a table sharing meals, conversations and playing games;

Imagine Joseph and Jesus fishing together.

I invite you now to think of another holy family, your family. Remember your joys and struggles, the successes and disappointments.

I invite you also to think of this holy family that gathers at this table. We have our own struggles, our ups and downs, our disappointments and our joys.

In this season, we celebrate our God, who took on flesh in Jesus. But this was not just a one-time-shot, a 33-year incursion of God into human history. The mystery of the incarnation goes on. God is still taking on real flesh inside of us, making us the Holy Family with all our ups and downs. We shouldn't be so hard on ourselves. Life is messy and there is nothing wrong with that because Emmanuel, God is with us.

The incarnation makes us all family. We are now brothers and Sisters, because God is our parent. We are never alone. God is always with us, closer than even our skin. We are family, in the good times and in the bad. Inside this holy family, we do not judge who's in and who's out. Love understands, forgives, and holds each other in union in ways that take into account weakness, hurt, complexity, absence and even sin. Love binds, looses, forgives and holds others in union.

This is the holy family that we celebrate. We are this holy family!