

## **The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph December 26, 2021**

About three months after they purchased their home, Scott and Lauren asked their pastor to come over and bless it. They wanted God's protection over them as they began their family together.

After the pastor was done with the blessing, he sat down with them for a cup of coffee. In the course of their conversation, he said to them, "You know, there's nothing about your house that tells me you're Catholic. You don't have any crucifixes on the wall, and I don't even see a Bible anywhere."

Though Scott and Lauren were taken aback, they started to think about what their pastor had said to them. So they then bought crucifixes to put in all the bedrooms and a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the living room. They took their Bibles out of the boxes they had been stored in and put them on the shelf. From there, they started making it a point to read a passage from the Bible every night together and discuss it.

With just those simple gestures, Scott and Lauren began experiencing their home not just as a place to live but as a place to encounter God. It became for them a "little Church" where sitting down to pray together was just as natural as sitting down to have dinner together. And it all started with that simple challenge by their pastor to display symbols of their Catholic faith in their home.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. It is a time for us to reflect on how God calls each of us to be part of a family and to grow in our faith through our home life. This feast reminds us that our faith is not just something we exercise on Sunday but every day of the week. And our worship of God is not just something that takes place in a church but is also meant for our homes. No matter what our family may look like, God calls us to grow in holiness by showing each other love and forgiveness as Saint Paul tells us in today's second reading. No family is perfect but every home can be holy by honoring Christ's presence there.

What are some of the ways we can make our homes into "little churches"?

One way is to asking ourselves the question that their pastor asked of them. If someone were to come into our homes, would they know that a Catholic family lives there? Are there crucifixes on the walls and statues of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints? Is our Bible on display or is it packed away in a box somewhere or stowed away deep in some drawer?

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It is important for us to have symbols of our faith on full display in our homes. They are not just for show. Rather, they serve as holy reminders for us. When we see a cross, it reminds us to pray and reflect on how Jesus gave His life for us. A statue of Mary might remind us to be careful about how we talk. And a Bible might make us stop for a few minutes and spend time in prayer reading a passage.

Having symbols of our faith in display in our homes also give us opportunities to share what we believe with others. A person who comes into our home and sees a crucifix might ask us about it. Then we can explain our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection to them. Or a person might see a statue of Mary in our home and ask who she is. That would give us an opportunity to tell the story of how God chose her to be the Mother of God.

Another way to make our homes “little churches” is by taking time to pray together as a family. Prayer is at the heart of Christian life. When we pray, we lift up our hearts to God and experience His presence in our lives. Our homes cannot be “little churches” if we are not praying together regularly. Grace at meals is a great way to start. It reminds us to be thankful for what we have. Special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries are also times to introduce prayer. It is also good to have traditions like the blessing of an Advent wreath or praying the rosary during Lent. When we pray together as a family, we invite God's peace into our homes.

Another great way of making our homes “little churches” is by serving the community together as a family. Just as the Church has a mission to witness to God's love by serving the poor, so every family has a mission to reach out to those who are less fortunate. It could be simply opening your home to a child who is lonely and neglected. It could be taking time as a family to volunteer at a soup kitchen or deliver meals to the homebound. Visiting nursing homes and hospitals is also a great way to brighten someone's day. Working together to serve others is a great way to bond together as a family and will create memories for years to come.

Finally, our homes cannot become “little churches” if our families are not participating in the “big church” of our parish. Mary and Joseph found Jesus by going to the temple. Our families find Jesus by going to Church. Here we experience the Risen Christ alive and present in the congregation, in the Scripture, in the Eucharist, and in the priest who celebrates the Mass in the person of Christ. Participating in the life of the parish by going to Mass, volunteering, and supporting its good works will bring life and energy into our homes. Receiving the sacraments regularly - particularly Confession and Communion - will strengthen us to be better parents, grandparents, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters.

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We know that for many, families are not always places of peace and stability. They can also be places of pain and anxiety. But God still wants to be present there. God wants to bring His gifts of healing and reconciliation to all our homes no matter what condition they may be in. Taking some of these first steps whether it be displaying symbols of our faith, praying together as a family, volunteering in the community, or coming to Mass regularly as a family might be the beginning of a real transformation in our families. That is God's desire for us - that we live in love and harmony together. Putting Jesus at the center of our family life and making our homes "little churches" can make it a reality.