

Rev. Derek Fairman

Holy Family C (Physical and Spiritual Inheritance)

This Feast of the Holy Family is a time to remember that we share so much with family. There is a genetic inheritance that we share with our parents, and they share with their parents, and so on. There is also the bond between siblings. There is a physical bond that we share between husbands and wives, between mothers and children. In the Old Testament, family was an important part of the covenant. Genealogies were important: the Old Testament puts an emphasis on knowing family lines.

The Virgin Mary was the only link in the flesh between the Lord Jesus and the rest of humanity. She is a Mediatrix who links us to the Son of God. We are all related to the Lord Jesus: distantly, but still related. Our familial links are an important part of the New Covenant that the Lord has made with His people.

Abraham made a covenant with God, and this covenant was made in the flesh, in circumcision. The same is true with the New Covenant: the bond between Mother and Son is the bond between the Lord Himself, both God and man, and the one who is the faithful Daughter Zion, the one who represents the faithful people, the one who is the best of the Chosen People and the best of humanity. Their bond is a genetic and physical bond.

Since the Lord Jesus cannot really lose His genetic bond with His Mother, in some ways this represents the Lord's love and fidelity to His people. The Lord is faithful to us no matter what. For Mary, her physical bond with her Son is not diminished through a bond with another. Her perpetual virginity ensures that her physical bond with her Son exemplifies her fidelity to her Son but also the fidelity of the faithful Church to her Son.

These genetic and physical bonds though are only the beginning of family bonds. The Paradise which existed in the beginning was present in Mary's heart from the first moment of her conception, in the Immaculate Conception. This Paradise that was present in Mary's heart was then made real in the home life of Nazareth. This home life in Nazareth was the place in which the Lord Jesus found welcome and care. This home life in Nazareth was a place that St. Joseph would defend and protect.

Her devotion to her Son made the house, which was a Temple for the Son of God to dwell, a home. In contrast to the grandeur of the Temple building in Jerusalem, the Son of God dwelt in a Temple in Nazareth that was humble but warm and inviting.

There are places we feel safe, and where we feel like we have a sanctuary. Family life is not perfect, but the Lord has designed it to be a place where we can recognize the Lord's love for each one of us. Family life can take us back to the Garden of Eden itself, which the Lord created to be an idyllic place to begin humanity. It is an imperfect glimpse, but a glimpse nevertheless.

The Virgin Mary did not exist in a vacuum. The Virgin Mary inherited all the virtues and graces of her people. The faith of Abraham, the perseverance of Job, the bravery of David and Esther and many others, all came to her, so that she could imitate their examples. The Virgin Mary, the Virgin Daughter Zion, inherited all good things from the traditions of the whole people, and in particular, her parents and family. She would pass this inheritance on to her Son.

The old Temple of Solomon was a work of the whole people of God. Many contributed money to building the Temple, and many worked in the actual construction. In the same way, the Virgin Mary was a work of God, but she was a work of God in His history of salvation. Pope Benedict XVI and others have commented on how the various moments in salvation history found a kind of culmination in the Virgin Mary; she is at the receiving end of a process of purification and enlightenment, in which she received all the best of her people's qualities. The Immaculate Conception was the cornerstone, upon which her parents built the living Temple.

We too have received so many good things through our family bonds. We think about all the ways in which God has directed our ancestors and families, so that we can receive so many good things, including our Catholic faith. Sometimes whenever we make new friends, we can forget that. Sometimes we can simply take things for granted. This is a moment to remember that the Lord gives us family life, and this is a way to receive His blessings.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for all the wonderful things that we have received through our family bonds. Yes, family life is far from perfect. There are times when we are reminded that family life is a continuing work in progress, that it too needs purification and enlightenment. We can receive negative attitudes and bad habits through family life. But we appreciate the good things that we receive from family life too.

We also recognize the importance of family bonds, for the Lord Jesus made use of family bonds whenever He came down from Heaven. We ask the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who is the true Virgin Daughter Zion, that with her help we may come to appreciate the inheritance that we have received through our families. We pray that parents everywhere may provide a loving and welcoming home to children in imitation of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Heart.