



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Feast of the Holy Family, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings:

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

Colossians 3:12-21 [or (short form) 3:12-17]

Luke 2:22-40 [or (short form) 2:22, 39-40]

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word that engages you?

Read the following Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word in Liturgy

The Feast of the Holy Family is a modern addition to the universal calendar of the Roman Church (since 1921, when it was placed as the Sunday after Epiphany). Like many feasts added in modern times, its emphasis tends to be more on a doctrinal theme than some specific action of God. Its contemporary character is also shown by the way it seeks to instruct and inspire through an obvious appeal to sentiment and emotion. The placement of the Feast of the Holy Family the Sunday after Christmas is an even more recent adjustment to the calendar, stemming from the reform of 1969. By highlighting the family as the context into which Jesus was born, today's liturgy reinforces the fact of his full humanity. Following a way of thinking common in the early centuries of the Church, we proclaim that the Word made flesh sanctifies everything that God has taken upon himself—our full human nature including, today, the reality of family life.

The Book of Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) is part of the Wisdom literature, written most likely during the second century (ca. 180 b.c.) in Jerusalem by Joshua Ben Sira, a member of the scribal class. Part of a larger section on family life, today's reading is considered by many scholars to be a commentary on the fourth commandment, which may be the doctrinal focus of today's catechesis. The author's concern lies with the quality of relationships that must characterize family life. His suggestion that filial piety "will be credited to you against your sins" (v. 14) should be regarded as a way of encouraging the reader to show reverence and care for one's parents, not as a guarantee of divine forgiveness. However, the comment does support the sense of today's celebration that family life can be a source of holiness when lived in accord with God's will.

Today's gospel reading offers an elaborate description of the Jewish piety that marked Jesus'

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family and society. The humble eloquence of Simeon, the profound devotion of the elderly prophet Anna, and even the simple poverty of the holy family (a pair of turtledoves was the sacrifice of the poor—those with greater means offered a lamb) combine to form a touching portrait of the manifestation of God's Son to the faithful of Israel. Simeon's canticle, like those of Mary and Zechariah, transforms a personal gift into a broad proclamation to the world. Mary here, as elsewhere, personifies Israel. The passage does not shy away from the prediction that Jesus will cause conflict and division within Israel (the sword that will pierce Mary's heart), but does at the same time proclaim that his coming is Israel's glory. Family life thus takes its place in the wider context of the faithfulness of a people. The family both receives and witnesses to the grace of God given for all.

### **Catholic Doctrine**

#### **The Fourth Commandment: Responsibilities and Gifts of Family Life**

We believe that the family is not merely a human construct but is divinely instituted. The family is a gift from God (CCC 2203). As with every gift from God, there is a responsibility to use and enjoy that gift properly. Therefore, family life has certain expectations, as given in Church teaching which, in turn, is based on the fourth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16).

This commandment is stated in the positive and ends with a promise. So too the Church regards families as a potential blessing for everyone. Every individual is a part of a family. Some people come from traditional family units (mother, father, and children), and others are members of nontraditional families (such as single-parent families). For some, the extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) plays an important role in their experience. In any case, when families function properly, the individuals within them and society itself reap significant benefits.

Nuptial significance issues forth in the family, a community of parents and children who love each other, share life, and serve life. This community is created by the conjugal consent of husband and wife. Two key characteristics of the relationship between husband and wife in our Catholic understanding of the family are continued growth in mutual self-giving and indissolubility. Spouses daily look to each other and to the Holy Spirit that "they may progress toward an ever rich union with each other on all levels—of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul—revealing in this way to the Church and to the world the new communion of love, given by the grace of Christ" (FC 19.3). Spouses are also called, by the nature of marriage, to an unbreakable oneness (CCC 1614). Indissolubility in marriage becomes a sign of God's own love for humanity and the love Jesus has for the Church itself (FC 20.3). The goal of this mutual self-giving and indissolubility is twofold: for the good of the couple and for the procreation and education of children, the fruit of marriage. Couples share in the creative power of God as they bear, nurture, protect, and



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raise their children. In doing so, they become interpreters of God's love (CCC 2367). When parents are adept at expressing God's love and when their children return this love, individual members learn to care for and take responsibility for one another (CCC 2208).

The respect that children show to their parents derives from their parents' care as they share with their sons and daughters the very gift of life and make sacrifices on their behalf (CCC 2215). Christian parents care for their children in a variety of ways: as their first educators, as evangelizers, sharing the Good News of Jesus with them, as they treat their children as God's children and as human beings, and as they provide for their physical and spiritual needs. For their part, children show respect and gratitude by their obedience (CCC 2216) and later, as their parents age, through material and moral support (CCC 2218).

