

+ J. M. J.

In the Book of Genesis there is a mysterious figure named Melchizedek, the king of Salem. He is a priest of God Most High, and seemingly he comes out of nowhere to offer bread and wine on behalf of Abraham. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek had neither father or mother, beginning or end. As we continue our celebration of Christmas, today we reflect on the early life of Jesus. In saving us from sin it was important that the work of redemption be accomplished by one of us, so the Son of God takes on a human nature. Jesus, though, does not just mysteriously show up one day and begin preaching and gaining disciples. When Jesus says he has come down from heaven the Jews murmur “Do not we know his father and mother?” (John 6:42). Jesus experiences the entire human condition which includes growing up and being raised in a family. This helps us realize how important and what dignity our families have.

A lot of ecclesial communities put great emphasis on having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which is certainly important. Catholics have always maintained we are related to Christ through the community and we talk about communion. Certainly this makes sense for if God wanted to be in a singular relationship with each of individually we could have been created and put on our own little planet and have been perfectly self-sufficient. That is not how it is. Each of us has a father and a mother. We came into being because of a relationship. God’s plan to add to his family is through the fruit of marriage.

Our whole lives are about loving God who cannot be seen. That can be really difficult and abstract as we live in a material world. After sin what do we find in the world, lying, stealing, killing, terrorism, abortion, divorce, etc.? If we just look to the news we might have a difficult time of finding love, which is our purpose, to love. So in God’s wisdom the plan is that one of the goods of marriage be the procreation and education of children. By education foremost is meant the education of children about God, the passing on of the faith. The plan also is that children grow up in an environment where two people love,

provide, take care of them, give them life not for any reason, but only because they are a son or a daughter. We learned to love because someone loved us. For some reason this person called mom or dad gave everything to me. It was undeserved. It was unmerited, and if we think long and hard we could not come up with a reason why they had to love us.

Many of us were graced with brothers and sisters. Suddenly we found out that love made demands. We learned hard lessons that we weren't the only one recipients of the love of mom and dad. We had to share meals. We had to share toys. Sometimes we were dragged to practices and had to wait for a brother and sister. Those who grew up with more than one sibling could say that they grew up in a community, and through the interaction with other children in the family they received an education because they were raised in a community of children.<sup>1</sup> These lessons prepare for life in the body of Christ where we are to share, where we are to worship God together, where should want nothing but the best for our brothers and sisters in the Lord than for them to get to heaven.

As we consider the example of the Holy Family we also realize that even Jesus, Mary, and Joseph experienced misunderstanding and had opportunities for growth. In the case of the Jesus and Mary they responded to their opportunities for growth without sinning. Pope John Paul II reminded us that in our families we are in need of pardon and mercy, for we all experience degrees of selfishness, discord, tension and conflict and these things can bring about division and attack the very good communion that life in the family is supposed to promote. Jesus graciously gives us sacramental aids to help heal the damage done by sin in the family. These are the sacrament of Reconciliation and participation in the banquet of the Body of Christ that we experience here at Mass.

As we recall the one event that we know of Jesus' childhood and remember that he had a hidden life with Mary and Joseph let us rededicate ourselves to our families, both our immediate family and in our

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<sup>1</sup> Wojtyla, *Love & Responsibility*, 242-243.

later years our parents, brothers, and sisters who helped teach us about sacrifice and love. In the event there is someone who has wronged us let us also pray to the Holy Family for their intercession to forgive that person or in the reverse situation to ask humbly for forgiveness from our family, for if we haven't learned that lesson yet from the ones who we're supposed to love and be loved by unconditionally, how can we do the same in the larger community of the Body of Christ. How can we get to heaven if we do not forgive as Jesus?

Merry Christmas and may God bless you.