

Homily Feast of the Holy Family (30.12.18)

In our family relationships,
we do the best with what life throws at us,
through the grace of God.

Every year this feast comes round I find myself asking the question,

"What is holy? And how does that affect the concept of a holy family?"

And I think we can fall into the booby trap of thinking, well, the holy family is an image of perfection which we can never become. And so it always challenges, it's got to be something that is more tangible even if it's hard to achieve.

Many years ago, many, many years ago, I did a funeral for a lady in her 60s. And her son and her daughter, who were in their 20s, came to arrange the funeral and all this is public, I'm not giving any secrets away. They told me she had been an alcoholic all their memory. And they'd ended up as, the pair of them, sometimes caring for her, as children. I asked them if they want to speak at their mother's funeral, and the son said,

"Definitely, yes. My sister will stand with me and I want to say a few words about mum."

And he did a beautiful, very short summary of her life, pointing out this affliction that she had. She wasn't a nasty person, she was a sick person, an ill person, mentally as well as physically. And he said,

"The marriage broke down between my dad and her, and she went off and went through four other relationships with men".

But he ended saying,

"Some people might think my mother was a bit of a Mary Magdalene, but she was our mother and we loved her."

Now, I've never forgotten that because I thought that was touching the hem of holiness, because think of that young man, 20-odd, using a religious symbol like Mary Magdalene. He obviously had faith and they'd seen in their mother something of the love that we say God showers on us.

And so, for me it made me think that holiness has got to be something that these 2 had expressed in their eulogy. When we talk about the virtues of family life, it's got to be something to do with doing the best with what life throws at you through the grace of God. And certainly from the little bit of information we get from the Gospels, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had a rough time. We saw this incident today, but also they had to flee to Egypt and there were all sorts of insurmountable problems they would have had to face.

So I think that's where the virtues of family life are hacked out, by dealing with life as it is. I know and please don't think I'm trying to be flippant, I know that some things in life are thrown at people that overpower them and crush them, but I'm talking about the everyday challenges. These two young people witnessed too holiness in their own family circumstances - In their own approach to holiness and care for their mother.