

## Holy Family - 2021

You and I see a PINE CONE ... but I wonder what it might have looked like to the eye of a carpenter like Saint Joseph. Perhaps to his creative imagination, it was *a whole forest of possibilities*. ***But day by day, he had A PARTICULAR PIECE OF WOOD to work on in his shop***, here and now, the discipline of a breadwinner whose labors say to his family: “THIS is my work at the moment – the use of my time because I love you.” Joseph had to *lavish his attention, skill, and energy on each particular piece of wood before him, with a bigger vision of what he was creating*. Later in John’s Gospel, Jesus will say, *“the Son cannot do anything of Himself ... only what He sees the Father doing.”* Perhaps it was in Joseph’s carpenter’s shop that Jesus learned this lesson in the PARTICULAR, a lesson that played out many years later – in the particular city of Jerusalem, on a specific hill called Calvary, carrying just that piece of wood on which He was to accomplish His Father’s will, with that larger vision of what He was creating with His Passion: “THIS is my work at the moment – because I love you.”

This is also the mystery of the family – planting and nurturing seeds of love that create a whole forest of possibilities. But this love too can only grow in a particular place, with specific people, one day at a time. In your homes, as in the home of Mary and Joseph, *Christ dwells in Your midst*. Your family is truly a “domestic Church,” a treasure for the world. In God’s plan, it is within the family that life begins, and *the divine image is handed on from generation to generation*. It is there that we are formed in our fundamental attitudes, learning the most basic and lasting lessons about compassion and kindness, humility and patience, cooperation and responsibility, forgiveness and LOVE. It is there that we have daily opportunities to carry on the works of mercy ... to feed the sick, to comfort the sorrowful, to care for the sick, to clothe and shelter and teach, to correct and guide and forgive. In the daily business of simply being families, you do the work of the Church. Thank you for that witness in good times and in bad, in sickness and health, all the days of your lives.

All of that sounds grand; but I know at times it is hard to see in the midst of the daily routine and the sometimes painful dramas and great anxieties that make up the unique story of each family. ***In my experience of dreams, things always make perfect sense DURING the dream that often seem impossible in real life.*** I wonder if Joseph's dream, when the angel spoke to him, seemed that way as time went on. That dream was so clear and convincing that the next morning he was willing to let go of his doubts about his betrothed wife, to face the gossip and snickers of his townsfolk, and entwine his life with those of Mary and her Child. ***And so Joseph walked into a mystery far beyond his imagining.*** I am always inspired by his humility; in terms of grace, he was the least member of that family, but he was their equal in loving them with his whole heart. I think Joseph had to go back to that dream, ***time and time again, and reassure himself that it really was real*** – that THIS BABY in the straw, this little boy learning to walk, this teenager teaching the Temple teachers and later standing by his side in the carpenter's shop ... that THIS was Emmanuel, God-with-us. Must not Joseph have wondered from time to time ... is THIS what all the prophets were talking about?

Like Joseph, we too live in daily intimacy with the Mystery of the Incarnation, because Christ is in our midst ... in the Eucharist, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the life of our own particular families, with all their joys and sorrows. There, seeds of love are planted and, little by little, grow to maturity. Like Mary and Joseph, may we know that in Jesus, God is with us, dwelling in our midst -- ***Emmanuel.***