

*December
In the Year
of Mercy*

*Give &
Receive
Mercy.*



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Teaching the Way of Love

DECEMBER, 2015

PLEASE PRAY THAT

- Families will discover deeper ways to give and receive mercy.
- Parents will look to the Holy Family for an example and for support in growing in mercy.
- All families will form community of persons that serve life, develop society and share in the life and mission of the Church.
- By honoring the Holy Family we may come to a greater appreciation for the vocation of marriage and family life.
- Children will see in their parents a constant example of forgiveness and love.
- Children will feel confident that their parents will offer forgiveness and mercy in those times that they stumble.
- Families will do more to reach out to each other in love and to support each other in times of suffering.

Imitate the Holy Family in the Year of Mercy

The Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated the Sunday after Christmas. It's a fitting day for this particular feast to be sure, but it's closeness to Christmas means that this Feast sneaks up on us. The celebration of the Holy Family tends to get lost in the bustle, or it comes after we're completely partied out from Christmas.

The Feast of the Holy Family reminds us that Our Savior chose to enter human nature through a family as a helpless baby. Sometimes we think that because Jesus **did** come into the world the way He did, that he **had** to do it that way. We forget that He could have come any way He wanted. He could have just appeared as a grown man if He wanted to. But He chose to come as a baby in a family. So we have to ask, what was He teaching us by His choice?

Jesus wants to teach us that the family is the center of human life; the cradle of faith in God; the place where we learn to love one another and give and receive mercy. A family is the first school of humanity where charity and forgiveness come to life.

As we begin the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wants all of us to realize that mercy is as important to family life as is love. He reminds us that mercy is abundantly available to us if we seek it and that we Christians are called to be merciful in all we do. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14).



How the Holy Family Teaches Us About Mercy

The Holy Family has a lot to teach us about giving and receiving mercy. Theologically speaking, Jesus is Mercy Himself. Saint Mary and Saint Joseph received Mercy Himself when they welcomed Jesus into their family. That's why we call Mary the "Mother of Mercy" when we pray prayers like the Salve Regina. And in a special way, Mary gave Mercy Himself to the world through Christ's birth and accompanying Him during His public ministry, death and Resurrection.

The daily lives of Saint Mary and Saint Joseph were marked with compassion and show us how to give and receive mercy as well. Consider how Joseph mercifully took Mary as his wife and Jesus as his son at the word of an angel in a dream rather than expose his pregnant betrothed to shame. (BTW, Joseph is the patron of a peaceful death, since he received great mercy by being allowed to die in Jesus' and Mary's presence.) Mary also received mercy by being born without Original Sin. While she was without sin, Mary was still born into the fallen human race. The grace she received at her Immaculate Conception was God's mercy shown to her, just as forgiveness of our sins is God's mercy shown to us. We also see that mercy immediately moved Mary to visit Elizabeth in her pregnancy in her old age. And we see both saints—well equipped with mercy—patiently enduring many hardships and evils surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

So Saint Mary and Saint Joseph are the primary examples for us of how to give and receive mercy.

What do they teach us?

1. Giving and receiving mercy both require great humility. Mary accepted Jesus with the words, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord."
2. We are better able to receive mercy when we are open to whatever God has in store for us. That means both embracing the mystery of faith and seeking God's will in our lives. Joseph accepted his role based on nothing more than a message in a dream.
3. We are better able to receive mercy when we practice obedience to God. Joseph and Mary both obeyed God readily and immediately.
4. Receiving mercy and grace is not always a passive act. We are called to cooperate with grace to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And we're called to extend mercy to others—to forgive just as we have been forgiven.
5. Giving mercy often requires patience (being willing to quietly suffer an evil) and sacrifice (being willing to serve others in love at the expense of our own comfort, convenience, etc.).

The Holy Family is our model for giving and receiving mercy. It is humbling to think that God chose a family for such an important task. But it shouldn't really be surprising to us. We know that the family is the first place we learn how to exercise mercy. And, after learning how to give and receive mercy in our home, God calls us to do the same in the world beyond the family.

So we can look to the Holy Family as an example of how to both give and receive mercy in our own lives. And we can also ask Jesus, Mary and Joseph to pray for us that we may learn to live in the mercy of God just as they did.

Here is your December Challenge

Your challenge for this month centers on the Holy Family and on mercy.

1. Spend some time learning more about the Holy Family. As you read through the Christmas story this year, look for all the ways the Mary and Joseph gave and received mercy. Notice the situations where you and I might have exercised anger instead of mercy (such as against the inn keepers or against Herod). This would make a great Advent reflection, maybe during an Advent wreath ceremony in the home.
2. Discuss as a family ways that you can show mercy toward each other, and ways that you can receive mercy with a more loving heart. Where do you need to work on forgiving each other? Where do you need to accept forgiveness? What struggles can you help each other through? Where do you need to accept help more readily?
3. What are some ways your family can exercise mercy in the wider world? Maybe you could create some beautiful homemade cards expressing God's love and give them with a donation of food to a family. Maybe you could donate food to a homeless shelter and offer to serve it or to eat with the residents. How can you be more personally present in your giving so you can really show those you serve that they are loved by God through you?

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the Teaching the Way of Love home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.