

Homily
HolyFamB rev
December 28, 2014
St. Bernard Church

Question: What makes a family holy?

Well, there are so many things that could be said in response to that question.

I'm just going to address one thing that makes a family holy.

I'm going to talk about the role of prayer in the family.

Some people may think that sounds boring. But I believe very strongly that it's actually prayer that keeps a marriage and a family from being boring.

First of all, the prayers of parents, for themselves and their children, are the foundation of the family.

The prayers of the parents invite God to make His graces available to the family, and God always honors these prayers.

In our own family, especially as our children became teen-agers, God answered our prayers in many ways, including by helping us find out about things our children were doing that were harmful.

One night, my wife had a dream that caused us to drug test one of our children. This turned out to be a very good idea that led us to take some steps that had very positive results.

I went on a retreat once at which I had a powerful experience involving our Blessed Mother. It was like we were conversing with each other. I would say something, and then her words would come to me.

The night I got home from this retreat, my son, Tim Jr. was out past his curfew. I asked Mary if my son had been drinking. The words that came to me were: "a little."

When Tim Jr, finally got home and came into our bedroom to say goodnight, I asked him if he had been drinking, he said to me, "No. Why are you asking me that?"

I said, "I had some information that you were."

The next day, in the afternoon, when Tim Jr. came home after hanging out with some friends, I said hi and then said, "Tim, let's talk about last night."

Tim exploded. He said to me, "I have been asking all the guys I was with last night if they had seen anybody that would know you. None of them saw anybody. We were listening to some live music and some guys at the table next to us bought us a bucket of beers. I just had a few sips. How did you know?"

By this time, I was really laughing.

My daughter Katie had joined the conversation. She said, "All I know is that whoever told you they saw Tim drinking must be a real loser."

A few days later, I told Tim how I got the information that he had been drinking. "Great," he told me, "Now every time I try to do something I shouldn't do, God's going to tell you."

Here's another important aspect of prayer for a family.

We normally think of prayer as talking to God. But maybe an even more important part of prayer is listening, listening for God's communication.

What is God's will for a married couple? What is God's will for a family? What does God want us to do? Individually? As parents? As an entire family?

The answer comes through prayer, the kind of prayer that involves listening to God.

I have found that God always has a plan for me, for me and my wife, for each of our children, and for our entire family. This plan is always changing. It is never boring, not even for a single day. It always involves some kind of adventure, something that will help all of us grow.

And the way we find out the details of the plan is through watching and listening for the many ways God might be communicating to us, through things that happen, through things people say, through dreams, through what seem like random ideas that come into our brain.

About 10 years ago, I was Family Life Director for our diocese and asked a woman named Lisa Lickona to come and give a talk on parenting. After her talk, my wife Connie and I took Lisa to lunch before driving her to the airport.

During lunch, we started talking about our families, and Lisa mentioned that she had a beautiful sister who just wasn't meeting the kind of guys she was interested in.

Connie said, "How old is she?" Lisa said, "26." Connie said, "We have a son about that age."

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God's will for our son was communicated to us through a casual conversation with a complete stranger. It's interesting and most appropriate that Dan and Christie's first child was born on Lisa's birthday.

There's a saying in the Bible that, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." So, for the family: "Where there is no vision, the family perishes." Life becomes dull, very normal, and these days normal is not good enough.

The vision, the direction that our families need, comes from God.

Today, on the Feast of the Holy Family, and especially as we approach the end of one year and the beginning of a new year, it's a perfect time to ask ourselves:

What is my sense of direction in my life right now? Do I even have one? Where am I going? How do I make my decisions? Am I listening for God's communication and trying to discern and obey His will?

What is God's will for me and my spouse?

What is God's will for me and my family?

To answer these prayers, we need to be attentive to the events that take place in our lives, always wondering how God's messages to us are being communicated.

Then we need to be flexible. It's not that God is always going to ask us to do something out of the ordinary. But He might. So we need to be ready.