

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Wholly Family

Right about now, the toys are wearing out. The trash cans are stuffed with wrapping paper. The sweaters don't fit. The turkey has been turned into a casserole. Everything has started to taste like eggnog.

The cousins who flew in from Omaha have overstayed their welcome. Their dog has ruined your carpet.

Everybody insists that you visit them and, when you can't, they whine. You wonder if your in-laws were serious about coming to stay for New Year's.

Your children didn't get what they want, and do not tire of sulking about it, and your siblings insist that this year it's *your* turn to entertain the grandparents, who have never forgiven you for that singing fish you gave them last year.

Is everybody still feeling jolly?

Experts agree: Christmas is the most stressful time of the year. Besides the shopping, and the crowds, and the noise, and endless lists of things to do and people to see, there is the simple, overwhelming *Christmas-ness* of it all. It is a time of merriment and joy, and you will be merry and joyful, even if it kills you. And you will do it surrounded by family, and all that entails: expectations, disappointments, conflicts, heartburn, tension headaches, guilt, crowded airports, and long lines at the returns counter at Macy's.

This can be a season of family togetherness—and a time when people yearn for family apart-ness. One woman I know — in between trips to visit parents, stepparents, cousins and estranged siblings — wearily describes Christmas as “the holiday from hell.”

Sometimes, it's hard not to agree.

But into this whirlwind, at this particular moment, when we have had just about *enough* ... there comes the Holy Family. This Sunday, the first one after Christmas, the Church pauses to honor one family that got it right.

The details are sketchy. We know the Child was born in poverty to a young woman who was not married when she became pregnant. We know the family fled soon after the baby was born, fearing for His life. The father was a carpenter. They were devout Jews, who kept the customs of their day.

We do not know much more than that. Their day-to-day lives are a mystery.

But out of that mystery, from that small family, grew a love that history cannot contain, and that no mere holiday can really do justice to. Whatever that mother taught her Son, whatever that father showed Him, it had a profound effect on us all. It helped to reshape the world.

And so we honor them, for what they gave Him, and us.

What they gave transcends this season. It is grace wrapped in wisdom and love—a gift as wide as the desert, as far-reaching as the stars. It moves us, and humbles us. It reminds us of what family can be—a sanctuary of hope, the Church in miniature.

It's quite a gift.

And, let's face it: As gifts go, that's a lot better than a singing fish.

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