

## Fr Ryan Homily 12-31-23

Read: Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3; Psalm 105; Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40

It's one of those things when we hit the feast of the Holy Family, it's one of those situations where I don't know how it has been for you over the past week with everything surrounding Christmas. Maybe you're like yay time with family was great; it was wonderful. Because family can be one of the great blessings in life and it can also be one of the great trials of life. The reality of family not just having a family but for some not having a family. And it's crazy how we flip flop, we go back and forth. People who have a family are like oh my gosh just these people and the messiness of that and the way they can twist up our hearts. And there are people who don't have a family and long for all of that messiness. So I recognize I don't know how the past week has gone for you over Christmas or just over life when it comes to family, but I can say this, my guess is that you have not found pure happiness in family. Like I'm just throwing that out there cuz a lot of us think that's the goal. Family is the place where you find happiness. Or even marriage. Marriage is where you go to find happiness or joy and really like no it's not. Like I said before weddings are funerals. Marriages are where bad people go to die. Pause for laughter, it's a joke. Or confusion – what is father talking about? It's okay it's the same for ordination with priests. And what I mean by that is that marriages is where bad people go to die themselves in order to become people who know how to love. St John Paul II, he said marriage is a school of love, it's not the place where you go when you graduate. I guess what I'm trying to say is marriage and family life is not a reward for having lived life well and it's also not the source of our joy or the source of our happiness. It's interesting I think that if we look for fulfillment in marriage or family or even in kids we realize we're looking in the wrong place. Even today for the Holy Family, we think it must have been the easiest family in the world to live in and it was not. Yeah like two members were saints, the other was God, that doesn't mean it was easy. Just remember Joseph, he struggled to understand how Jesus was conceived. He was gonna divorce Mary until an angel had to appear to him to tell him what was really going on. And then of course intimacy. Joseph and Mary, they never consummated their marriage. I'm sure there's some heavy discussions at home about that. This prophecy from Simeon today must have weighed heavily on Mary's heart that a sword would pierce it because of whatever is gonna happen to her son down the road. And

they had unemployment issues. In the gospel were told an angel tells Joseph to take the child and his mother and go to Egypt to be refugees. With no work, you don't know anybody, you don't know the language and also just imagine the great loneliness at times because of that responsibility of having the Son of God at your kitchen table. Even in the best families, the best marriages, loneliness is real. So let's not mistake the Holy Family to be this easy or ideal situation. There were issues of trust, of intimacy, unemployment, loneliness – they were all real. But what they did, what made the difference was what they based their family and their home on which was the only Beloved Son of God. He was why they were together. He was the beginning and end of everything they did. The goal of their family living was Jesus Himself. So often we think the goal is marriage or the goal is having kids but really those are gifts from God so that we who do not know how to love can learn how to love. And if your family is anything like mine you don't come close to getting it right all the time. And again family and marriage is that school of love. It's where we learn, and fall down, and get back up, and we do better. There is one thing that you don't see happening in the Holy Family that I do see a lot of families struggle with and that is no one in the Holy Family ever left the faith. And that happens in our families all the time. It's not always the case that our kids embrace the faith and that is painful for parents that they walk away from the Son of God. In fact it's more common in our culture right now that our children reject the faith that you've given them, and reject God as their Father, and they walk away. But what I wanna offer to all of us, but parents especially who might be in that situation, is just to say you are not powerless. You are not helpless. In fact you have within your grasp right now four powerful tools. Four powerful things you can do right now that can change everything because you're not powerless. And the first thing that you can do depending on how old your children are is you can teach your child how to pray. And it doesn't have to be complicated, please don't make it complicated, it can be so simple. St John Paul II, he did an interview in the last part of his life that got turned into a book. It's called The Threshold of Hope. And the interviewer asked him this question, he asked how does the Pope pray? And the holy father said there's one particular prayer, it's the prayer of the Holy Spirit, that he has prayed every day of his life. So here's John Paul II leader of the Catholic Church on earth and he says that there's one prayer I've prayed every day of my life. And the interviewer asked well where did you learn that prayer? And John Paul II said my father taught me that prayer when

I was just a young boy. And his father if you don't know was just a humble government worker, he was not educated, but he was a faithful man and he taught his little boy a simple prayer. And that little boy became the spiritual father of a billion people. There was a line from one to the other and maybe you have done that. Maybe you can say I've taught my son or daughter a prayer like that, and they still walked away. Okay, that prayer is still in them and when they come to their senses that prayer may become the first step back into a relationship with God because you taught them that prayer. So teach your children how to pray, that's number one. Second thing I guess is mostly for dads, moms you can pass it on to them, but number two is the power of a father's blessing. There's something ontologically different in a fathers blessing. I was at a men's conference years ago and the speaker reminded all the dads who were there, he said no matter how old your kids are that you can make the sign of the cross on your child's head and bless them because the father in a sense is the priest for his home. And that has ties all the way back to ancient Israel where the father in the family had that role. And this speaker said he started doing this within his own family and his kids were already grown and at first he would do it and they're like thanks dad. Like holy roller over here, what are you doing? He's patient, he just kept doing it. And he said on one occasion all his kids were home and two of them got into a very heavy discussion, right because he said in their home they don't have arguments they have discussions, right they don't yell they just raise their voices. So he said his daughter was upset, angry, and so her dad just walks up to her and very gently takes his thumb and makes the sign of the cross on her forehead. Doesn't say anything. He said he could see something in her break in a good way. There was so much tension and anger and sadness and just -breath in, breath out – and just part of that is okay I'm still claimed. I can get mad, I can fail and have brokenness, but I am still claimed by my dad. But again it's that ontological power, real power to change things that's within a fathers blessing. Well someone might say that my child has cut off contact with me or they live far away, that doesn't matter. A father can bless his children remotely even if they're not in his presence. There's so much power in a fathers blessing to change lives, to change hearts. Then the third thing is basically an example of a Christ centered life. One of the best gifts that you can give your children – living a Christ centered life cause no you can't make your child choose Christ, but you can always make sure they see Christ in you. And you guys know JRR Tolkien, wrote Lord of the Rings, the Hobbit, all of

that stuff. At one point when he was a young boy his dad died and that's when his mom became Catholic. And she was just convicted by the reality and the truth of the Catholic church but because she did that her own family and her husband's family completely rejected her, and they cut her off. Her and her two sons so JRR and his brother. And so in order to make ends meet she worked so hard, multiple jobs and the family says you want our support just stop being Catholic and you can have our support again. But she refused that. She said I have found the truth, and I cannot turn my back on the church that Jesus founded. She worked hard to support her sons. Tolkien he said later on she essentially worked herself to death. And he said actually he considered his mom to be a martyr for the faith because of what she did for her sons. She gave her sons a living and powerful faith that sparked in him a commitment to Christ. And then going back just real quick with that again John Paul II. It was him and his dad growing up, his mom had died and they lived in a very small house and he wrote so much later on about watching his dad pray. He would wake up in the middle of the night and look over and see his dad kneeling on the hardwood floor deep in prayer. And he said later on that watching my dad pray, that was my first seminary. That's where I learned what prayer and a relationship with God was. Again the power of a mom or dad who lives this Christ centered life can transform how many lives through that example. So teaching your children to pray, the power within a father's blessing, living a Christ centered life, then number four. Last one, powerful tool for parents is to pray for your child. Maybe you know the story of St Monica. Monica, she had several sons. One was named Augustine and Augustine; he was a genius who lived back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century. But he was a genius who dismissed the church and Jesus and Christianity. He thought it was all beneath him. That it was this unintellectual garbage, and he went down a lot of bad paths. At one point Monica is trying to convince him to come back but Augustine, he's so smart, he's running circles around her. And maybe you felt like that. Your kid comes back from college or whatever and they're like you don't know what you're talking about. I learned everything that you don't know, and Monica felt that too. So she knew she couldn't talk or outsmart Augustine so she outprayed him. She just outlasted him. At one point she was praying in this church in Milan and Ambrose, who is the Bishop there, he's St Ambrose now, he sees this woman deep in prayer and she's weeping. He goes over to her, and she tells him the story of her son Augustine. After she's done Ambrose looks at her and he says it is impossible for a child of so

many tears that he would ever be lost to God forever. And of course Augustine did go on to be a great saint in his own right. And so that forth powerful thing any parent can do for their child is to never stop praying for them. And to fast for them as well. Jesus said to do both, pray and fast. Offer both up for your children. But I know even in all this it's so easy to get discouraged because it's still possible to feel like a failure. But to take heart because here is God who is our Father and to think about this there is no better dad than God and His kids walk away from Him all the time. There's nothing more He could do; if there was He would have done it. And His kids walk away from Him all the time. So if you're one of those parents like what more could I do? What more could I have done? Well there's these four things but then you could also get close to the Father. A parent may be like man I feel like such a failure. Don't give in to that discouragement and never lose hope because you are now so close to the Father's heart whose kids are walking away from Him all the time. For me when I was far from the Lord, my parents didn't give up on me, neither did the Father in Heaven. So don't give up on your kids either because the Father in Heaven will not give up on them. This might be a bad chapter in one of their lives, but the story is not yet over. So do those four things. These four powerful tools: teach them to pray, the power of a father's blessing, example of a Christ centered life, and praying for them. And then trust in the Lord and never give up because we can't give up cause God our Father has never ever and will never give up on us.

Amen