The Family is an Incredible Gift

As I type this, I can't tell you what I'll be getting for Christmas. But truth be told, while I'm sure the gifts will be quite nice, what I'm really looking forward to is being able to see my parents after the last Mass on Christmas for a great dinner, but more importantly, just being with great people.

Growing up, I'd regularly see my grandparents. And since I've been ordained, I've been able to visit my mom and dad quite often. Mom always insists on making a great meal, but much better than the food though is the company. I love going home. It's where I can just simply be myself and totally at ease. Seeing them on Christmas for a delicious ham and exchanging gifts will be nice, but much better than any present is just spending time with loved ones. I'm sure you'd agree as you spent time with your loved ones this past week.

This weekend, we celebrate that as we mark the Feast of the Holy Family.

I've certainly learned much from school and life experiences and still have much to learn, but as I look at where I am at in life I realize a big part of it is because of what loved ones have shown me. My mom and dad taught me the value of patience and the true meaning of love by taking time with me growing up to help me with homework, to work hard for the family, and to help their parents as they aged with home maintenance and other tasks they couldn't do as easily any more. They taught me the importance of prayer by praying with me while growing up, and they taught me the importance of giving the gift of time by investing plenty of that with me.

No family is perfect – even Jesus caused Mary and Joseph a lot of anxiety by disappearing as a boy to spend time in the Temple without letting them know. But families are so important in forming us. This Christmas Season, as many are on vacation through this upcoming week, my hope is that you can also find time to spend some extra time with family, and use 2020 to build bridges, work past any grudges, and help your family life to grow even stronger. There are so many little things we can do over a lifetime. When we are growing up, we can listen to our parents and give them the benefit of the doubt, doing our part to help around the house. We can help aging relatives with needs such as shoveling and lawn cutting and also stop in to visit from time to time. Or, if there's a family rift, we can pray for healing and extend an olive branch, mindful of the fact that we are only here for a little while and it's important to work for healing and reconciliation rather than waiting for someone else to make the first move. We can also continue to pray for loved ones who have gone before us, making peace, for if someone passed on and words were left unsaid, our connection with them still continues. And finally, we can give the all-important gift of time by having a family meal, or setting aside time in during the week or on the weekend for family time which means conversing rather than texting with one another.

When you think of our Lord growing up and the 30 years that are largely unrecorded, how much he must have learned by "advancing in wisdom and age before God and man" (Luke 2:52) from

what Mary and Joseph taught him. Our families can drive us crazy sometimes, and over the years from fighting over a video game controller to fighting over who said what at the reunion to who got what in a will, rifts emerge. But so often when we look at what divides us, we realize how petty it can be, and if we think about it, we realize what one of the greatest gifts can be found not under the tree, but in the people who fill our lives around that tree every Christmas. What a blessing the family is.

Have a blessed Christmas Season and a wonderful New Year – may it be filled with many more wonderful memories to be made with your loved ones.

God bless,

Fr. Paul