

Feast of the Holy Family
Dec. 27-28, 2008.

Jesus Christ born at Christmas is the light born into a world of darkness. The powers of darkness rise up in opposition to his truth and goodness and seek to overthrow him.

Joseph is warned in a dream several times in the infancy of our Lord to rise up, take the child and his mother and flee from those who seek to take his life.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family to remember that God set the Family at the heart of the Church. It is a model of the Church. It is also a mirror of the Trinity, a unique glimpse into the heart of God himself.

Pope John Paul II, in his letter to Families, says, “No more important mission in our world today could be imagined than to create a family. The family is placed at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, to unleash the forces of good.”

Today, also, the goodness and holiness of Christ arouses the rage and fury of the devil and his angels. Anyone who bears the name Christian must realize their own share in the battle against sin and darkness.

But the armor of Christ, the sacraments he has given to the Church, are sufficient protection against any assaults the devil might mount.

The devil must work through human beings who choose to cooperate with him in his works of darkness, as he has no power of his own against God. The devil’s

power is wielded in deceit, and lies. It plays on pride, jealousy and anger. The Catechism speaks of the events in the life of the infant Christ as part of the cosmic struggle between the devil and God.

The flight into Egypt and the massacre of the innocents shows this opposition of darkness to the light: Christ's whole life was lived under the sign of persecution. 'He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.' If we hold to His truth, we can expect the world to reject and hate us.

Jesus' departure from Egypt recalls the exodus and presents him as the definitive liberator of God's people.

We are members of the family of God, the people of light, who are conformed by baptism to Christ.

Our families are the greatest means to overcome the burdensome weight of darkness and selfishness in the world.

We can sometimes forget that marriage is a vocation. Once your marriage is blessed in the Sacrament of matrimony you in fact become someone different. When you promise yourselves to one another totally and faithfully and promise openness to receiving children, you accept the vocation to married life. And at the heart of this vocation is God's call to you to be *holy*—by giving of yourself to your spouse and children—it is a call to achieve personal holiness—to be a saint, and to help your spouse to become a saint as well.

When you pronounce your vows you make a complete gift of yourselves to one another. You are imitating what Christ did for us on the Cross. And like Christ, for the rest of your lives you will continue to live out that gift. Though

Satan hates for you to know it, it is in this complete surrender that you will find the greatest happiness.

This vision of life is very contrary to the world's view of happiness. The problem with our modern world is that it wants to be happy by getting, not by giving. But that way of living is the complete opposite of the Christian way of life, a life which is supposed to be lived in imitation of the One who gave of Himself until there was nothing left to give.

In a society and a culture of entitlement this basic fact of life is obscured—we want, we expect, we presume—that everything should be ours only because we desire it. Jesus Christ tells us that only by giving up our lives, our wishes, and our desires can we truly find life, happiness and peace. The family is the place to learn how to give up those things in love and we find our greatest joy in the life we nurture.

If we are God's people, we must not be surprised if we are despised. Being the instruments by which the light of Christ scatters the darkness of lies and deceit infuriates Satan and all his followers.

We share Christ's grace so that, conformed to his suffering and death, we may rise with him to "newness of life." We have joined the cosmic struggle between darkness and light, but go forward to battle confident that his "yoke is easy" and his "burden is light."

He is victorious over sin and death, and we too share in that victory through faithfulness and perseverance on the day of battle.