

As a historical note, in the time of Our Lord, men were fully employed in the market place at the age of 12 or 13 and married and supporting a family by 16 or 17. It wasn't like they needed a high school diploma to find work.

When I was in formation for the diaconate studying Christology under Fr. Tom Tully, the debate in the class had to do with how much of Jesus staying behind to study in the Temple was just being a teenager, versus how much of his actions were driven to demonstrate for us his obedience to his Mother and Foster Father, St. Joseph as an example of the Commandment to "Honor your Father and Your Mother" for our lives. As for the answer, we can ask him when we see him because no one knows. What we do know is that his actions were not sinful.

Jesus had to be in his Father's house, the Temple, the place of worship, a place of learning about God and our relationship with him. We are here, in a Temple, a place of worship, a place of learning about God and our relationship with him. Our homes are Temples, places of worship, places where we learn about God and our relationship with him. All too often our homes fall well short of the mark in this respect because we violate the sanctity our family temples with fights, lies, petty jealousies, and all of the drama that we drag into it trying live at the level that we think the world expects from us.

On this Feast of the Holy Family, how do we up our game? How can we bring our families and ourselves to try to imitate the Holy Family? After all that is a very high bar to reach. The place to start is within ourselves.

One of life's great lessons is to learn what we can actually control. We start as a child thinking that we can control the world. Unfortunately too many parents reinforce that feeling by failing to teach their children discipline at an early age. As we get older, we try to control our siblings, our parents, and our friends. Once we finally leave home we rejoice because we can finally do whatever we want to do. Except, we have to work to eat, we have to listen to the boss, and that 'freedom' we sought rapidly becomes another set of limitations. Even if we start our own business, between customer

demands and government regulations we find ourselves with more bosses than anyone else.

Hopefully sometime in our lives we learn that we can't even completely control ourselves. If we could, we would all be in great physical condition with full heads of hair, no need for glasses and perfect teeth. The only thing; let me say again, the only thing that we have complete control over is what we think. We can exercise nearly complete control over what we are thinking about, and in that exercise, we learn to control our emotions and our actions. Learning to control what we think about is within nearly everyone's capabilities. It requires self-discipline, self-awareness, hard work and daily practice.

This last week I was listening to a POD Cast by Bishop Robert Barron where he was talking about something he learned from Saint John Paul II. It was called "Law of the Gift." What this law means is 'that your being increases in the measure that you give it away.' In a more formal setting as a Cardinal during the Second Vatican Council he wrote that; "Man finds himself only by making himself a sincere gift to others." (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24)

We can't make ourselves into a gift until we throw off the tyranny of doing what we want and expecting the world, or at least our corner of it to bend to our will. When we take control of our own thought process and focus on making ourselves into a gift for others, we can put the world into the proper perspective, and focus on the relationships that will make us complete.

The world is focused on and measures success by the accumulation of things, money and power. God is focused on relationships and the mighty in the eyes of God are the ones who have given away what they have, and the most important, most valuable thing that we have to give away is ourselves.

The primary relationship in a marriage is between the husband and the wife. In the marriage vows the husband and wife pledge all that they have, all that they are, all that they ever will be to one another. This is why the first place where Saint John Paul's 'Law of the Gift' should play out is in the family. The more the husband gives of himself to his wife and the more wife gives of herself to her husband,

the more content and committed they will be to their marriage and their family.

In order for a couple to completely surrender themselves to one another in the marriage relationship, a relationship blessed and sanctified through the Sacrament by God, they must make God and equal partner in the relationship, they must give each other to God through prayer and sacrifice. The more they give to each other and to God in their relationship, the more wonderful, the more holy the relationship, their marriage will become.

We exist for God and to serve God's purpose. That purpose is to know him, to love him, to serve him on this earth in order to spend eternity together with him in heaven. The family exists for God and to serve God's purpose. That purpose is to provide that Temple we spoke about, the place of worship, learning about God and our relationship with him. The family is the basic building block of society, if the family isn't stable, then the children don't have a stable environment in which to grow, therefore the fabric of society weakens and we see the problems we are facing in our society today.

On the other hand, when parents embrace their roles as the ones responsible for the formation of their children in their faith by example, word and action, the family becomes holy by surrendering to the will of God. The closer we are to God, the more we let go of each other and give each other to God, the deeper our love for each other will become which in turn will bring us closer to God who is the source of all love.

Even if we manage to achieve this idyllic state, will we suffer pain, challenges, temptation, sickness and death within our family? Of course we will. Saint Joseph left Mary a widow. Mary stood at the foot of the cross and suffered with her Son. Suffering is God's point of entry into our souls. We always learn more from the test question that we got wrong than the ones that were correct. Thomas Edison failed over 1,000 times to invent the light bulb. He said that the invention of the light bulb just had over 1,000 steps.

We need to have the same attitude with our spiritual and family life. Holiness isn't usually found in great acts under extreme circumstances, holiness isn't usually found in perfection. If holiness

required great acts, extreme circumstances and perfection, it would be a task beyond our human ability to accomplish.

Instead, holiness is found in doing our very best to follow Jesus and keep his law in the ordinary events of every day life. Do we all want holy families? We need to learn to control our thoughts, to focus on what is really important, our relationships with God and each other. Then we need to give ourselves away to our spouses and children. Then we need to give them to God. And in the act of giving during the ordinary events of our lives, we will get to experience the 'Law of the Gift' as we see God's grace unfold in our lives.