

HOMILY – THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

The scriptures surrounding the birth of Jesus suggest that the Holy Family must have accumulated a large number of “**Frequent Mule Miles**”. Mary traveled nearly a hundred miles to visit with her cousin Elizabeth. I would assume Joseph would have gone with her on such a difficult journey in the high country.

Later, Joseph and Mary again travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, 80 miles, to comply with the order of Cesar Augustus to be enrolled in a census.

Once again they hit the road because they were told to flee to Egypt, because a jealous and vicious King Herod was seeking to kill Jesus and had already massacred hundreds of babies two years old and under who lived near Bethlehem. That was 40 mile journey.

And finally, after returning to Nazareth, 106 miles, from exile in Egypt, they were obligated to travel again to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, another 80 miles.

They would travel once again to complete the obligation of presenting Jesus to the temple and dedicate him to God.

Now keep in mind, the travel was not first class. They either walked or were mounted on a mule. The roads were terrible and there was the ever present danger of thieves along the way.

What helped Mary and Joseph on these difficult journeys was that they had each other – and Jesus was with them.

All of us have had a wide variety of journeys in our lifetime. Some have been joyful and filled with pleasant memories. It may be the drive home from the hospital with your first born child. It may be the journey to the parish to celebrate your child’s baptism, First Communion or Confirmation. Maybe it was the walking down the church aisle with your son or daughter on their wedding day or the trip to a high school or college campus to celebrate a graduation.

What made these celebrations so special for was you shared them with spouses and family and friends. You also have been on difficult and unplanned journeys – the drive to the cemetery to bury a loved one, the need to move in order to take a new job and leave behind old friends and familiar places, to take a child to the hospital with a serious illness, to drive to jail to bail out a child that made a bad choice. What made these journeys bearable was that you found loving and caring family and friends who stood by you and supported you in these difficult moments.

During these both joyful and difficult journeys, Jesus also was with you – through the loving support of those who laughed and cried with you, who offered a hand for support or a shoulder to cry on. They prayed for you and Jesus gave you strength and help when you felt you could not go on. We can face almost anything in life if we have family and friends around us and carry Jesus with us.

The New Year will take us on new journeys – joyful and challenging. What kept the Holy Family together and sane throughout all of their trials and crosses – love for each other and God. What holds families together in times of joy and difficulty is love and support and caring presence. I believe the greatest threat facing families now is simply that we do not spend enough time together. There is a story about a lawyer who lived a considerable distance from her elderly family. Months passed since they had been

together and when her parents asked her when she might visit, the daughter gave a long list of reasons why she could not come. The father asked, "When Mom and I die, do you intend to come to our funerals?" "Dad, of course I will come." The dad answered, "Forget the funerals and come, I need you more now than I will then."

Just as the Holy Family survived all its trials through love for each other and faith in God, I pray during this Mass that our families, our parish community, will conquer all difficulties through love for each other and faith in God.