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Have you heard what really happened that day when Jesus came across the woman caught in adultery? Jesus said, "Let the person who is without sin among you cast the first stone" (John 8). They fell silent, and then, all of a sudden a stone came flying towards the condemned woman. Jesus looks up, and says, "Come, on, Mom!"

The Feast of the Holy Family invites us to reflect on our own family life. Sometimes it feels like our families are less than holy, and while the witness of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph can provide some inspiration, I've heard some say, "Yeah, well, your family would be holy, too, if the father was righteous, the mother was immaculate, and the son was God." Marriage is tough. If we look at the cross, we see that self-sacrificial love demands something significant, and the what the culture offers in terms of witnessing to family life is less than helpful. We experience that the people we are closest to often are the ones we fight with the most because, being near each other all the time, we are easily annoyed. Isn't it the case that they say the quirk you once found endearing is precisely what one year after the wedding has become annoying? So how is it that today's feast provides inspiration? It reminds us that with grace, holiness is possible, including for us. That is to say, life would be holy if people were full of and cooperating with the grace of God.

For example, this is why Venerable Patrick Peyton, buried here in Massachusetts at Stonehill College, went around the world promoting the family rosary as a key to peace, with his two families quotations "The family that prays together stays together" and "A world at prayer is a world at peace."

When I was a deacon studying in Rome, for Holy Week one year, I was ministering in Ireland, to get a feel for parish life. I was there two weeks, and I was touched to see that in every faithful Catholic home hung an image of the Sacred Heart with a votive candle in front of it. In his encyclical letter on the Sacred heart devotion, Venerable Pope Pius XII was delighted to see that families were dedicating themselves to the Sacred Heart as a way to consecrate their family to God and be open to and cooperate with his grace.

And we could do that, as that is one devotion, but in our hyper-individualized American context, I think people need to make personal commitment, not just for our families, but for our personal lives of holiness. This is why I am proposing that every Catholic consecrate themselves to Jesus through Mary, sometimes referred to as entrusting themselves to Mary. Saint Louis de Montfort, the great promoter of this Marian consecration, says that it is, “surest, easiest, shortest, and the most perfect means to becoming a saint.” We are particularly blessed at our parish to have running almost continuously the Hearts Afire programs, making it easy for parishioners to entrust themselves to both the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. I hesitate to call it a program because it is so much more than that. One parishioner described how it changed his life, saying,

“Mary gave her yes and spent the rest of her life magnifying the Lord by the way she lived. Giving praise and glory to the Lord by continually saying yes. That’s the journey that I’m on. She teaches and guides me by example, help, and love. Walking with me to follow the Lord, so in return I give everything to her (consecration) and she makes everything more perfect and presents it to Jesus for me. I walk with Mary, my Mother.”

These are devotions that can change your households and families. I strongly encourage you to pray about whether God is inviting you to participate in such a consecration in this upcoming year. The next program for consecration to Mary begins January 10. It requires a short reading each day, about a page, and watching a weekly video, which can be done with the parish group or in your own small group that you organize. More information about what that entails and sign ups are available in the narthex after Mass or you can contact me to be put in touch with those running it. May God bless you.