

We Are Family (Sister Sledge, 1979)

Intro. This year's circumstances have caused a lot of changes to our plans. Baptisms, weddings and funerals were postponed in hopes of families being able to gather safely to celebrate these important moments. As the months dragged on, we have celebrated in very small groups and adapted technology to enable families across the country and in a couple of celebrations, across the world, to be present. It has shown how important it is to celebrate the significant milestones of birth, marriage and death with family in spite of the limitations.

I. The gospel tells us about the first public action by Joseph and Mary as a family [J. Waters, *America*, December, 2020]. Seemingly without family by their side, alone they celebrated the usual religious customs, presenting their son at the temple in

thanksgiving for his birth. Immediately strangers came up and told them wonderful things about him. Simeon, known in the community as a holy man, waited his whole life for this moment and, as one translation puts it so well, "under the influence of the Spirit" he came to the temple. Anna, after the loss of her husband, made a life for herself dedicated to prayer and the Lord, was known as a prophet. She too talked to Mary and Joseph about their child's future. In that moment, Anna and Simeon became family. Joseph and Mary probably had large, extended families, but so often in the early days of their life together they were not with them. Other people came into their lives and left their marks: angels, shepherds, and now Simeon and Anna. The family returned home and to the day to day life of a

husband and wife, father and mother; a quiet change after all those powerful events.

Concl. In the past year, who is family has changed I think. Many of us have been cut off from our parents, children, sisters, brothers and cousins. We have also been cut off from our work family and our school family. Many of us have struggled without the support we took for granted from these “families.” We had to look around for contact with people we didn’t know except by seeing them in the yard next door or at the grocery store. Last week I was in my front yard and I heard a voice. It said, “Hello, neighbor. Merry Christmas.” I looked up and it was one of my neighbors down the street. I had met the husband, but not the wife and it was she who called out to me. I could feel a smile come to my face. I thought how rare that is today. But it

shouldn’t be. Years ago, people routinely called out hello’s to each other. There is no question times have changed. And no question as a nation we are divided in some ways. The connections between us have been strained. No family is perfect; families struggle. What hasn’t changed is that we are still all part of a very large family, God’s family. We share so much more in common than we do in difference. To see and acknowledge one another is important if we want to re-strengthen our families and our nation.

Under the influence of the same Spirit that sent Simeon to the temple that day, maybe we can meet each other face to face again in our work places, our schools and our churches. And recognize that we are family. And we are holy.

Fr. Michael Pendergraft,
Holy Family, December 27, 2020