



A journal for restless minds

## FAMILY TIES

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*Let us give thanks and praise*

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Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

## Family Ties

*Genetic indifference*

Life can, and often does, throw us curve balls, or better yet, staying with the baseball metaphor, knuckleballs. A knuckleball travels an erratic, unpredictable path which makes it nigh impossible to predict where it will end up, making it darn near impossible to hit.

Look up the dictionary definition for "family" and you will find a multitude of meaning, everything from a social unit—I cannot help but think of the Borg unit, Seven-of-Nine—, a crime syndicate, a set of curves or surfaces in a mathematical equation, a group of persons of common ancestry, et cetera, et cetera.

Of course, these are correct in their usage but stray far afield from its primary and original meaning: a social group

consisting minimally of a man and a woman united in marriage, and the product of their conjugal union, children.

From the beginning it has been so, for "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, ...'" (Genesis 1:27-28).

There is an ineluctable argument necessitating the distinctive biological differences between man and woman; no amount of casuistic sophistry can obviate the obvious: procreation requires the coital union of a man and woman.



There lies within the context of family, a thing essential, a factor that goes beyond genetics, something which denies biological inheritance; shared DNA does not ordain a family. Family demands a bond, a relationship of mutual interest and respect.

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# Becoming Man

## *The Carpenter's Apprentice*

Each week, whenever I begin to reflect on the Sunday readings, I inevitably run across a singular thought or phrase that stands out in stark relief from whatever else I have read. This week, this pithy sentence immediately caught my attention: *"The Designer of the Universe becomes an apprentice in the Carpenter's Shop"*<sup>1</sup> and my mind immediately jumped two-thousand years to images of The Sorcerer's Apprentice in Disney's classic animated film *Fantasia*.

Don't ask why. I suppose the thought of a young Jesus, the Son of God, learning an earthly trade as a carpenter's apprentice bore too much a similarity to the image of the forbidding sorcerer leaving his apprentice—in this instance, Mickey Mouse—to his own devices. Jesus was a child longer than he was an adult and as any parent can attest, leaving a small child alone often spells "T-R-O-U-B-L-E," trouble.

We know from Paul that though Jesus was truly the Son of God, he knew that man could not grasp the mystery of his Godhood and so he became a man of lowly estate, with neither power nor wealth nor prestige nor fame. Rather, he took the form of a servant, humbling himself before us, born into poverty, obedient to the Father's will.

In Sirach, we are offered an explanation: *"God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons."*

Jesus, the Son of God, submits himself to the authority of Joseph and Mary as the Son of Man. Through his submission to his earthly parents, he allows us to anticipate his ultimate act of obedience and obeisance to God, the Father. Why would the Son of God do this? Again, we find in Sirach the answer: *"Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself for them."* God became man in order to atone for the sins of man.

nephews, parents, grandparents, and so on. Relatives, especially cousins, were often called brothers and sisters and no family lived disconnected from this network of relatives. In addition, family meant living as part of the family of God, the chosen people of Israel, and as children of God.

Looking at the Holy family through the lens of distant time, we too often focus on the divine intervention, and forget or ignore the commonality shared by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph with all other families in Israel: their shared relationships with one another and their familial

relationship with their Creator God.

This familial relationship between ourselves and God can, and often does, feel strange at times. *"God marries our human flesh and finiteness. In Jesus the eternal Word of God becomes wombed in time. Thus, we who bear his name and live his life are a people who see the transcendent in the particularities of names, places, historical events."*

*It is strange, when you think of it. We celebrate conceptions, circumcisions, and purifications; we ritualize marriage so highly that some of those who have left our communion are struck by the leanness, even barrenness, of*

*some other marriage ceremonies. Births and deaths, we linger and pray and play over. Food and blood characterize our Eucharists.*

*It is unsettling for many—and some—*



Whenever we think of the Holy family, separate and apart from any other family, we have a tendency to forget their normalcy as a first-century family. Families were extended, complete with uncles and aunts, nieces and

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times for us—that God would penetrate and inhabit our ordinariness.”<sup>2</sup>

**E**arly writers documenting the birth and childhood of Jesus often seemed uncomfortable with the commonness of the baby Jesus, wanting to describe him more godlike, with greater splendor and power. And yet, it is his humanity and his human relationship with our lives and God’s that is at the core of his earthly purpose.

*“In the last analysis we are as defenseless as a child before the great forces of time and consciousness. What is more, we are reminded that our very God, as well, is somehow like a child, defenseless before us. Perhaps that is why the heavenly advice so often given in the infancy narratives is ‘fear not.’*

*It is fitting that the holiness of the family also be celebrated at this time. For it is only by the ordinariness of being born, nurtured, and taught, so frail and dependent upon those who have welcomed us into their lives, that we ever grow in strength and grace.*

*God enters these intimacies, too, just as surely as God wants entry into all of human history. And so, the wisdom of the father and the authority of the mother and reverence of the child reveal the splendor. Sometimes the wise old ones in our midst, like Simeon, help us name the glory. Other times, it is the prophetic ancient, like Anna, who sees the truth of our ordinary radiance.*

*Paul reminds us that the virtues of daily life—kindness, thankfulness, patience, and forbearance—embody our good and gracious God, who has willed to dwell*

*in us. Our submission to each other, our love, our care lest the frail among us lose heart, is the making, once again, of the Word into our flesh.”*

Something else to consider is this: defining the family is never easy, it wasn’t in antiquity anymore than it is today. Determining what kind of family is a good and decent one is even more difficult.

The family into which Jesus was born and raised was unquestionably devout and pious. They followed the Law, the Torah, faithfully, and would have had him circumcised and named eight days after his birth. There is a long and storied history surrounding circumcision and to fully appreciate the significance of both one must understand the common belief that the man deposited a fully formed miniature person in the woman who served merely as a vessel in which the seed could grow to maturity.

**L**ong before DNA testing and modern medicine, there was no way for a man to know for sure whether the child born was actually his. Such uncertainty would effectively weaken the family bonds, making potential heirs suspect. By circumcising and naming a boy as early as eight days after birth, the father made a public proclamation formally accepting the child as his son.

*“In Luke’s Gospel, Joseph does not receive a ‘revelation’ about Jesus and his divine origins, such as he does in Matthew’s Gospel. Nevertheless, Joseph demonstrates that he is truly an honorable and just man by seeing to the circumcision and naming of his son in accord with the*

*prescriptions of the Torah. Joseph’s honorable behavior solidifies the bonds of his young family.”<sup>3</sup>*

**W**hy God became human is a mystery. *“But the good news; the great news is that He did. And it is how “God drew close to us, so that we could see him, touch him and come to know him.” God, through Jesus, “one of us,” who fully entered our world and “dwells with us, rejoices with us, cries with us, bleeds with us, and triumphs with us.” And all of the ways that we celebrate being family – at the family meal, at the kitchen table doing homework, celebrating the great holy days and holidays, and coming to Mass – remind us that it is the love between parents and children and brothers and sisters that get us through the joys and the crises; the triumphs and the tragedies. Christ is truly present in our families just as certain as he was a part of the Holy Family—and it is that every presence that makes our families holy.*

*And today, at this Mass, we bring all of the stuff of our family lives; all of the fragmented parts of our families, and we place them on the altar before God, along with the gifts of bread and wine.”<sup>4</sup>*

Amen.

Homily for the  
The Holy Family (B)  
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14  
Colossians 3:12-21  
Luke 2:22-40

1. Innocent Smith, O.P., *Homiletics & Pastoral Review*.
2. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *God Made Flesh*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
3. John J. Pilch, *Children of God*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
4. Deacon Dave Shea, DMin, *Athenaeum of Ohio*.

The Holy Family is the quintessential ideal expression of family, universally admired for the bonds of love and commitment exhibited between Joseph and Mary and their steadfast devotion to Jesus. And yet, their child was not conceived by their conjugal union; Jesus was not Joseph's biological offspring.

For Christians, we believe this to be so, that Jesus is the Son of God, conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was the husband of Mary and a foster father to Jesus; and yet, we see in them the near perfect embodiment of family. And so they were and so they ought to be considered for they were family in the truest sense of the word.

One of my grandchildren was adopted shortly after his birth by one of my daughters and her husband. Within a month after his adoption, the newly adoptive parents were blessed with the news of expecting another. Although one of their children is biologically unrelated, he is, without a doubt, their son, a member of their family; every bit as much as his sister.

We all know of them, those who by random chance and the accident of birth are biologically related yet completely estranged from any relationship which could be considered family.

Anyone familiar with animal husbandry knows there is no relationship beyond the act of breeding between male and female animals. There certainly is nothing remotely akin to a familial relationship. Cartoons and

children's books notwithstanding, family ties simply do not exist outside of man.

Sadly, there are human beings who subscribe to much the same, indiscriminately breeding for no particular reason other than self-congratulatory adulation. Children born of such self-absorbed narcissists are but unfortunate byproducts of mutual self-indulgent masturbation; a family they most definitely are not. Biological fathers and mothers they may be; family they will never be.

There is a difference, one of utmost necessity, between coarse breeding and self-sacrificial procreation. Animals breed instinctually; the very act biologically driven; devoid of passion, absent attachment, commitment or intimacy, they mindlessly breed to appease their basest appetite.

Humans are capable of more, much more. Biologically driven acts, acts motivated by self-imagined impulse are justly despised, and those who would act upon such impulses rightly deemed repugnant. There is no room for animalistic amoral and immoral actions performed by one upon another.

The difference between the animal and man lies in the reality that the animal has no moral compass, no soul to provide it guidance; man, created in God's image and likeness, has been gifted with a discerning and rational mind and the innate knowledge of rightness and wrongness. Man sees the hand of God in all of creation; animals can neither reason nor own a rational thought.

Man lives by a moral code, imperfectly observed, even while acknowledging the existence and necessity of such a code; animals exist and survive on nothing more than unthinking instinct.

Family ties are inherently human. God created rational man, a being with a reasoning mind and free will, with the capacity for independent thought and the ability to conceive abstract ideas and concepts. Above all else, God gave man passion, the capacity to love and to be loved, the need to be connected with others, the desire to selflessly give of oneself for the benefit of others.

It is in that selfless devotion to the care of others that the bonds of family are formed, forged by the mutual self-giving love of its members. There is, as it should, a genetic indifference to its formation. A family is where the heart is, where the soul resides, where God smiles with fondness.

## Courage

*Saying "Yes" when God calls*

Courage. We are all too familiar with the telling of acts of heroism and courage performed by soldiers, first responders, teachers, and ordinary men and women. We generally look up to and revere those who have selflessly acted when many would not, often at the cost of their own lives. Of the nearly 3500 recipients of the Medal of Honor since 1861, fewer than 100 have been awarded to the living.

As we celebrate this Christmas



season, rejoicing in the birth of our Lord and Savior, we should not forget the courage exemplified by Joseph and Mary in order for Jesus to come into this world. We are accustomed to thinking of Mary and Joseph as a poor, humble, and kind couple; yet we seldom consider how much courage was required of them.

**M**ary's "Yes" to God's call required a willingness to accept the very real possibility of death for herself and her unborn child; for the punishment for pregnancy outside of marriage was stoning. As a young woman, approximately 12-15 years of age, she was not allowed to appear alone in public.

Joseph's "Yes" to God required him to accept Mary and the infant in her womb as his own. In a society where honor was important above all else, this required enormous courage on his part. To accept and raise someone else's child would be difficult for most, even today. To believe that Mary's child was truly conceived by the Holy Spirit would strain the credulity of almost anyone. Yet Joseph said "Yes" to God and that took courage.

It took courage to flee to Egypt, taking little with them, to avoid the death that awaited their child. They fled to an unknown land, not knowing what might await them when they arrived or how they would survive once they got there.

Their courage should be an example to us all. It should remind us that saying "Yes" to God is never easy. It takes courage to accept His will. But

the consequences for refusing to do God's will are unimaginable. Where would we be today if either Mary or Joseph had simply said "No" to God?

During this Christmas season let us offer thanks to Joseph and Mary for their courage to say "Yes". Let us pray that we will find the courage to say "Yes" to God when He calls.

## Open All Hearts

*Let us give thanks and praise*

**T**he birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a time for rejoicing. We see his birth as a time of joy and we thank God for His wondrous love for all His creation. God is truly a loving God.

For the Jews God was not a loving God, rather He was a God to be feared. The Torah speaks of His anger, His wrath, His condemnation of His people when they failed to follow His commands. The Jewish people were locked into a rigid, unforgiving sense of obedience to God's law, a law that demanded strict adherence to its covenants. They, quite simply, were afraid of God's retribution, and thus were unable to visualize a loving, caring God.

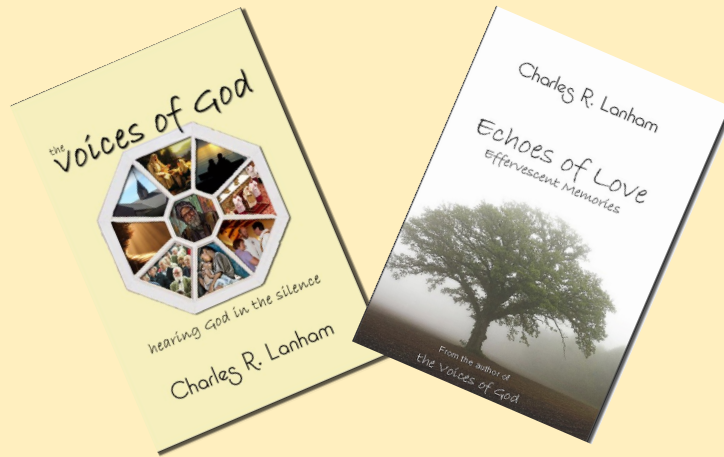
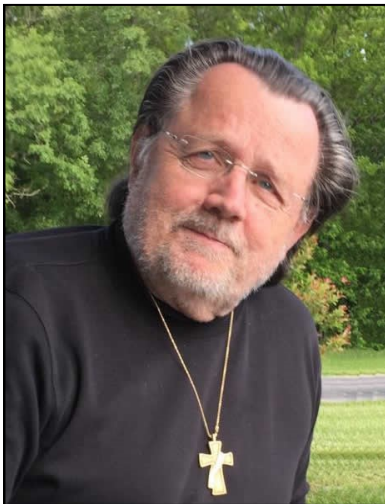
Jesus, quite literally, turned the Jewish people's belief system on its head. He spoke of a loving God, a God who cared for all His creation, a God who asked that we love Him and love one another as we love ourselves. Jesus taught us that it was not only right to love our self but that God required us to do so. For if we do not love our selves then how can we love one an-

other? And if we cannot love one another — God's creation — then how can we love Him.

**F**or the Jews, this was such a radically new way of viewing God that it was virtually impossible for them to understand or accept it. Their entire lives, the very core of their faith, were constructed from a fear of the Lord; remember, they were not allowed to even speak the name of God! But despite, or perhaps because of their fear of God, the Jewish people were very faith-filled and deeply devoted to their God.

Quite the contrast with many people today. God loves us but does anybody really care? Churches are rarely filled and when they are, it appears to be out of obligation rather than from an abiding desire to give thanks and praise to God, our loving Father and Creator of us all. All too many of us find it inconvenient to spend any time with God. We are too busy or it simply is not high on our to do list. We have no fear of God; therefore we have no time for God.

As we begin this New Year, I believe that we should make a resolution to return to God, to make Him an essential presence in our daily lives, to put God first and foremost in our thoughts and prayers. Let us offer prayer to God for all that He has given us and ask that He speak to those who have hardened their hearts to His presence. Let us ask God to open all hearts and minds to His love and urge all to give praise and glory to His name.



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