

You have all probably heard the phrase “spiritual but not religious.” That may apply to many people today – but it doesn’t apply to Jesus and His Holy Family. Today’s Gospel passage shows clearly that Joseph and Mary were devout and religious Jews. They followed all the details of the Law. In bringing Jesus into the temple they were following the Law of Moses that required a sacrifice for, and consecration of, every first-born male. We’ll see a further demonstration of this devout religious practice later in this second chapter of Luke when the Holy Family goes up to Jerusalem when Jesus is twelve years old to take part in the feast of Passover as was required of them. My point is that the lives of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were filled with religious practices and rituals. They were spiritual and religious.

I mention all of this because there’s the idea in our society that religious practices, laws, and rituals, are not necessary for, or even obstacles to, true worship of God and spiritual maturity. And those who immerse their lives in religion are likely to be Pharisees. But Jesus’ own

family and life show a different story. Although Jesus would challenge certain interpretations of the law, He was an observant Jew. And today in my homily I want to draw out some implications from that truth.

First, those of you who have had your children baptized as infants are following in the footsteps of Mary and Joseph at the Presentation. Baptism is not just a dedication of the child to the Lord. It brings about a true union of the child with the life of God. It establishes that state of grace. But in that we can certainly see it as a consecration to God. And in baptizing your children, like Mary and Joseph, you too are fulfilling the law of the Lord.

But what follows from that? In having your children baptized you are promising to bring them up in the Catholic religion. Catholicism has its own rituals, moral laws, and practices. And foremost among them is coming to this temple/church to celebrate this sacrifice of the mass. When you bring your children to the Eucharist you are fulfilling the law. That doesn't sound very spiritual, perhaps, to our modern ears. But, as

the Presentation shows, it's pleasing to the Lord. That is how He works – then and now. I tell all the families of young children preparing for baptism, come to the church every week, according to law and custom, just as the Holy Family came to the Temple. Make the church and the mass a normal part of life for your children so they are comfortable praying to God here.

But to all of us who don't have children to bring to Holy Family each week I would also say this: we who are without kids must recognize the right, duty, and privilege we have in welcoming the children of others into our midst. We are all meant to be Simeons and Annas, who recognize God's work in the children brought to mass and are glad they have come. We must be understanding of the parents of these young, holy families. The Gospel doesn't record that Jesus cried when He was brought to the Temple, but He was fully human so I'm betting He wasn't as silent as we might first imagine. Neither are the children of our parish silent, but we must accept that willingly. It is true

that when a child really starts a sustained crying fit, the parent should take him or her out to the narthex momentarily. But they should come back in again when the child settles down. That is what the Lord wants.

Our parish is blessed to have so many children in it. How many times I have heard young couples say to me they come here to Holy Family, in part, because there are so many people like themselves, struggling with trying to raise a holy, Catholic family in what is often a society unfriendly to the faith. We must be careful not show that lack of appreciation for children and their ways among ourselves.

Finally, I want to speak to the children here today. Your parents have brought you to mass today. You might have made it difficult for them to get you here. Maybe you threw a tantrum on the way out the door. Maybe you pouted, sighed, rolled your eyes, and generally grumbled at having to go to church. Maybe they have to bribe you with a promise of a doughnut after mass – so you'll be good, or at least not horrible and embarrassing.

In doing this you are being ungrateful and mean to them. They bring you to church to worship God and receive the Eucharist, not because bringing you gives them any great personal satisfaction. In fact, they would probably get more out of mass if they weren't fighting with you so much. But they bring you because they love you and believe that being here will help you to live better, happier, and holier lives in the long run. And, you know what, at this stage in your life, that is their responsibility. They know more than you do about this.

There will come a day when you children are mature enough to make your own decisions about worshipping God. But you need to see your parents' sacrifice of their own comfort and peace now to get you here to this church as what it truly is – a sign of their care and love for you. It's not easy bringing you all here to the Temple and presenting you to God. But they do it because they promised God they would do it when they had you baptized and consecrated you to Him in a church like this years ago -- and they are faithful people and parents, trusting

that God knows what will make His children happy. On this feast of the Holy Family let us all, as a parish, remember our responsibility, whether we have children of our own or not, to praise God for the children He gives us and to play our part in raising and supporting holy families.