

Holy Family, B

You and I are living in a forward looking time. Adventure and progress are the themes of the day.

Though we are sometimes frightened by this rapid change, we dare not set in total condemnation of it. A lot of things have needed to be changed for a long time. And where this is the case, the church should not only be glad for it, but leading in it. The church must be at the forefront of this movement. But in days such as these, we should also recognize that there is a danger of throwing overboard some valuable cargo that ought to be kept. So today, I want us to think for a moment about some traditions that are worth keeping.

Our gospel reading tells the story of that day when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple. That was a tradition among the Jews that went all the way back to the time of Moses. By no stretch of the imagination could Mary and Joseph be called conservative. They were totally involved in a brand new movement that was destined to shake the world. But there they were observing a ritual that had been observed across the centuries by untold generation of Jews. They obviously felt some traditions were worth keeping.

One was the tradition of the family. Mary and Joseph clearly regard themselves as a unit. They were involved in this thing together. Joseph might have sent Mary with the baby while he remained at home and

attended to business, but he did not. They were family. There were some things that required participation of every member; so they were all three there. Mary and Joseph, wrapping their mutual love around the baby Jesus, brought him to be presented to the Lord. That, I say to you, is a beautiful thing and a tradition worth the keeping.

Some today would throw it overboard. The family has been under constant attack today. Young people are living together without benefit of marriage. The purpose for such an arrangement, we are told, is to determine whether or not they are suited for each other before taking the step of matrimony. At the same time some married couples are deciding that fidelity is old tradition and needs to be cast away. They call themselves open-minded, progressive, modern thinkers.

One misconception about all of this is that there is really nothing new about it. Across the centuries man has experimented with every possible kind of sexual relationship. Nothing new can possibly be added. And out of this long history of experimentation has come the great tradition of the family. One man and one woman love each other for life and provide a permanent home for the rearing of children and the enjoyment of grandchildren. No one has ever yet improved on that arrangement. It is not easy; no one has ever suggested it would be. But it is good; it works; it is a tradition that ought to be kept.

Another is our moral tradition. And I am not speaking now of trivial rules and laws. Jesus, himself, paid little or no attention to these. Constantly, he was criticized as a breaker of the law; but they were talking about such things as silly rules concerning the Sabbath. Many of these he broke without a second thought, but great moral principles were another matter. Such things as courage, compassion, self-sacrifice, integrity, and respect for others were not expendable. These he stood for, lived by, and died with. They were engrained in him as part of a great moral tradition with its roots in the soil of the centuries.

When a man is possessed of high principles with deep roots, he does not have to decide every issue as he gets to it. Many of them are decided way in advance. Some things are beneath him; some things he simply cannot do because they are in violation of the moral tradition that is a part of his very being. That was what sustained Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. His response was spontaneous: "how can I do this thing, and sin against the Lord?" he was incredulous at the very thought. There was something within him too deep, too high, and too fine for him to stoop to that kind of behavior.

You and I need that kind of tradition to draw upon. It is risky business to fly through life making every decision on the impulse of the moment. I would not trust myself to do that; I know myself too well. I am grateful for some deep roots that enable me to decide some issues even before

they come up. We have at our disposal the benefits of a great moral tradition. I submit to you that it is worth keeping and building upon.

We come now to our last thought, and that is the tradition of a great faith. That kind of faith is clearly a part of the Holy Family. We see it also expressed by Simon as he held the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God for his saving grace. He was an old man with young heart that looked optimistically to the future. The prophetess, Anna, expressed the same confidence as she anticipated the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Much of the spirit of our age stands in sharp contrast to that. When conversation turns from the shallow to the serious, one often hears expression of cynicism, fatalism, and despair. Life came from nowhere, is going nowhere, and in the final analysis really means nothing at all.

It is easy to understand how one could think that way, if all of life is based upon this present scene. We are surrounded by events that argue eloquently concerning the futility of it all. It would be tragic to live by a philosophy that springs exclusively from what is happening now. What is needed is a great faith with deep roots in the past that hold a man steady in the present storm, and enable him to look with hope to a glad tomorrow. If you have that, hold on to it. If you do not, you should be determinedly building it. Such faith is a tradition worth keeping.

Let no one tell you that Christian tradition is dying out. Only the form will change. The real things, the great principles, the high ideals, the

deep faiths, as we see them expressed in the Holy Family will outwear and outlast everything. Hold on to these, carry them with you into 2018; they are worth to keeping. **Amen.**