

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

"Hannah, we'll be back to just our family tomorrow," the mother informed her precious six-year-old daughter. Both sets of grandparents had visited over the past week because baby brother Michael had just been born. "My dear," one of the grandmothers, informed me that Hannah responded with the question, "Does that mean that Michael will be leaving too?" "No," the mother replied, "Michael is part of our family." I love that story. It makes me laugh.

Families, adjusting families. My oldest son and his wife are expecting their third child. To get ready for this blessed event, they needed to do some bedroom rearranging. Their oldest, Beverley, was moved to the guest bedroom and Frances was moved to Bev's old room. All of this moving around was a big deal. They didn't want either of the girls to feel displaced by the soon-to-be new arrival. They chose a weekend for the change-around and sent the girls to their Tuscaloosa grandparents. Abracadabra! On returning home, the swaps had been made. Frances' baby bed was put up in the attic and wouldn't reappear until right before the baby comes. The plan is that it will have new bumper pads so Franny won't even realize it was her old bed.

Wrong! I won't tell her parents, for they'll discover it on their own soon enough. The fun is just beginning! Sibling

rivalry, the "mine" mentality, the clashing, the crashing, the bashing, the mashing, the rashing (what?) is about to really flourish at their house. Gosh, that was fun listing all those sibling probabilities. There is nothing like "family" to make life rich and wonderful and challenging. And raising children, that's a piece of cake. Right?

It's amazing that in mathematical addition, when dealing with numbers, $1+1=2$, $2+1=3$, $3+1=4$, etc. But when the "set" you are dealing with is not numbers, but rather children, the correlation is not the same. The results of an addition or two or three are not predictable.

I know this and it's not because I hold a BS degree in child development, which I do. In fact, that diploma in many ways was a hindrance instead of a help. A week after receiving it in 1970, I married my husband who was a widower with three children. They were age five, three, and one. I thought I knew everything on the subject of raising children. Doesn't everyone know everything at age twenty-two? Why, I was even on the Dean's List until I started dating my husband. I legally adopted all three and forged ahead to become "Super Mom." Hello?

Thank the dear Lord, I don't think there is such a creature, except our Lord Jesus' mother Mary. Oh, we can try - and I did and I failed miserably on some days and did OK on others. I jokingly say (though it really is the truth) that the children and I grew up together. The three of the four that are

now parents have already surpassed me in many of their parenting skills - and I'm still growing!

Family. One of God's most precious gifts. The immediate family - the extended family - the blended family - the universal family. It seems to me that the essence of a family unit - if you took just one and squeezed it down so that just the basics were left - is community. If you continued to reduce it until it could be reduced no further, all you would have left, the quintessential element, is love.

The Triune Family: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is community. There is Love. Look at the holy Family: Mary, Joseph, and the Babe. There is community. There is Love. There might not have always been total understanding of seeing the Big Picture by all. I thank the dear Lord for that. I thank the dear Lord that Jesus was raised in a human family, even if a holy one. That gives me great hope and joy.

But what about the sick family, the broken family, the abusive family, the one in which there is no community and there is no love? Oh, heaven forbid. Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, forbid. It must grieve Your heart profoundly when... I will stop there with that sentence for there is no judgment. There can be no judgment. All of us, every single one of us.. Oh here I go again, judging. Lord Jesus Christ, forgive. I know that I daily grieve Your heart by some, rather many, of my actions, especially the ones which do not promote, cultivate, celebrate Your community and Your love.

I read The Gift of Peace by Cardinal Bernardin. I wish I could just stop and copy page after page for you. Instead, I'll highly recommend it. It deals with the challenging last three years of his life, but even more importantly, it's his life's testimony of his walk with the Lord. He died a holy death from cancer thirteen days after the book's completion. The book was a blessing to me. Whenever a Christian pilgrim is willing to share his or her story, it is a blessing. Such books strengthen the community of love, Christ's family, our family.

In this letter I left you hanging when we got to the part about what we are to do, as Christians, about wounded, broken families. First, I needed to repent and say, "Forgive me when I am at sinful fault." Then, I think Cardinal Bernardin had a lot of good advice and some that pertains to this subject. He said that he made a conscious effort to try to love each person he meets and try to be totally present to that individual at the moment. I've read that before. I've seen that truth in action. It's about letting God's love flow through us. We, in our sinfulness, can't love all, can't be in community with all - but Jesus can, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us can. I've seen a few saints in action. When a saint talks, the Jesus in them shines so strongly through them that you feel like your heart is being directly touched by His heart. Love. That is the only element that heals - heals individuals, heals families, heals friends, heals communities, heals the world, and heals the universe. We can pray to be emptied of ourselves and be filled

with the love of Jesus and then, only then, go forth. That's saint-walking, faithful saint-walking. I'm not there yet. I might not ever be - but boy, do I yearn. Do you also yearn?

I'd like to end your letter with Paul's prayer for the Ephesians and for us, which deals with our today's subject, family, community building and love. That's Ephesians 3:14-21.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Family, community building, love. Help us, Lord Jesus.

I am,

because of His cross,

your loving family member,

Lucy

