

Introduction to the Icon of the Holy Family

Pope Francis encourages families to look at or 'gaze' at the icon of the Holy Family. Why? The word 'icon' means an image. But it is more than a picture or photograph. When we read the bible with reverence we are not just reading words, we are already praying. It is the same with an icon. When we look on it with reverence - when we 'gaze' on it - we are praying. God is speaking to us through the images and we are responding.

If you would like your family to spend a little time with the icon here are three simple steps.

- 1. When you get home from Christmas Mass or at another moment that suits gather the family for a few minutes.**
- 2. Pass around the icon that you received at the Christmas Mass and offer the explanation (below).**
- 3. After you have finished this ask one family member to read the family prayer with the icon.**

Explanation of the Holy Family Icon

The angels on the outside - This icon of the Holy Family is shaped a bit like a house with a double door. On the outside of each door there is an angel. Michael on the left, Gabriel on the right. We remember the prayer from our childhood. 'O angel of God, my guardian dear.' Angels represent God's desire to protect us, our home and our family. When we pray to the angels we pray for God's protection. The words at the bottom of the door mean 'The Joy of Love' - the message to us from Pope Francis about family.

The Holy Family at the centre - When we open up the doors we see in the centre the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph gathered around the table. They are sharing a meal and celebrating the Passover, a Jewish religious festival remembering God's goodness. Like all families they had experiences of joys and sorrows. They were once refugees in another country, fleeing the violence of King Herod. This image of the Holy Family is very similar in form to another icon - one of the Blessed Trinity. This reminds us that God is like a family, and that family is the place where the love of God is experienced through the love we have for one another.

Family stories from the gospels at either side - On either side of the Holy Family there are images from the Gospels, showing Jesus' care for marriage and his deep compassion for those living with the burdens of family life. The image on the left depicts a story from the gospel of St Mark. Jesus brings back to life the daughter of a man called Jarius. The image on the right is from the wedding feast at Cana, a story from St. John's gospel. Here Jesus reaches out to the newly married couple in a moment of need.

For more detailed information on the icon go into the Amoris.ie site and follow the links to the icon through the Popular Moments.

Prayer of the Faithful for Christmas Masses

Lord, we pray for every family in our parish in all our diversity, our strengths and our weaknesses. We pray a safe journey for all coming to Ireland in August for the World Meeting of Families. Lord hear us...