

The Icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth

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is prayerfully entrusted to the Holy Family of Nazareth

Did you ever have the experience of wanting to create and share something – to draw a little closer visually to a deeper spiritual sense? Following prayer, reflection, having journeyed with families and those who support in particular ways marriage and family life I came across an Italian iconographer, Fabrizio Diomedi of the Philokalia Laboratory. The possibility of creating an Icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth emerged. Fabrizio Diomedi wrote the Icon following conversations, his very patient listening and special interpretation.

At its core and centre is the Holy Family of Nazareth, the family at the family table including a symbol of Marriage – on the table cloth, the cross and unitive rings of Marriage as a total communion of love and of life of the spouses with God within the cross, the carpenter's workshop and the open door of faith and the adult Jesus who is the door of faith – always an ever open door bringing the Good News of the gospel of love, truth, mercy and tenderness to real people. We are the open door of faith for those we meet on the journey as we live our faith. The link with the waters of baptism is made and with the cross of suffering and resurrection. The people symbolise all people – every human person is my neighbour and the respect, love and mercy we are called to show every person.

The Icon in its interpretation reflects the relationship between the Holy Family of Nazareth and the Trinity with a focus on family issues in the world today. It has been said that the Holy Family is the most perfect image of the Trinity on earth. The image of the Holy Family reflects

the action of God and the openness to the world, humanity and history.

Red, being the colour of blood has become the colour of humanity. In the early centuries red was considered the colour of God, the divine, as the blood, according to biblical tradition, is the place of life and life belongs to God, and God alone is the Lord of life. Mary has a mantle of red to indicate her divine motherhood, her tunic is blue indicating her humanity. In Jesus we see the two colours exactly opposite the red tunic to indicate that He is God and the blue mantle to indicate that he has assumed human nature. Joseph, according to the tradition, brings the yellow robe as a man of holiness and justice and is covered by a green cloak which is a symbol of creation. The Holy Family turn towards us in love.

Joseph stands next to the Virgin Mother as the Blessed spouse of Mary and protector of his family with an eye to the sky, from there appears a hand from the Father's hand: a hand fully open, not in a fist or closed in on itself, not retaining anything but allowing God's gifts on humanity. From this hand comes his life, the Holy Spirit, the gift of God par excellence, tongues of fire which descended on Mary. Joseph is the man who has accomplished all that God asks and holding a branch, symbolising the root of Jesse, waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of God. Joseph contemplates the origin, the source of every family which is the Father who is in heaven. The attitude of Joseph is very different from that of Mary the mother of Jesus and that is fundamentally important in the iconography of the Holy Family. Jesus through the hands of Mary descends into the world as a

ladder between earth and heaven. Therefore the child with his left hand tenderly opens the protective mantle of Mary and enters the world. He is the Word of God who in his right hand at all times holds the scroll (the Logos, the Word) to indicate the unity of the Word and of the body, the humanity of Christ. At the same time alluding to its mission to fulfill the will of God, as it is written in the same scroll.

In his weekly general audience, on 2 April Pope Francis reflected on the sacrament of matrimony and the vocation of marriage, noting that the marital couple is a unique example of divine love in the world.

'Married couples carry out this vocation in a full and definitive communion of life. As "one flesh," they become living icons of God's love in our world, building up the Church in unity and fidelity'. Marriage is a sacrament, he observed, 'which brings us to the very heart of God's loving plan for the human family' and 'introduces us to the design of God, who created man in his image, capable of loving.' 'The Triune God created us – men and women – in his image and calls us to mirror the mystery of his love,' the Pope continued, adding that 'married couples carry out this vocation in a full and definitive communion of life.' Highlighting how the vocation builds the Church in 'unity and fidelity,' he explained that 'Christian marriage also reflects the mystery of Christ's own faithful and sacrificial love for his body, the Church.' 'Christian spouses thus receive a special consecration and a special mission: to manifest in simple and daily things the love of Christ for his Church, giving themselves in fidelity and



service.' Noting that marriage is 'a noble vocation,' Pope Francis also emphasised that it 'is not an easy one' and that 'it must constantly be strengthened by a living relationship with the Lord through prayer'. These prayers include 'mornings and evenings, at meals, in the recitation of the Rosary and, above all, through the Sunday Eucharist.' Concluding his address, the Holy Father asked those present to pray with him 'for all families, especially those experiencing difficulties, so that by God's mercy they can always be joyful models of faith, love and generous service in our communities.'

The Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 'Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation', 5 to 19 October 2014 is prayerfully entrusted to the Holy Family of Nazareth in the words of Pope Francis,

Prayer to the Holy Family
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendour of true love,
to you we turn with trust.
Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and
prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic Churches.
Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again
experience violence, rejection and
division:
may all who have been hurt or
scandalised
find ready comfort and healing.
Holy Family of Nazareth,
may the approaching Synod of
Bishops
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of
the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer!
Amen.

Earlier in February of this year, Pope Francis wrote to the world's families asking for prayers for the upcoming Synod, asking families to get involved. He said this time was dedicated to them, and to analyse their role in the mission of the Church. Pope Francis wrote that it's necessary that the 'people of God' support it with prayers, so that 'through these events the Church will undertake a true journey of discernment, and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel.' He also recalled that the next World Meeting of Families will take place in Philadelphia in 2015 and said it would be a good moment to reflect and pray for the conclusions to the Synod on the Family.