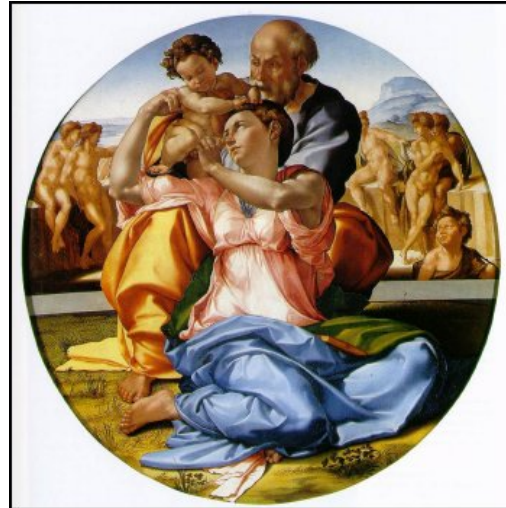


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## The Holy Family, 2008 (First Sunday after the Epiphany)

*“Show unto us, O Lord, the Light of Thy mercies.”*  
(Ecclesiasticus 36.1<sup>1</sup>)

Once again we have the theme of the Light of Christ; which was the bond of unity and love in the Holy Family—a family given to us by a loving God as an example of that true peace which God desired should exist in every family on this earth.



*“When the God of Mercy determined to bring about the long awaited work of mankind’s renewal, He so arranged the basis and order of this work, that its early beginnings should display to the world the wonderful image of a divinely constituted Family. All men could then look upon this Family as the definitive model of domestic society, holiness and virtue.... We can be sure that exemplified in the highest degree those praiseworthy qualities of ordinary home life which spring from the mutual exercise charity, from holiness of character and from the expression of filial devotion. For the Holy Family was to be a pattern of virtue for others.”<sup>2</sup>*

Thus, this light of God’s mercies can and should dwell in every soul through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the hymn at Morning Prayer, on this feast, we sing: “The love of Mary for Joseph and that of Joseph for Mary unite in their love for Jesus, and He rewards them both for their love of each other. May it happen to us in like fashion that love be the unbroken bond of our life, promote family peace and bring comfort in our sorrows.” And we cannot ignore the versicle taken from sacred scripture – “All your sons shall be taught by the Lord. And great shall be the peace of your children” – followed by the Antiphon “Enlighten us, Lord, by the example of Thy Family, and guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Peace was the theme of Pope Benedict’s homily at New Year on the Feast of Mary Mother of God. He warned of the danger to peace resulting from the concerted attack on the Christian family which is spreading like a plague in almost every country in the world; not least here in Ireland. The Pope said: “Anything that threatens the traditional family threatens peace, because the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace.... The first form of communion between persons is that born of the

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<sup>1</sup> 4th Antiphon at Lauds for Saturday

<sup>2</sup> Leo XIII

love of a man and a woman who decide to enter a stable union in order to build together a new family.” And he warned that anyone who weakens the institution of the family weakens “what is in effect the primary agency of peace” in society. “Every thing that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life; everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an obstacle on the road to peace.” His Holiness also talked about the effects of violence and exploitation on the “peoples of the earth” and he explained that the theme he chose for the message, the fact that a strong healthy family is the basis of a healthy society, was not simply a slogan. “In a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace, justice and love between brothers and sisters—the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them.”

In Madrid an estimated gathering of two million at a rally in defence of the traditional family were addressed by Pope Benedict by video link. He described the event as a “very important initiative” and reminded the nation that “the happiness of the individual and of society [was] strictly connected with the health of the family.” He described marriage as an “indissoluble of man and woman” and “a privileged place where human life is welcomed and protected from the very beginning to its natural end.” At the same rally, Cardinal Rouco of Madrid declared that “the origin and end of marriage, its basic elements and its principles are determined by God and natural law,” and that they could not be manipulated by groups within society, or by the civil authorities.

In the Mass for Our Lady’s Saturday, at the offertory, we prayed: “For thou art happy, O Holy Virgin Mary, and most worthy of all praise, because from thee arose the sun of justice, Christ our Lord.” Mary desires whatever is the will of her divine Son: namely that amongst God’s family in the Church there should be that total unity that St Paul speaks of in his Epistle to the young church of Corinth. “Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ that you all say the same thing—and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be perfectly united in one mind and in one judgement.” It is only if we enjoy that perfect unity that our prayers can be effective. Let us beg our Blessed Mother to obtain for us that grace, so that we pray as one body in Christ—for that is the way to real Christian progress.