



Celebrating the International Day of Families May 15th 2004

Fifth Saturday after Easter: Acts. 16: 1-10, John 15: 18-21

The church is moving close to the great feast of Pentecost. On that feast we remember one of the very dramatic times when the Holy Spirit entered into the disciples of Jesus and caused them to become more courageous and expressive of their faith. Families are also small Christian communities where God's Spirit is also present, but perhaps in less dramatic fashion.

Families today come in a variety of shapes. In today's reading from Acts we learn that Timothy, one of the first great missionaries of the church, was the son of a Jewish/Christian mother and a Greek father. He might have lived in what we call today an inter-religious or interfaith family.

The Spirit of God enters all families where there is genuine love and mutual service going on. God is more interested in what's happening between the family members than in any idealised form or shape of the family. The reading from John's gospel notes that we are not to be of this world. When John speaks of the *world*, he is not thinking of our life here on earth - for here we are loved and blessed by God - but rather the powers that are against what Jesus came to proclaim. In that sense, the world stands for forces of indifference, hostility, abuse and evil, that undermine the great dream God had for each of us when we were created. Christian families can be described as living in the world, but not in that part of the world that John saw as lacking in care, compassion and love.

The family can be a primary place where we learn about ourselves, our value, our importance and our goodness. The spiritual life of the family is often messy, disorganized and noisy. The hectic way families deal with daily life can give the impression that the Spirit of God is missing, but to think so would be a big mistake. Go back to that first Pentecost. Can you imagine the chaos and confusion that followed the Spirit's arrival as fire above their heads? They were probably running about, scared to death about what was happening. Where there is genuine life, there's often excitement, lots of noise and general pandemonium. Be assured that God's Spirit welcomes the exuberance of ordinary families. As one family meal prayer has it, "Bless our mess." Yes, bless all families.