

## From Image to Likeness

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14  
Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5  
Colossians 3:12-17  
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Families—sometimes they're the greatest blessing, other times, they're the greatest pain! God could have created us to be self-sufficient and self-propagating, but He didn't. Instead, He chose for us to be a part of a family. In this way, He created us in His *image*—which is a community, three Persons. In the community of our families we are part of an intricate network of relationships that makes each one of us dependent on others, and others dependent on us. The real struggle of family life is to not only be the image of God, but to be His *likeness*, as well.<sup>1</sup>

By creating us in his image, God has made us like a coloring book—the outline of what we are meant to be is provided, as are the crayons, but it's up to each of us to color it in a way that reveals the “likeness” of God, which is love. How do we do that? How do we make our family life, not only an image of God as community, but a likeness of God in love? I want to recommend three “crayons” that can help.

The first “crayon” is **respect for individual roles**, which is mentioned in our first reading and second reading today. This is a very difficult thing to do! It means that parents cannot act like children, nor children like adults. It means that parents have to be mature enough to be guardians to their children, more so than friends. It means that parents must not abuse their authority or neglect to love one another or their children. It means that parents must choose to be the first educators of their children in the ways of faith and model Christian virtue for their children. It also means that children must be obedient and respectful of their parents, as well as not pick on their siblings, saying hurtful things or injuring one another. When each family member accepts his or her role in the family and respects the roles of the other members then God's loving likeness is reflected in the family.

The second “crayon” is **forgiveness**. In our second reading today, Saint Paul wrote that we are to bear with one another and forgive one another. Family life gives us many, many opportunities to practice this virtue. If our families are to reflect the likeness of God's love, and if forgiveness is one of the greatest expressions of love, then our families must be havens of forgiveness. We must be willing to *ask* for forgiveness, as well as offer forgiveness.

The last “crayon” that helps us to color our family's image of God is **hope**. Every family will experience trouble. Even the Holy Family experienced trouble, as we heard in the Gospel reading today. How our families react to difficulties and troubles says a lot about our “likeness.” We must be families full of hope! Hope helps to remind us that every hardship is an opportunity to grow closer to one another and closer to God. The Gospel of Matthew points this out when it tells us that the Holy Family's difficult flight into Egypt wasn't some arbitrary suffering they had to endure, but rather, it was actually part of God's plan of salvation! The gift of hope can help our families to focus less on our difficulties and struggles and more on God's loving plan of salvation.

Family life is rarely easy, but it can be beautiful. When we choose to use the “crayons” of respect, forgiveness, and hope to color our family life, then we reflect to the world, not only image of God, but the likeness of God, too!

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:**

✚ Name some more of the “crayons” that help your family to reflect the likeness of God's love.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”