

If you were to look at any liturgical calendar, you would notice that today is really the feast of the Holy Family. Normally this feast day is celebrated the first Sunday after Christmas. So, if you were to go to Mass today at Holy Trinity, All Saints, Precious Blood, or most other parishes, that feast would be observed. However, today is December 27th, which is also the feast day of St. John, apostle and evangelist. Since St. John is our patron, his feast day takes precedence over all else. So in any parish named after St. John, the feast of this apostle and evangelist is observed. So instead of speaking about the Holy Family today, I will gear my remarks toward this Son of Zebedee, who is really very close to the Holy Family. After all, we know that St. John took special care of the Blessed Virgin after Jesus' death on the cross. We also know that St. John was the beloved disciple described in the gospel that bears his name. Well, scripture scholars like to dispute that but since the Fathers of the Church had no trouble believing it then neither do I. They lived in the first centuries of the Church, they were much closer in time to Jesus than I am so I'll take their word for it. Yet we are extremely lucky to belong to a parish named after this great apostle. His place in the early Church was extremely significant, and since he was so loved by Christ, we can be sure that his intercession is equally powerful. But on the feast of our patron, it's important to remind ourselves about this remarkable saint and the role he played. John is the brother of St. James, also an apostle. He is a son of Zebedee. Recent scholarship suggests that Zebedee was himself a Jewish priest, a part of the priestly aristocracy of Jerusalem. During the time of Christ, being a Jewish priest was like a part time job. Each priest would perform their services about two times year, with each tour of duty only lasting about a week. So it is plausible that this man Zebedee had a fishing business in Galilee in order to make ends meet. He had many day-laborers, which explains why his sons, James and John could leave and follow Jesus. Zebedee also probably owned a second residence, a small apartment or living unit in Jerusalem. It is here, in the upper room, where the last Supper took place. According to Jewish custom, the host would sit to the right of the guest, and lean his head on the latter's chest. If the host was unavailable, the firstborn son – which in this case is John – would be the proxy. Certainly this all fits together. We know that St. John and his brother were called by the Lord in Galilee while working with the boats and fishing nets. Among the Twelve, St. John was part of a small group Jesus invited for the great miracles and events of his life – the raising of Jairus' daughter, the Transfiguration, and the Garden of Gethsemane, among others. When we see the important position St. John had among the Twelve we can understand why his mother would ask that her two boys might sit to the right and left of Jesus in His kingdom. And we know that Jesus responded by asking if they could endure the same trial and martyrdom he was about to undergo. St. John must have fully understood the price of discipleship as he witnessed Jesus' trial and crucifixion. If St. John's father was part of the priestly aristocracy, it certainly explains how our saint was able to witness firsthand the trial and then be at the foot of the cross with Mary and the other women. Finally, St. John was also an evangelist, the original author of the fourth gospel.

In preparing for this homily, I was looking at different materials about St. John. Most of the literature I read had to do with arguments about the authenticity of the fourth gospel and doesn't really apply to a homily one would give in a parish. There was something, however, which Pope Benedict alluded to. He wrote, "The Lord wishes to make each one of us a disciple who lives in personal friendship with him. To achieve

this, it is not enough to follow him and to listen to him outwardly: it is also necessary to live with him and like him. This is only possible in the context of a relationship of deep familiarity, imbued with the warmth of total trust. This is what happens between friends...” We are indeed called to this same friendship of warmth and love that defined the relationship between Jesus and St. John. It is not enough for us to simply do something because it is obligated – that is the Old Testament, that is simply the law without the aid of supernatural grace. We are called to much more, to indeed develop a relationship of love and friendship with Our Lord. This can only happen in the context of deep prayer and a frequent reception of the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist. Prayer and the sacraments – by these two means we are enabled to not only do what is asked of us, but to actually want to do what is asked of us. This same deep familiarity imbued St. John, it enabled him to recognize Jesus after the Resurrection, to point Him out to St. Peter after the miraculous catch of fish. In this Christmas season we highlight the fact that God became man. He wanted to make himself more accessible, to make it easier for us to develop that friendship with Him. Yet for many of us, he seems hidden, distant. But the Lord has come to us, he continues to come to us. He has taken the initiative and shown us just how much he loves us by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. We like St. John are called to respond to this divine initiative, to point out the risen Lord and develop a deep friendship with Him. We are called to recognize Jesus’ sacramental presence in this Church, in the tabernacle as the Eucharist. Then through our repentance and subsequent forgiveness which Our Lord longs to give in confession, through a deep conversion of heart Our Lord comes to dwell within us. We carry Him with us, we bring Him to others, we recognize Him in others. In this way we build up a community of believers, an assembly or local Church which is worthy to be called after the name of the Beloved Disciple. St. John the Evangelist...pray for us.