Today we continue our Christmas contemplation beholding the Holy Family, now twelve years removed from the scene in Bethlehem. We continue in the spirit of Christmas, which is to pause and wonder before the mystery of the birth of Our Lord. When we see the Nativity story for what it truly is, we experience the same wonder that overcame: The shepherds, who, full of wonder, raced to the stable after seeing visions of angels; The Magi, who wondered at the meaning of the star,

journeying far from home to greet the newborn King and the elders of the temple, who are mystified by the boy Jesus in the temple. With Luke’s guidance, we are brought to the Temple at a point in time when the Lord Jesus was twelve years of age. In this episode, Mary and Joseph “lose Jesus” for a time. Have you ever felt like you lost Jesus?

As the story of Jesus’ disappearance is narrated, we see in Luke’s Gospel how Mary and Joseph suffer a dark experience for three days, much like the three days of Jesus in the tomb that Mary will later undergo. Mary and Joseph are undoubtedly the two persons on earth who loved Jesus the most. They knew Jesus from infancy, knew his preferences in food and music, they knew his first words and his favorite toys — they knew everything about him from a parental perspective, and yet even they experienced losing Jesus for a time. For a Christian, it is necessary to accept that there will be periods in our lives when we may feel like we have “lost Jesus.” In those moments, we should echo the psalmist today who says: “My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord” (Psalm 84:3).

What makes us lose Jesus? Sometimes it is of our own doing. Our personal sin is a moment of “losing Jesus”, our sins of omission, our laziness and spiritual sloth, and many other causes. Sometimes it is life — when life comes at us and everything is upended, we lose our focus as can happen when our (or a spouses) health deteriorates, when a souse or loved one dies, financial difficulties may arise.

The world around us may seem to fall apart. Sometimes it is God’s doing — He may want to stretch our faith, He may purify us with grace, He may be challenging us to climb higher up the spiritual mountain, He may want to pull us out of an “unhealthy comfortableness”.

In this case with Mary and Joseph, this is God’s doing. Mary and Joseph have not sinned; they have simply not captured fully in their mind and heart the fullness of who Jesus is. And if we are honest, neither have we! They lose Jesus, and then they must find him, so they search for him. So too, today, we are tasked with renewing our search for Jesus. This is to seek out God and his will and Kingdom in our personal lives. Saints are those who have never given up the search for Our Lord.

Like them, let us in faith seek out what our Lord is calling us to do today.

The celebration of the Holy Family during the Christmas octave places before all Christians a model of family holiness. For that is what we are celebrating after all: the family — in the Holy Family we have the model and foundation of all families.

Despite the festive and nostalgic thoughts that are brought each year by the arrival of Christmas, let us not forget that this family struggled to survive against the Roman authorities (who forced them into an untimely journey for the census or tax enrollment) and the puppet kingdom of Herod (who forced them into a very untimely exile to Egypt). Biblically, God’s family is attacked from beginning to end. The villain is always some form of the antichrist:

Satan enters the garden intent on destroying Adam and Eve, the first family. The division caused in their marriage by sin is passed on to their children, where Cain is not only tempted to, but does kill his brother, causing the “primal eldest curse” to fall upon humanity. The story of Noah is also a story of how a family is lost in a world of sin and how God intervenes again to save the family through the ark. The Chosen people are then enslaved by Pharaoh, and their male children are threatened with death and destruction. God intervenes again, through the water of the Red Sea, to bring his people to a promised land where, as the family of God, they could thrive. The royal family of David is beset by sin and violence. Only two kings after David — Hezekiah and Josiah — are truly good. All the other kings lead the people into idolatry and sin.

The families of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be sent into exile. Throughout the centuries, these families of the people of God, are tempted to abandon their faith and adopt pagan ways. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, all want to pull apart the family of God.

King Herod destroys many families by his diabolic act of massacring the boys of Bethlehem. With God’s assistance, the Holy Family escapes under cover of darkness to the land of Egypt.

All of these attacks on the family have only continued down to today. The powers of darkness are a plague upon the world with: abortion mills, euthanasia centers, transgender advocacy, policies which promote the breakdown of the family and policy attempts to steal away the rights of parents over their children. All these attacks on the family reveal the ugly face of Satan. We have been reading this season from the first letter of John. He employs an enigmatic phrase: “many antichrists have come” (1 Jn 2:18). Who are these antichrists and how many will make their appearance? A tell-tale sign of the demonic is always an attack on the nuclear family. The devil cannot stand any reminder of the Holy Trinity and wishes to destroy all vestiges of God’s love. The family will always be under attack until the end of time. We must not fear, because in the end, God will be triumphant. We must persevere until the end, making our way like the Holy Family through the difficulties of this world.

Many Christians might be unaware of the centrality of the nuclear family in the thought and teachings of the Catholic Church. For example, the family is an icon of the Holy Trinity. Pope Benedict XVI said that: “The human family, in a certain sense, is an icon of the Trinity because of its interpersonal love and the fruitfulness of this love.” (Angelus, December  27, 2009). Also, the family is the building block of society, called by the Catechism the “original cell of social life” (*CCC*, 2207). A conclusion can be made that what the Church teaches is that we should all do what we can to nourish and protect our own families, and to help create a society that also nourishes and protects the family. In reality, the family pre-exists any form of government, it is more natural than any civil society, and as a structure, it is a higher value to the world than any earthly kingdom.

World governments do well to make helping the nuclear family the highest value in their systems. One of the central divides between political philosophies is always the tension between collectivism and individualism (or between socialist-leaning theories or capitalist-leaning theories). This dichotomy is surmounted by focusing on the family. In helping and serving the family, a government supports both the collective and the individual. Yet world governments and powers, to their own detriment, so often tend to attack the family. Anywhere there is an attack on the family, we see the face of the antichrist.

May we truly examine how we think about families, especially those blessed with several children, and how those thoughts came about. May we truly examine the television shows, movies, and other forms of entertainment to which we subject ourselves, and check the values and messages these present, and ask “Is this of God?” If it is not, do we really need it? And how does this help my relationship with God?