

**Saintly Families: Examples for Parents and Kids Today**  
**ReCatechism 6**  
**Maria-Fotini Kapsalis**

This evening's talk is entitled, "Saintly Families". I had suggested this topic to the Re-catechism team because the saints of the church provide us with living examples of Christian behaviour that also extends to the family. So I will lead you on a journey to encounter a few saintly families, to get to know them, and then to examine the lessons that they provide us.

The first holy family that we will encounter this evening is that of Saints Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Theotokos, and only grandparents of our Lord Jesus.

### **Saints Joachim and Anna<sup>1</sup>**

St. Joachim is said to have been of the tribe of Judah, and a descendant of King David. St. Anna was of the tribe of Levi, and the youngest daughter of Matthan the priest. Matthan had three daughters: Mary, Zoia, and Anna. The eldest, Mary, was married in Bethlehem and bore a daughter named Salome; Zoia was also married in Bethlehem and also bore a daughter named Elizabeth, who became the mother of St. John the Forerunner; and Anna was married in Nazareth to Joachim, and in old age gave birth to Maria, the Theotokos.

Sts. Joachim and Anna had been married for fifty years, and were childless. They lived devoutly and quietly, dividing their income in three and giving a third to the Temple, a third to the poor and keeping a third for their own needs. Joachim had done this since he was 15-years-old, and God multiplied his flocks, so the couple was well provided for.

We see before us a couple that truly followed the greatest commandments of God as told to us by Christ: to love our God most, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We are all known by our actions. Joachim and Anna through their actions of dividing their wealth reveal to us the depth of their devotion to God and to his commandments and their love to their fellow man. And it is said that God multiplied their flocks, because of their love and devotion. If we were to measure ourselves according to this standard, where would we measure? What are our actions? Do we truly show our God that he is first in our lives? And do we truly show our neighbours and the poor that we love them as much as ourselves? God truly blesses those who bless him.

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<sup>1</sup> Information taken from [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joachim\\_and\\_Anna](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Joachim_and_Anna)

But Joachim and Anna, though they loved God and neighbour, and had been blessed by earthly riches, had not been blessed with a child and remained childless into their old age. One day when they were in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to God, the High Priest, Issachar, upbraided poor Joachim, "You are not worthy to offer sacrifice with those childless hands." Others who had children upon hearing this jostled Joachim, and shoved him back as unworthy. In despair, he consulted the genealogical records of the tribes of Israel and discovered every righteous man in the nation indeed had been blessed with children, everyone except him.

This caused the aged saint great grief, and he and his wife left with heavy hearts. Why had God held back this blessing? What had they done to displease him? The husband and wife then gave themselves to prayer to God that He would work in them the wonder that He had worked in Abraham and Sarah, and give them a child to comfort their old age.

St. Joachim with his flocks went to a high mountain, refusing to return home in shame. Meanwhile, St. Anna prayed in her garden. God sent the Archangel Gabriel to each of them, who gave them tidings of the birth of "a daughter most blessed, by whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed, and through whom will come the salvation of the world." Each promised to have the child raised in the Temple as a holy vessel of God. The archangel told St. Joachim to return home, where he would find his wife waiting for him in the city gate. The archangel also told St. Anna to wait for her husband at the gate. When the couple saw one another, they embraced, and this image is the traditional icon of their feast.

St. Anna conceived shortly thereafter, and in her ninth month gave birth to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Church celebrates the Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God on December 9 and the Nativity of the Theotokos is celebrated on September 8.

As we encounter the saints Joachim and Anna, we see before us a husband and wife totally devoted to God; a husband and wife who form the nucleus of the family unit. And so as we encounter them, we are able to examine what it means to be a saintly couple.

The first thing that we encounter is their example of single-mindedness. Sts. Joachim and Anna were united on many levels, in their faith, in their pain and in their prayer. They shared the same depth of faith, and put their trust in God wholeheartedly, knowing that if he could make a miracle happen to the barren Abraham and Sarah that he could also make the same miracle happen to them. They shared the same desire to be righteous before God. They did not seek fame, or wealth, or power and influence, but rather desired to be close to God. Being

loved by God was the most important thing in their lives. The fact that all the righteous people were parents troubled them immensely as they felt that things were not well with them and God, that maybe they had done something to displease the Lord, and that is why they were barren. In the Jewish culture of that time (and even today as Jews are still waiting for the Messiah not having accepted Christ), having children meant that you could be chosen to be a forefather or foremother of the expected and long awaited Messiah. Having no children, then meant that you were never to have the chance to participate in this way in God's saving economy. Joachim and Anna shared the same pain, which was not caused by illness, or want of anything, but rather was a pain in their heart that God might be displeased with them, and removed from them the possibility of participating in the coming of the Christ. Why else would the giver of life, not grant them a child. Thus, they shared the same prayer, falling on their knees and asking God for forgiveness and to bless them with a child. And not only did he bless them with a child, but He blessed them with the child who was destined to be the mother of the Messiah, so they were very blessed indeed, and very pleasing to God as they did become the forefather and foremother of the anointed one. For Christians today, children are still seen as a blessing, but the inability to bear a child is not seen as shame. We **all** participate in the economy of Christ through baptism, and this is why marriage with or without children, the single state and monasticism though different roads all lead to our heavenly Father.

We today, especially married couples look towards Sts. Joachim and Anna and learn from their example of single-mindedness. We must also strive to be single-minded. We must strive to have the same depth of faith, share each other's pain as one pain, and pray together the same prayers. We must have the same vision, and goals in life, and I am not talking about which new car to buy, or what furniture to purchase for the family room. I am talking about the kingdom of heaven. Day to day purchases are not goals. Goals are where we see ourselves in 10, 20, 50 years down the road. Not what jobs we are going to have, but what kind of people we are going to become, because one day we will all come to that bend in the road. And at that bend we will encounter our departure from this life. Where do we see ourselves then? The one sure thing that we must always have in the forefront of our marriage is our common goal to help each other achieve salvation, to help each other face the day when we will encounter our Creator. That is the true purpose of marriage, our salvation. And that is the example set before us by the maternal grandparents of Jesus Christ.

As they promised, Sts. Joachim and Anna took their daughter Mary, at the age of three, to the temple to be dedicated to the service of the Lord, and presented her to the priest Zechariahs. The parents then, after offering up her sacrifice (according to the custom of the time), left the Virgin with other maidens in the apartments of the temple to be brought up therein. The Church commemorates the Presentation of the Theotokos on November 21st.

After the righteous Anna and Joachim (Righteous in the eyes of the world as they now have a child) dedicated their daughter to God, they visited Mary often at the temple. The holy Joachim reposed at 80 years of age, several years after the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple. St Anna, having been left a widow, moved from Nazareth to Jerusalem, and lived near the Temple. She died three years after her husband, leaving the Theotokos an orphan at age ten.

The second thing that we encounter when we read or hear about Sts. Joachim and Anna is how we are to view our children. In the Old Testament, people viewed children as the means that linked them in a time line, from Adam and Eve to the coming of the Messiah. After the birth of Jesus, Christians no longer view themselves as participating in this particular genealogy, however, the notion of being blessed by God is still very much there. For saintly families, children are seen as a blessing, as a gift of life. Children are gifts from God that are entrusted to us, to raise-up in the love of God, to raise-up to have faith in God, to live for God, and to inevitably one day be returned to God. They are not ours, though they come from our DNA, genes, and co-mingling. Righteous children are seen as being created by our working together with God in synergy. Sts. Joachim and Anna knew that their baby girl belonged to God. The archangel told them, that she was destined for the Lord, and was therefore to be raised in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. They obeyed, realizing that their daughter was not their own.

### **St. Sophia and Her Three Daughters<sup>2</sup>**

We, today, need to also realize that our children are not our own, which is why on their 40<sup>th</sup> day, we bring them to Church and dedicated them to God. Our little ones are entrusted to us. They are on loan, if you will, from our heavenly Father. And it is our responsibility, not only to feed, clothe and shelter them, raise them and love them, but to more importantly to teach

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<sup>2</sup> Information taken from <http://www.antiochian.org/node/16753>

them about their real Father in heaven, and instill in them a desire to be with their Father in Heaven. Examples of this can be found among all the saintly families. However, encountering one family in particular makes the greatest impact, because the children here are not teens or young adults, but truly children who martyred for their faith.

When we encounter St. Sophia and her three daughters, Faith (Pisti), Hope (Elpida) and Charity (Agapi), the theme of living for Christ alone, the belonging to God alone becomes almost mind boggling to our 21<sup>st</sup> Century thinking, because when faced with the choice of God or nothing? What will *our* children choose? What will *we as parents* choose? I have no doubt that we will give the lip service, but I wonder if we will put our money, no our very lives, where our mouth is. For St Sophia's young children, their lip service led them straight to Christ.

Saint Sophia and her daughters were born in Italy at the beginning of the second century. Sophia a pious Christian widow had named her three daughters for the three Christian virtues. At the time of their martyrdom, the oldest, Faith was twelve, Hope was ten, and the youngest, Charity was nine. St. Sophia raised them in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they did not hide their faith, but rather openly confessed it before everyone.

An official named Antiochus denounced them to Emperor Hadrian (Roman Emperor from 117 to 138) who ordered that they be brought to Rome. The holy family prayed fervently to the Lord asking that He give them the strength not to fear torture and death. As they knew this is what was to be expected now that they were denounced. When they appeared before the emperor, all those present were amazed at the composure of these children and their mother. They looked as though they had been brought to some happy festival, rather than to torture. Summoning each of the sisters in turn, Hadrian urged them to offer sacrifice to the goddess Artemis, but the girls remained unyielding.

The emperor then ordered the children to be tortured. They were burned over an iron grating, thrown into a red-hot oven, and finally into a cauldron with boiling tar, but the Lord preserved them and even after such brutal tortures they survived. The youngest child, Charity (Agape), was also tied to a wheel and beaten with rods until her body was covered with bloody welts. After undergoing unspeakable torments, the holy virgin girls glorified their true Father in heaven, their Heavenly Bridegroom Jesus Christ, and remained steadfast in the Faith.

Their mother, St. Sophia was subjected to another type of grievous torture: she was forced

to watch the all suffering of her daughters. What kind of mother would not yield to save her children from such pain and torment? And yet, her daughters gave her courage to be steadfast, and courageous. They urged her not yield because if she gave in then they would not be together in paradise, and so encouraged, the mother in turn urged her daughters to endure their torments for the sake of the Heavenly Bridegroom. Finally it was ordered for all three maidens to be beheaded, and it is written that they joyfully bent their necks beneath the sword.

The emperor (being such a compassionate man) permitted St. Sophia to take the beaten and broken bodies of her three daughters for burial. She placed their remains in coffins, loaded them on a wagon, and drove beyond the city. There she reverently buried them on a high hill, and sat by their graves for three days, until she too gave up her soul to the Lord. Even though Sophia did not suffer physical tortures for Christ, she suffered in her heart emotional and in her mind psychological tortures, and so was not deprived of a martyr's crown. Believers buried her body there beside her three daughters. Later their relics were moved and have rested at El'zasa, in the Church of Esho, since the year 777.

What do we today, almost two thousand years later, learn and understand when we encounter this martyred saintly family? The first things that come to mind are the depth of their faith in Christ Jesus, their hope in the promise of everlasting life in Christ, of their love for their Lord and for each other, which is displayed in their desire for each other's salvation. These virtues are fittingly revealed through their names: Sophia (Wisdom), Pistis (Faith), Elpida (Hope) and Agape (Charity). And why so these children possess these virtues? Because their mother, in her God given wisdom, instilled in her daughters a *faith* in God that was deeply rooted, solid and unshakeable. And why did these young children endure what they endured? They endured and persevered martyrdom because their mother taught them to love their God with all their minds, and all their hearts and all their strength.

These children, these little girls no less, were raised to know that their ultimate goal in life was not to one day be married with children, was not to one day be famous, was not to one day inherit the riches of this world, but rather to one day be with their heavenly Father. They belonged to Him completely with every fiber, and broken fiber of their being. This is what kept these children strong to endure their tortures and physical death. And what about their mother, St. Sophia, who was made to watch her babies whom she loved more than her own life, be tortured and broken before her eyes. What mother could endure it? What mother

would not risk her own life, and even her own salvation to help her children? I'll tell you what kind of a mother, a mother who loved God more than herself, and more than her offspring. But don't think what she endured was easy. When Sophia's tender maternal heart was being tempted, and broken, it was her children who gave her courage and reminded her that if she gave in to the demands of this fallen, corrupt, and often evil world, that they would not be together as a family in paradise with their Lord.

Again the encounter with the saints reminds us that the purpose for our life in this world is to prepare for our eternal life with our Heavenly Father. This life is like a womb from which we are born into eternity. And the type of pregnancy that we have here and ultimately the type of labour and birth that we will experience as we pass into the next life depends on our preparation for this event.

Thus far the two examples of saintly families that I have presented for us to encounter seem "perfect". They seem almost to be super human, in faith, in courage, and in endurance. But not all saintly families were "perfect". There are numerous examples of "naughty" children who became saints because of the prayers of their saintly mothers. I want you to encounter one such mother and her very naughty son whose lifestyle brought pain to his mother's heart. This very famous son is non-other than the blessed St. Augustine, who credited his faith and conversion to the tears and prayers of his mother, St. Monaca.

### **St. Monaca and St. Augustine (Fourth Century)<sup>3</sup>**

St. Monica, who was likely to have been of Berber origin, was married early in life to Patritius, who held an official position in Tagaste (present-day Souk Ahras, Algeria) in norther Africa. Her husband was a "non-practicing" pagan, with a violent temper and debauched habits. Needless to say, Monica's married life was far from happy. There was, obviously, a big gulf between husband and wife. Monica's alms deeds and habits of prayer annoyed her husband, but it is said that he always held her in a sort of reverence. She was not the only unhappy wife, but it is said that her sweetness and patience set a good example among all the other wives of her native town; they knew that she suffered as they did, and her words and example had an effect on them.

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<sup>3</sup> Information taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Monica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Monica); and <http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/>

Monica had three children: Augustine the eldest, Navigius the second, and a daughter, Perpetua. She had been unable to secure baptism for her 3 children, and this grieved her greatly, and she realized that before she could reach out to her children, what needed to be done first was to bring her husband to Christ. Through her prayers, patience, and Christian example, Monica's husband Patritius subsequently did become a Christian, and died very shortly after his conversion. Monica decided not to remarry.

Meanwhile, the young Augustine had been sent to Carthage, to pursue his studies, and there he lived licentiously. With her husband now asleep in the Lord, Monica's anxiety now centered on Augustine; he was wayward and, as he himself tells us, lazy.

At the age of nineteen, Augustine read Cicero's *Hortensius*, an experience that led him into the fascination with philosophical questions and methods that would remain with him throughout his life. At Carthage, Augustine studied rhetoric (a discipline that he used to gain employment teaching), and it was here that he had become a Manichean (a believer in a heresy that claimed that all created matter was evil). When on his return home Augustine shared his views regarding Manichaeism with his mother, Monica flew into a rage, and drove him away from her table.

However, she is said to have experienced a strange vision that convinced her to reconcile with her son. Monica went to see a certain holy bishop, whose name is not given, but who consoled her with the now famous words, "the child of those tears shall never perish."

After a few years as a Manichean, Augustine became attracted to the more skeptical positions of the Academic philosophers. Monica followed her wayward son to Rome, where he had gone secretly; when she arrived he had already gone to Milan, but she followed him there too.

Although tempted in the direction of Christianity upon his arrival to Milan in 383, he turned first to Neo-Platonism. During this time, Augustine fathered a child by a mistress. This period of exploration, including its youthful excesses are recorded in Augustine's most widely read work, the *Confessions*.

Here in Milan, Monica found St. Ambrose and through him she ultimately had the joy of seeing Augustine convert to true Christianity, and be baptized in 387 at the age of 31, after seventeen years of resistance. Mother and son soon after his conversion returned to their homeland in Africa. They stopped at Ostia where death overtook Monica. Her son's grief led

him to write down the depths of the emotions that he experienced. Augustine was ordained a presbyter in 391, taking the position as bishop of Hippo in 396, a position that he held until his death. — Confessions 6.2.2.

What do we learn from our encounter with Sts. Monica and Augustine? We first learn of the great desire of a mother to bring her husband and then son to Christ. A 17-year journey with tears and bended knees, proved to be fruitful. God does listen to our fervent prayers, and does have the power to soften hearts, and lead us to encounters that open our eyes and reveal his truths. The lesson from this family is to always take courage. All is never lost. Tears are never wasted. Monica's lifelong desire was to have her family saved. Nothing else was more important to her than her Christ. And we see this when she kicks out her beloved son when he blasphemes against her Lord at the dinner table with his heretical views. And yet, because she puts her Lord first, she has no choice but to call others to His light and reveal Him to her family, first her husband, and then her son.

And what of Augustine? His work, the *Confessions*, show us how grateful he was to his mother. How penitent he truly was. How his life changed so completely when he encountered Christ, and he calls us, like his mother called him, to experience a relationship that is life-changing. Augustine lived the rest of his life first as a penitent; and second as a bishop who, like the other saints we encountered this evening, saw the salvation of others (and self) as his top priority.

### **St. Macrina the Younger, St. Basil the Great of Caesarea, and St. Gregory of Nyssa**

I want to end this evening's talk by encountering older sibling: two great Fathers and one Mother of the Church from Cappadocia; St. Macrina the Younger, and her younger brothers St. Basil the Great of Caesarea, and St. Gregory of Nyssa.

St. Macrina was born in 326 AD in Pontos, the eldest of ten children to wealthy parents of the landed gentry in Cappadocia, Emmelia and Basil, not to be confused with his eldest son Basil the Great who was named after him. (Nine of their children reached adulthood: Makrina, Basil, Naukratios, Gregory, four other daughters, and the youngest, Peter) Five of their children "established a record unmatched in the annals of Christian family history"<sup>4</sup> as one of their sons Basil, became an archbishop and one of the greatest defenders of Orthodoxy in the east, two of their sons, Gregory and Peter, became bishops, one son, Naukratios, was seen as being a true ascetic and a daughter, Macrina, became the founder-ess of female monasticism.

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<sup>4</sup> Eva Catafygiotu Topping, *Saints and Sisterhood: The Lives of Forty-Eight Holy Women*, p.238.

The three siblings that we will encounter tonight are considered among the most famous saints of the church.<sup>5</sup>

It is often said that the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree, and this was definitely the case with these children. Both Emmilia and Basil were extremely pious and belonged to faithful Christian families. Emmelia's grandfather had suffered martyrdom. Her mother, St. Makrina the Elder (the giagia) was a disciple of St. Gregory the Miracle-Worker who was a student of the great Origen. The paternal grandparents, Basil's parents, were also persecuted and deprived of all their possessions because of their Christian faith.

Thus Emmelia and Basil passed on to their children the faith of their parents and forefathers. When their first child, Macrina the Younger was being born, an Angel appeared to Emmilia as she laboured in a dream and addressed the unborn child as Thekla. St. Thekla was the first Woman Martyr and Equal to the Apostles.<sup>6</sup> It was taken as a sign that the child was called to serve God, and as she became the founder-ess of female monasticism, we can infer that there was truth to the dream.

When Macrina reached the age of 12 she was betrothed to a young man who had just finished his law studies and was quickly becoming a champion and voice for those who were wronged. However, he died before the wedding. Macrina insisted that she was already married, and that her husband was still living in God, and so she could not marry another. Before the birth of the youngest sibling, Peter, their father, Basil, fell asleep in the Lord, and Macrina took over the family, taking care of her mother, managing the house, raising her youngest brother, and educating all of her siblings, including the great Basil, who was very close to her in age. You would think that this saintly family did not experience the typical family problem of sibling rivalry and squabbles. But do not kid yourselves.

Even among saintly siblings, squabbles most definitely exist. The difference is that in their case, the squabbles pertain to more serious issues than the usual "Why are you taking my stuff?" and seeking for parental attention. Here the issues deal with keeping each other in line when anything other than Christ-like behaviour is being displayed, and when one's salvation becomes at risk.

The great sibling squabble that was recorded in this family's history was between Macrina and Basil. Basil was the oldest boy, and the second child in the family having been given his father's name. He was born in 329 AD. He was educated in the finest schools in Caesarea,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

studied in Antioch under Libanius, then to Constantinople and finally in Athens where he met his best friend St. Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus. Both friends became experts in rhetoric and the classics. Upon graduation, Basil was offered the chair of rhetoric at the University of Caesarea. He accepted and gave

courses. (Imagine having him for a professor.) Basil also began a very successful law practice. And so things would have stayed, had it not been for his sister Macrina giving him a piece of her mind.

She accused Basil of ““being puffed up beyond measure with the pride of oratory.” She complained that he looked down on the local dignitaries and believed himself better than anyone else in Caesarea. She was always quoting the classics at her and showed no desire to follow in the Christian traditions of the family.”<sup>7</sup> Basil didn’t seem to give his sisters opinion of him much thought until God intervened and gave Basil a blow. What followed was the death of their brother Naucratus, who was the third child, a year or two younger than Basil. According to Macrina, Naucratus “excelled all the brothers in physical beauty, strength and ability. He could run faster, and though reserved, he possessed a sharper intelligence.”<sup>8</sup> The other great quality was that Naucratus was deeply religious. His death was sudden, totally unexpected, and so overwhelmed Basil that he renounced his chair and “sat at his sister’s feet, learning from her the secret of renunciation and Christian virtue which had eluded him in all his years in Athens. A chastened Basil took the place of the imperious rhetorician.”<sup>9</sup> But though his focus was now on serving God, Basil still possessed a very strong personality, which could be said to boarder at times on bullying. If Basil believed he was right, there was no changing his mind. His stubbornness tarnished his friendship with St. Gregory the Theologian. However, had it not been for this stubbornness to stand by his convictions and his faith, Orthodoxy would have been overrun by the Arian heresy. Basil was definitely a character who was larger than life.

St. Gregory of Nyssa was very different from his older brother. He was the fourth child; born in 335 AF and never raised his voice, or thundered like Basil. He viewed the world with awe as it was at the created beauty of God. Gregory loved people, and saw the good in everyone. His health was weak and his formal schooling was irregular. Like Basil, he loved the Greek classics, and when his father died he refused to adopt a profession, living instead on his share of the family estate. Like his big brother Basil, he too at first didn’t share the depth

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Payne, *The Holy Fire*, p 114.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

of faith held by his parents, and sister. When he was twenty, God gave him a blow, too. His pious mother had just announced that the relics of the forty martyrs had come into the family's possession. They were to be solemnly translated to a chapel built specially for them on the family estate at Annesi in Pontus. Gregory was ordered by his mother and sister to attend the night-long vigils, and arrived in a temper, not wanting to be there. He had at the time contempt for the "worship of relics."<sup>10</sup> In his annoyance, Gregory snuck out and went to the neighboring garden and fell asleep. Like Mary of Egypt, he dreamed that he had a great desire to attend the ceremonies, but when he attempted to make his way back to them, 40 armed martyrs stood in his way, threatening him, and would have trampled him, had not one of them, shown mercy. So vivid and real was this dream that he woke up sobbing. He went back to the service and fell on his knees asking God and his 40 martyrs to forgive him. This was the first major crisis of his life. There would be many more.

Gregory married a renowned beauty, Theosobeia. But they lived together for a short time deciding to part and live the rest of their lives in chastity dedicated to God. At this time, Basil, who founded with his friend St. Gregory the Theologian a male monastery in Iborra, invited his younger brother to join them. Gregory lived in his brother's shadow, especially after Basil became Bishop of Cesarea.

One day when Gregory heard that Basil was quarreling furiously with an uncle, who was by the way a bishop in Pontus, Gregory decided to intervene and put an end to it. There were no telephones, emails or texts in those days. So, it was quite easy for Gregory to forge 3 letters from the uncle to Basil, seeking reconciliation. Gregory viewed these petty quarrels to be astonishingly stupid and sought to put an end to them. He believed that if we are baptized in the one Christ, then we should live in Him harmoniously, and lovingly. However, "Basil sent copies of the letters back to Pontus, and when the uncle angrily repudiated the forgery, the "fat was in the fire." Basil wrote angrily to Gregory:

It is impossible to argue with you in a letter. How can I chastise you, as you deserve, for your complete simplicity of mind? Three times altogether you fell into the trap. You allowed yourself to be snared three times. You actually forged the letter and brought it to me as from the most reverend bishop, our uncle, and you did this to deceive me! I haven't the faintest idea why you do these things! ...So I am writing to upbraid you for your remarkable simplicity, which I consider unbecoming in a Christian and especially inappropriate at the present time. I beg you in future to watch over yourself and spare me—I am speaking very frankly—because you are unworthy to attend to great affairs. [Ep. 48]<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p 138.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140-141.

Where Gregory forged the letters to bring Christian harmony back into the family because he saw that behaviour as unchristian, Basil upbraided his younger brother because his solving the family's problem so simplistically was also seen as unbecoming in a Christian, and inappropriate. Do we see the difference here in the saintly sibling squabbles? They had nothing to do with worldly possessions, but everything to do with what was considered to be appropriate Christian behaviour.

The saints, as we can, see were human. They were so much like us in many ways. Young Basil was puffed up and full of self-glory, Gregory went to venerate martyrs unwilling and in a huff. How many times do our children, or we ourselves for that matter behave in such ways? And yet, God acts. And yet, God calls. And yet, the example of the parents and other siblings makes an impression. And these off track children, repent, and renounce their old ways, and live for God. But even after their repenting and living for God, even when they are abbesses and bishops they still argue, and they still squabble. But now they squabble for righteousness.

And when St. Basil died, Gregory was shattered. And when St. Macrina died, his heart was broken. But his faith was strengthened. And he let God use him. The little brother, who was name called a simpleton by his older brother became the voice of Orthodoxy. Where Basil is the Father of the Church who taught and championed for the divinity of the Holy Spirit, it is his little brother Gregory who was instrumental at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council of Constantinople to include the Spirit in our Creed, and became known as the "Common pillar of the church." What a family, imperfect, yet perfected in Christ.

All of the saintly families that we encountered this evening, and those we haven't were not perfect. But their faith in Christ, their hope in Christ, their love for God kindled inside of them a desire to be righteous before God and to unite with God, and the Lord forgave them, accepted them and perfected them. All of our talks here at Re-catechism are not to give you head knowledge, though they do to some extent. But our hope here is to kindle within you a desire for Christ, a passion for Christ, the same passion that was felt by all the saints, and which led them to make the choices in life that they made. And it is our hope that in the choices you make as parents, as children, as siblings, as members of our church and our society that it is for Christ that you ultimately make them.