

Role of Free Will in Nature versus Nurture The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
Friday, December 30, 2016 8:15 AM Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Mt 2:13-15, 19-23 (In God's
divine wisdom he has made each of us the one who decides what kind of person we are going to
be.)

On the feast of the Holy Family it might be an appropriate time to bring up an issue that has plagued psychology for many years, and that is the influence of nature and nurture on how people turn out. There are schools of thought that say we are more or less the way we are because we are born that way. There are other schools of thought that say, no, we are the way we are because of the way we are fashioned and formed by our culture and our families. And **both these schools of thought**, although they might have a certain amount of truth in them, **are too extreme.**

The truth is of course **we are born with certain traits**, and we see that in children, certain traits, **but none of those traits are that important. What's important is what people choose to do with the talents they are born with**, and no one determines that except the individual. Here, again, the primacy of free will. Likewise, with influences of family, family values, so to speak, **values, which means taught by the family. These are only as good as the free will of the individual chooses them to be**, and that's actually been proven. There is no such thing as conditioning children to believe or to value anything; there is no conditioning involved—that's been proven. We suggest. We encourage. We can even demand, but ultimately **how children turn out is their own choice.**

When it comes to what they are given by nature, they have to choose how to use it. When it comes to what they are offered in their family life in terms of values and beliefs, that's all up to them. They can take or reject whatever, and this is very important for us to keep in mind because **in the absence of good training, in the absence of good values, in the absence of sound**

beliefs, a child grows up rootless, aimless, and ultimately headed for disaster. So we need to supply the best possible environment, the soundest possible beliefs, the deepest and truest values, but then we have to recognize that the most wonderful family, the most wonderful parents cannot actually make children do anything; especially **once they hit majority and they are out the door, they are their own person, and truly for better or for worse.** So we have to do our best, but our best will not necessarily do the trick, because **in God's divine wisdom he has made each of us the one who decides what kind of person we are going to be.**

And so this would be an appropriate time to bring up **gratitude for the wonderful parents that we all had,** that set forth the kind of values and beliefs that have led us here this morning because I'll bet most of us came to those values and beliefs from our parents, some maybe not. **Maybe a few of us grew up in a vacuum and we had to go search for the truth**—possibly. But that's a harder life, not necessarily a worse one. But being grateful for all the good that we have been surrounded with is surely an appropriate way to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family.