Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, which quite simply is the picture-perfect family. It is sadly ironic that sometimes our reaction to the Holy Family is discouragement. We see a Christmas card of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in which everything is perfect and beautiful, and our first thought is, “My family looks nothing like that!!” However, when we look a little closer, we have to realize that our family has many similarities to the Holy Family. I would like to share a story I read on Facebook. Yeah, Facebook.

The airline Captain’s lead flight attendant came to him and said, "We have an H.R. on this flight." (H.R. stands for human remains.) "Are they military?" he asked. “Yes”, she said. “Is there an escort?” the Captain asked. “Yes, I've already assigned him a seat,” she said. “Would you please tell him to come to the Flight Deck?”

A short while later a young Army sergeant entered the flight deck. He was the image of the perfectly dressed soldier. He introduced himself and I asked him about his soldier.   
 The escorts of these fallen soldiers talk about them as if they are still alive and still with us. “My soldier is on his way back to Virginia,” he said. He proceeded to answer my questions, but offered no words.   
 About 30 minutes into our flight, I received a call from the lead flight attendant in the cabin. “I just found out the family of the soldier we are carrying, are also on board”, she said. She then proceeded to tell me that the father, mother, wife and 2-year old daughter were escorting their son, husband, and father home. The family was upset because they were unable to see the container the soldier was in before we left.   
 We were on our way to a major hub at which the family was going to wait four hours for the connecting flight home to Virginia. The father of the soldier told the flight attendant that knowing his son was below him in the cargo compartment and being unable to see him was too much for him and the family to bear. He asked the flight attendant if there was anything that could be done to allow them to see him upon our arrival. I could hear the desperation in the flight attendants voice when she asked me if there was anything I could do. 'I'm on it', I said. I told her that I would get back to her.   
 I was in direct contact with the dispatcher. I explained the situation I had on board with the family and what it was the family wanted. He said he understood and that he would get back to me. Two hours went by and I had not heard from the dispatcher. I sent a text message asking for an update. I saved the return message from the dispatcher and the following is the text:   
***“Captain, sorry it has taken so long to get back to you. There is policy on this now, and I had to check on a few things. Upon your arrival a dedicated escort team will meet the aircraft. The team will escort the family to the ramp and plane side. A van will be used to load the remains with a secondary van for the family.   
 The family will be taken to their departure area and escorted into the terminal, where the remains can be seen on the ramp. It is a private area for the family. When the connecting aircraft arrives, the family will be escorted onto the ramp and plane side to watch the remains being loaded for the final leg home.   
 Captain, most of us here in-flight control are veterans. Please pass our condolences on to the family. Thanks.”***

I printed out the message and gave it to the lead flight attendant to pass on to the father. The lead flight attendant was very thankful and told me, “You have no idea how much this will mean to them.”  
 After landing, we cleared the runway and taxied to the ramp area. The ramp is huge with 15 gates on either side. It is always a busy area with aircraft maneuvering every which way to enter and exit. When we entered the ramp and checked in with the ramp controller, we were told that all traffic was being held for us.   
 “There is a team in place to meet the aircraft,” we were told. It looked like it was all coming together, then I realized that once we turned the seat belt sign off, everyone would stand up at once and delay the family from getting off the airplane. As we approached our gate, I asked the copilot to tell the ramp controller, we were going to stop short of the gate to make an announcement to the passengers. He did that and the ramp controller said, “Take your time.”  
 I stopped the aircraft and set the parking brake. I pushed the public address button and said: “Ladies and gentleman, this is your Captain speaking: I have stopped short of our gate to make a special announcement. We have a passenger on board who deserves our honor and respect. His Name is Private Allen, a soldier who recently lost his life. Private Allen is under your feet in the cargo hold. Escorting him today is Army Sergeant Thomas. Also, on board are his father, mother, wife, and his 2 year old daughter. Your entire flight crew is asking for all passengers to remain in their seats to allow the family to exit the aircraft first. Thank you.”  
 We continued the turn to the gate, came to a stop and completed our shutdown procedures. A couple of minutes later I opened the cockpit door. I found the two forward flight attendants crying, something you just do not see. I was told that after we came to a stop, every passenger on the aircraft stayed in their seats, waiting for the family to exit the aircraft.   
 When the family got up and gathered their things, a passenger slowly started to clap his hands. Moments later, more passengers joined in and soon the entire aircraft was clapping. Words of God Bless You, I'm sorry, thank you, and other kind words were uttered to the family as they made their way down the aisle and out of the airplane. They were escorted down to the ramp to finally be with their loved one.

I tell you this story because when I read it, I immediately thought of family. You hear of a mother and father walking the final steps with their son, just like Mary did with Jesus. You have a wife and daughter honoring their husband and father. We have the airplane and in-flight crew, the bigger community family making sure to support the walk of this family. Then you have the family that was on that plane that day putting themselves second for the good of the family. This story gives me hope. It should give all of us hope that we can imitate the Holy Family.