

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

REFLECTION 1: HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

A missing child, frantic parents, relief and reproach at their reunion, the amazement of the people at his intelligence and insight, the loving goodness of a mother who did not understand but believed in her son...all these ingredients make the Lucan story today a memorable and touching one (Luke 2: 41-52). The Evangelist has pushed back the affirmation of who Jesus was from the period when he was clearly acknowledged as messiah, Lord, Saviour, Son of God, Son of Man to the period of Jesus' childhood, known as Luke's Infancy Narrative. Jesus' 'hidden life' stories are significant, showing that Jesus was God's Son even as a boy by having in his work the same sort of signs he did during his ministry using the same high language.

We see the real crux of the story in Jesus' explanation, 'Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?' The question conveys a sense of necessity or urgency. According to Luke certain things 'had to be' or were necessary to the saving plan of God made known in Jesus. Referring to God as his Father, Jesus asserted his filial relationship to God, a relationship that transcends even the deepest bonds of human love. It was the awareness of his special relationship and unique mission that carried Jesus through his ministry. The evangelist foreshadowed by anticipation the reality of the man and his mission.

Various reactions to Jesus are recorded: amazement, astonishment, and lack of understanding - all these would also be experienced by Jesus during his ministry. But the response of Jesus' mother is perhaps the most noteworthy. We are told that 'His mother stored up all these things in her heart.' Although Mary did not perceive with clarity the mission or mind of her Son, yet she did not reject what she could not grasp. In love she treasured in memory the words and events of her Son in her heart, sorting them out in faith, she grew to understand and to accept. In time the things she had held in memory began to make sense as the events of Jesus' public life began to unfold. Luke affirms Mary's growth in faith naming her as one of the members of the apostolic community 'all these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers' (Acts 1: 14). In this aspect of her deep and persevering faith Mary has become an inspiration for all who do not fully understand but are willing to grow in faith. In this Year of Faith, we need Mary to guide us. Through the bonds of family love, God spoke his word to the world, and through that word, Jesus made known to all peoples the saving good news of his loving Father.

REFLECTION 2: PONDER IT ALL

A small boy at a shopping centre approached the security guard and blurted out, 'I've lost my grandpa'. The guard enquired, 'What's he like?' and the little boy, hesitating for a moment, replied, 'I can't tell you what he's like, but he speaks like the man who advertises Brennan's Bread!'

In today's Gospel Jesus has gone missing and his frantic parents find him in the temple surrounded by the rabbis. Jesus says that his parents should have known that he was to be about his Father's business. That business is the Gospel story of Jesus doing the will of his Father; healing and helping people, feeding the hungry, preaching to the multitudes and teaching his disciples. In our families we are called to do the same.

The Holy Family is seen as the model for the human family, the faith community, (that's us!), and the Church itself. The celebration of the incarnation has brought us to see and experience God's closeness. In the Holy Family we see the ordinariness of the life of Jesus, the simple acceptance by Mary and Joseph of the marvels of God. In the daily life of family and community, we can touch the divine and draw closer to God. But we have to learn to live centred on God

with respect and love for each other. The Gospel reminds us that life in the Holy Family was as real as true holiness must always be.

Last January Pope Francis spoke of family life and said, 'sometimes the plates will fly but after the storm has passed things must be worked out!' This Gospel doesn't refer to flying plates but Mary's comments to Jesus were more than a sweet, 'How nice to see you, we had no idea you were here'. Evidently, Jesus, Mary and Joseph needed patience, forgiveness and the other virtues Paul recommends in today's second reading (Col. 3: 12-21). One wonders if Mary's retelling of this episode might have influenced Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, coins, sons?

Luke's gospel today depicts Jesus as a young person unusually attracted to and conversant about the things of God. While his parents expected him to be with them, Jesus couldn't understand why they didn't realise that he 'must be' involved in things that have to do with God. Mary might have replied, 'God can be found in more places than the temple'. Whether or not she said that, we know that Jesus returned to Nazareth to be with them.

Jesus interaction with his parents really foreshadows his life later on with his disciples. Jesus would make decisions that they did not understand or indeed want to accept (Cf. Mark's Gospel). Every time the disciples tried to lay claim to the privilege of being Jesus' 'in group', his buddies as it were, Jesus called them to greater openness and inclusivity. When they tried to understand him, they could only do so by understanding his relationship with the Father - a relationship based less on blood than on doing God's will.

Faith always involves risk. It indicates that love of God and family does not avoid confusion and irritation. Love is an ongoing process that must be nurtured consistently by each person involved. The Feast of the Holy Family presents a realistic example and call to the holiness of family life. So, let's celebrate - we are not called to be holy card images, but real life-seekers and the discoverers of that love for which we were created.