

HOLY FAMILY B

READING I Sir 3:2-6,12-14

READING II Col 3:12-21

GOSPEL Lk 2:22-40

Around the beginning of the second century B.C., Ben Sira wrote his compendium, commenting on many areas of traditional Israelite wisdom. In this section, he offers a commentary of sorts on the fourth commandment. He reflects on both the sociology and theology of his day. The father is the head of the household, and, as such, he enjoys a divinely given position. The mother has a lesser but still influential place, since to comfort her is to obey the Lord. Since Ben Sira rejects an afterlife, children receive their rewards for obedience and respect in the present life. Thus, the respectful son is promised wealth, children and a long life. Ben Sira also notes the sacrificial dimension of respect and consideration, namely, atoning for sin and serving as a sin-offering. It is especially in old age, he notes, love and respect are particularly required.

Among other questions that concerned Paul were practical questions of Christian life. The passage may be divided into two parts: (1) General principles for Christian life (vv 12-17); and (2) Applications for the Christian home (vv 18-21). The first part may be an early baptismal instruction. "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved ...", describe the newness of life into which the Colossians have entered. This, then, is reflected in five virtues which emphasize the change. Forgiveness, similar to that which was given by the Lord in Mt 6 is another characteristic. Since Christ is to be the very center of the community, peace is also a distinguishing mark. The final and most comprehensive piece of clothing for the new Christian is love, which gives meaning to everything else. By both word and song, they build up the community. No matter what the Colossians say or do, they are to recognize the Lord's presence in their words or actions.

The second part is a list of household duties. The verb "submissive" describes the loyalty and obedience of a soldier to his leader. Wives are to be loyal to and support their husbands. Such loyalty and support are bound up with the Lord, who is the cohesive center of Colossian life. In turn, husbands are to treat their wives with affection. The model for the husband's love is the self-giving love of Christ for the Church. Children are to obey their parents. But again, the Lord is the center of gravity.

This scene in Luke may be divided as follows: (1) Parents' presentation of child in Temple (vv 22-24); (2) Simeon's greeting and twofold oracle (vv 25-35); (3) Anna's greeting (vv 36-38); and (4) Conclusion (vv 39-40). The Old Testament background for Simeon and Anna are the figures of Eli and Hannah. Luke also seems to have the text of Mal 3:1-2 in mind: "And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord ... But who will

endure the day of his coming?"

Going to the sanctuary, only the purification was required. Luke also mentions the offering of the of the firstborn male. This leads to the meeting with Simeon, the Eli who confronts the latter-day Elkanah and Hannah: That is, Joseph and Mary. Luke indicates the greatness of Jesus by dwelling on the Law, the prophetic Spirit, and the Temple cult. The Nunc Dimittis (Canticle of Simeon) borrows from Second Isaiah. In it, Luke anticipates Acts, where the Gentiles are also God's people. In the second oracle of Simeon, Luke anticipates the Jewish rejection of (1) Jesus during the ministry and the passion, and (2) the Christian overture to Israel in Acts. In the sorting out process (the sword), Mary will experience pain as Israel, as a whole, fails to respond.

In Anna the prophetess (together with Simeon), Luke probably refers to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. She represents the devout Anawim (remnant) of Israel—not unlike Judith. In v 40 Luke probably alludes to the growth and development of Samuel. The reader is thus prepared when Jesus appears in the synagogue in Nazareth.

To give of one's self is to grow in Christ. We pursue merely our own good, so we do not mature. We accept only our own judgments, so we do not develop. We love just ourselves, so we do not grow. To give of one's self is to grow in Christ.

The author of Colossians offers advice to new Christians. Growth consists of Christian love, which gives meaning to all other virtues and activities. On the practical level, wives should be loyal to their husbands, but with a loyalty in the Lord. Husbands are to love their wives, but with a love based on Jesus' self-giving style (see Eph 5:25). Children are to obey, but with an obedience that springs from the Lord. Christ is the principle of development. To give of one's self is to grow in Christ.

Mary must grow. For Luke, she is the faithful disciple. From Simeon she now learns of the discriminating sword which will result in tragedy — not a few will reject the mission of her Son. However, she already belongs to the true family of Jesus — she "hears the Word and keeps it." She will also see that growth as allowing for mystery: To realize that the Father has a greater claim on her Son (Lk 2:48-50). Because Mary is rooted in the person of Jesus, she grows. To give of one's self is to grow in Christ.

Wives who say to their husbands, "How can I serve you better?" grow. Husbands who say to their wives, "How can I respond better to your love?" develop. Parents who say to their children, "How can we provide for your total education?" mature. Children who say to their parents, "How can we meet your needs?" progress. All such questions are grounded in the self-giving Jesus. To give of one's self is to grow in Christ.

Eucharist reflects the growth of the man who responded to the needs of the Father. Eucharist presents this image of the self-giving Jesus to the community. Eucharist sees the bread and wine as means of growth. Provided that Jesus is the center of the community's life, to eat and drink with Christ is to grow. In Eucharist, therefore, to give of one's self is to grow in Christ.