

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph © - December 30, 2018

(1Samuel 1:20-22,24-28; Ps. 84:2-3,5-6,9-11; 1John 3:1-2,21-24; Luke 2:41-52;)

Our first reading, which is often from the Old Testament, is often a situation which sets us up for the gospel reading. Scholars have said that the Old Testament is a pre-figurement of the New Testament and the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Our first reading is from the first book of Samuel and we see today the birth and dedication at the temple of the boy who would become the prophet of this and another book of the Old Testament. Hannah was one of two wives of Ekanah. The other wife had several children, but Hannah had none. To not have children, at that time, was considered an indication that you were not in good favor with God, that you must have sinned. Hannah was ridiculed by the other wife. She and her husband were at the Temple in Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant was before the Temple of Jerusalem was built. She prayed for a long time by herself in silence, with only her lips moving. The priest Eli thought she was drunk and told her to go home and sober up. She explained that she had a heavy heart and was praying. Eli then asked the Lord to grant her her request. Hannah had promised the Lord that if she had a son she would bring him to the temple and present him to the Lord. We hear today that she did have a son and named him Samuel. When he was weaned, probably at the age of about three, she brings him to the temple today and presents him to the Lord and to the priest Eli. He would grow up serving Eli in the temple and serve as a priest and prophet after him. He would be the one to anoint the first two kings of Israel, Saul and then David. Jesus would eventually be brought to the temple, first for the presentation 40 days after his birth and for the purification of his mother Mary. Today we see him at the temple at the age of twelve, officially becoming an adult man in the Jewish Faith. This would be celebrated at their annual trip to Jerusalem on the Feast of Passover.

In those days the holy family, like many of their relatives, neighbors and friends would travel by walking. The trip to Jerusalem of 70 miles would take several days. They traveled in a caravan to support and protect each other. Often the men walked together and the women in another group. Jesus would have walked with his mother on the way to Jerusalem. After the celebration, this first time, he would return home with either parent. Later trips he would travel with the men. So as they traveled home Mary and Joseph figured that he was with the other one or with someone in the caravan. That evening when they got together he was not there. They searched for him for three days.

The feast of Passover would have brought many visitors from different countries to the city. There would have been all kinds of people and merchants and even thieves. The city would have been full of all kinds of people and animals, some for sacrifice. You can imagine the anxiety of Mary and Joseph, or any parent looking for their young child in such a place.

Our feast today of the Holy Family recalls the purpose of the family, as bishop Robert Barron points out, is not for the sake of the individual members, but rather for God. When God created the first family he commanded them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” (Gen. 1:28) It was not good that man should be alone. (Gen. 2:18) In creating Eve he gave them the beginning of the family. It would be through the relationship of love – giving themselves to and for the other, that the family would grow and bond together. It is a sign of God’s love between the Father and the Son, which grows into the love of the Holy Spirit.

That is true still today. The relationship of the family is an imitation and an example of the love in the Trinity. It is the self-giving love for the other that creates the family and holds the family together. I have noticed, even in my own family that when the family breaks up, often it harms their relationship with God and with his family – they often stop coming to church for one reason or another.

“After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” You can imagine Mary saying this with her eyes full of tears, release of the fear, anxiety, mixed with the joy of seeing him.

Notice it is Mary, not Joseph, that speaks to him at this point. It reminds me of one time after my brothers and I had come home from school, sitting at the counter eating some lunch, before going out to chore. My mother said, “I wish you boys would do what your dad asks you to do so he would not need to punish you. When he has to do that it hurts him more than it hurts you. Our mother was talking to us about our relationship with our dad – and that we should not take it for granted.

In my last assignment, I was visiting with a woman who was in one of the committees. She and her husband had several sons. She said that she encourages them to appreciate the time that they have to spend with their dad. I reminded her of this event in the gospel. She, like Mary, spoke to her sons about their relationship with their father. Women are more often focused on relationships and men more often on direction and accomplishments. As someone mentioned men are the head and women the heart of the family. Both are important for the well being of the family and holiness – the goal of the family. Having said this, prayer is where best the father can lead the family. It directs the focus of the family on God and seeking his will for them. My parents seemed to have an intuition or knowledge of that – Dad led the family in the rosary each night – something my mother continued after he died.

Jesus’ response to his mother and father was, “Why were you looking 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. Jesus, even at that early age, knew that God

was his true father. The temple, with the Ark of the Covenant, was his house, his presence on earth at that time.

Jesus never sinned, yet here he caused anxiety for his parents. Often when we seek to do God's Will and please him it may cause anxiety to others. As the life of Jesus shows us, when God enters into the lives of people, who have been injured and misdirected by sin – by serving oneself there is conflict and sometimes violence – as his death on the cross greatly reveals.

Mary, having not sinned, would have understood Jesus better than any other person on earth. St. Luke tells us that, his mother kept all these things in her heart. She is one who, like no other, could speak with Jesus and he with her about those things.

We learn many things at school or by reading books, but no matter how much we learn, we cannot understand it fully until we have experienced it. I am sure I made more mistakes and more misunderstandings in my first parish assignment than later on. Even on the farm, dad could tell us how to do something but the more we did it, the better we became at it.

Today Jesus reveals that he knew he was the Son of the Father in heaven. The teachers were astounded at his understanding and his answers. Yet our gospel reading concludes today, "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man."

You might say that here Jesus practiced carrying his crosses. That, in spite of knowing all things that the Father revealed to him, he would practice the entering into the broken world of mankind – an entering which would bring anxiety to many and sometimes misunderstanding of him and eventually violence to him. Being obedient to his parents, he would learn to accept them as the Father's Will and he would grow in his relationship with his Father and with his family here on earth. That is the key to holiness and the key to a holy family. May God bless you, your relationship with God and with His family.