



LIVING THE GOSPEL

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph December 29th 2024

Theme: "Your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

Gathering Prayer

All: O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; ⁴³and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; ⁴⁵and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; ⁴⁷and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." ⁴⁹And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰And they did not understand the saying, which he spoke to them. ⁵¹And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.

Gospel Focus

Many parents can relate to the experience of a child going missing. Not many can relate to the experience of searching for Jesus for *three days*. The gospel skim over the details of the search. But that's seventy-two sleepless hours of worrying and seeking and not knowing what they may or may not find. And Jesus meets them with no indifference that probably is relatable for anyone who is parenting a preteen. The moment in the Holy Family's life-the only episode we have of Jesus childhood-shows both their utter uniqueness and the ways in which they are like every family. They have a miscommunication, it leads to crisis, it's resolve. And the child continues to grow. Yes,

something big about Jesus' identity and God's plan for salvation is revealed in the process, but it comes in the midst of everyday realities.

Gospel Reflection

Most families know what it is to have an empty place at the table—a place meant for a son or daughter who is absent because of estrangement, life taking them in new directions, or death claiming them too early. During the rest of the day, the family may manage without the absent one, but it is the gaping hole at the table that is hardest to endure.

In the gospel today, there is at first a note of relief that Jesus is found unharmed. But an ominous note sounds when Jesus declares he must be in his Father's house. We already know the end of the story. We know that as Jesus builds a new family to abide in his Father's house, he will offend some religious leaders by filling in the empty places at the table with people who others did not consider part of the family.

The gospel episode ends with Jesus returning to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, saying that he "was obedient to them" and that he "advanced in wisdom and age and favor." We sometimes imagine Jesus as a reluctant teen who has to continue to abide to his earthly parents' rules even as he feels he must begin to pursue his life's work in response to God's call. Throughout his opening chapters, however, Luke has portrayed Jesus' earthly parents as utterly law-observant and completely conforming themselves to God's will.

There is no tension between what God asks and what they choose to do. Mary assents to Gabriel, even though she does not understand everything that was asked of her. Mary and Joseph obediently have their child circumcised after eight days and then present him in the temple in Jerusalem, as the law prescribes. Every year, they go to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. We might see, then, in the ending of today's gospel that there is no conflict between Joseph's obedience to Mary, and Joseph and his obedience to the will of God. Rather, it is Mary and Joseph who have taught Jesus how to recognize the call of God and how to be obedient to it. It is in their home in Nazareth that he will continue to grow in wisdom and grace and in the ability to discern what is obedience to God. It is through his earthly parents that Jesus will come to understand how precious and beloved he is as God's chosen one. It is from listening to his mother's song, which dreams of the hungry being well fed and the lowly lifted up, that Jesus learns the obedience to God's inclusive love. We, too, learn in our homes that we are already God's beloved children, as the reading from 1 John asserts; it is not a privileged to be earned but a gift already bestowed. And just as Hannah longed fervently for Samuel, so God longs to dangle each of us on her knees and wrap us in her loving arms. We already have a place at the table in God's family and we are all invited to remain there.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — 1 Sam 1:20-22, 24-28

²⁰In those days Hannah conceived, and at the end of her term bore a son whom she called Samuel, since she had asked the LORD for him. ²¹The next time her husband Elkanah was going up with the rest of his household to offer the customary sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vows, ²²Hannah did not go, explaining to her husband, "Once the child is weaned, I will take him to appear before the LORD and to remain there forever; I will offer him as a perpetual nazirite."

²⁴Once Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and presented him at the temple of the

LORD in Shiloh. ²⁵After the boy's father had sacrificed the young bull, Hannah, his mother, approached Eli and said: ²⁶"Pardon, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the LORD. ²⁷I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request. ²⁸Now I, in turn, give him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the LORD." Hannah left Samuel there.

Responsorial Reading — Ps 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10

R: Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. **(R)**

Happy they who dwell in your house! Continually they praise you. Happy the men whose strength you are! Their hearts are set upon the pilgrimage. **(R)**

O Lord of hosts, hear our prayer; hearken, O God of Jacob! O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of your anointed. **(R)**

Second Reading — 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

¹Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. And so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God ²²and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. ²⁴Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

472. This human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge. As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time. This is why the Son of God could, when he became man, "increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man", (Lk 2:52) and would even have to inquire for himself about what one in the human condition can learn only from experience. (Cf. Mk 6 38; 8 27; Jn 11:34; etc) This corresponded to the reality of his voluntary emptying of himself, taking "the form of a slave". (Phil 2:7)

503. Mary's virginity manifests God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation. Jesus has only God as Father. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed. . . He is naturally Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures. (cf. Lk 2:48-49.)

517. Christ's whole life is a mystery of *redemption*. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross,(Cf. Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14; 1 Pt 1:18-19) but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life:

- already in his Incarnation through which by becoming poor he enriches us with his poverty;(Cf. 2 Cor 8:9)
- in his hidden life which by his submission atones for our disobedience;(Cf. Lk 2:51)
- in his word which purifies its hearers;(Cf. Jn 15:3)
- in his healings and exorcisms by which "he took our infirmities and bore our diseases";(Mt 8:17; cf. Is 53:4)
- and in his Resurrection by which he justifies us.(Cf. Rom 4:25)

534. The *finding of Jesus in the temple* is the only event that breaks the silence of the Gospels about the hidden years of Jesus. (Cf. Lk 2:41-52.) Here Jesus lets us catch a glimpse of the mystery of his total consecration to a mission that flows from his divine sonship: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?" (Lk 2:49 alt) Mary and Joseph did not understand these words, but they accepted them in faith. Mary "kept all these things in her heart" during the years Jesus remained hidden in the silence of an ordinary life.

2599. The Son of God who became Son of the Virgin also learned to pray according to his human heart. He learns the formulas of prayer from his mother, who kept in her heart and meditated upon all the "great things" done by the Almighty.(Cf. Lk 1:49; 2:19; 2:51) He learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his people, in the synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. But his prayer springs from an otherwise secret source, as he intimates at the age of twelve: "I must be in my Father's house."(Lk 2:49) Here the newness of prayer in the fullness of time begins to be revealed: his *filial prayer*, which the Father awaits from his children, is finally going to be lived out by the only Son in his humanity, with and for men.

Sharing and Discussion

1. In this week's readings, Jesus and Samuel both showed us the importance of sacred space. What places have been meaningful in your walk with God? Where do you find God most clearly present?
2. On this feast of the Holy Family, we also recognize that our very home can be sacred spaces. How might you carve out a more intentionally sacred space there?
3. "52And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." How could this be used as a blueprint for a child's development?

Closing Prayer

All: Father of the Holy Family, we ask you to send your Spirit upon us, so that we might find the same union and peace that flowed through the Holy Family. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.