

Feast of the Holy Family

December 30 2018

1st Reading Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 2nd Reading Colossians 3:12-28, Gospel Luke 2:41-52

“Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” So said Mary to her 12 year old son, Jesus! Any parent who couldn’t find a young son (or daughter) for three days is going to be in not just anxiety but deep panic and worry. And so were Mary and Joseph!

Why would Jesus deliberately put His parents through such anxiety? The Gospel says “The boy, Jesus, remained behind in Jerusalem. But His parents did not know it.” He remained not telling His parents.

It would seem that this is a serious fault on the part of Jesus. We might evoke many reasons for such behavior but none could lessen the anxiety that Mary and Joseph felt during their panicked search for their son.

Did Jesus want His parents to look in the Temple first? Jesus said “Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” Apparently, the message was lost on them, for “They did not understand what He said to them.”

Why did it take Mary and Joseph three days to find Jesus? Well, it would seem that, the first day was most probably the trip back home. The next day (or part thereof) was their trek back to Jerusalem. Where did they first look? Was it at the place of their lodgings? Or was it to seek other relatives and friends? Why did they finally go to the Temple? It was obviously one to the places visited by the travelers since that was the whole purpose of making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Or did they go there to pray for the return of their son? I expect that Mary and Joseph were in deep prayer the whole time they were looking for Jesus.

This whole episode shows us that even the model family had its difficulties, disappointments and suffering.

We know extremely little about the life of the Holy Family from the time they left Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 until Jesus was 30 years old. The Gospel simply says that Jesus “...went down with them (Mary and Joseph) ... 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.” We know not how Jesus advanced in favor before man. It’s a given He advanced in age. Did His advancing in wisdom include learning how to read and write? He must have learned to read since he read from a scroll in the temple at one time. Did Mary teach Him? Did He have a tutor? We know so little during 18 years of His life. We assume that Joseph died at some point during those 18 years since there is no mention of him during the public ministry of Christ. It would seem that Jesus supported His mother as a carpenter taking after Joseph. Did you ever wonder what kind of artifacts Joseph and Jesus made to support themselves?

Jesus, Mary and Joseph must have been a family that prayed together. They took their religious responsibilities seriously returning to the temple annually. Praying together is what helps a family stay together. Prayer, individually or together, is what helps a family be together. Physical presence is neither essential nor needed. What binds is love fortified by prayer.

Have a blessed New Year.