

THE HOLY FAMILY
1 Sam 1:20-22;24-28
1 Jn 3:1-2;21-24
Lk 2:41-52

Today we give thanks to God for the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Mary gave birth to Jesus at the invitation of God and during her pregnancy she visited her cousin Elizabeth who was also pregnant with John the Baptist. During this visit Mary sang a Song of thanksgiving as Hannah had done when she gave birth to Samuel. All three boys were dedicated to the service to God.

Mary and Joseph were devout Jews whose relationship with God was one of love, trust and obedience. Their family reflected God's model for humans to be his agents in creation. God created males and females as equal but complementary. Their love for their each other and their offspring is equal but distinctive. In this way the family members experience God's love for them, their love for him and for each other. It was within this family model that Jesus was born and grew.

Today's gospel reading records an incident in Jesus' life when he did not act as his earthy parents expected and in doing so acknowledges his true heavenly parentage. As Jewish boys approached their 13th birthday and became regarded as adults, they often visited Jerusalem for one of the festivals as part of their formation. Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem but he did not leave with their travelling party at the end of the visit. Mary and Joseph were distressed and returned to Jerusalem searching for him and found him in the Temple on the third day debating with the wise men who were amazed at his learning.

In Jewish literature the phrase, 'on the third day' is used to relate an event of great significance. It was on the third day that Jesus responds to Mary's distress by saying, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" On the third day he revealed who his true father is and that his mission is to do his Father's will.

Following this incident, Jesus returned to Nazareth and St Luke tells us that he grew in wisdom, stature and in favour with God and man. In other words that Jesus grew physically, mentally and in knowledge as all young people do. He grew in social skills and behavioural manners and underpinning all this was his spiritual growth and favour with God. These four things must be integrated for a person's life to be balanced. In Jesus they were and so he was open to his Father's will being his will.

For most of us, being open and obedient to God's will is easier said than done. We like to know what God's will is before we decide whether or not to obey it. The bad news is that both Scripture and the experience of the Saints tell us that this is not how it works. We have to choose to be obedient, which means to listen, to God's will and only when we are committed to doing so are we likely to learn what the first step will be. Once we take the first step, the second step will be revealed, and so it goes on.

St John's epistle makes it clear that, "Doing God's will is living in relationship with God." This means that he and not we, must be the centre of our lives. Faith cannot be based on feelings, neither does it mean that if we have faith we will have a life free from struggle. Jesus didn't, so why should we think we ought to? The Christian life is a continuum which begins with our loving God and ends with our loving others. As the epistle tells us, the Christian life must be one of right belief about Jesus and the truth he has revealed. Then that belief must spill over into right action just as it did for Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

Today God is shouting at us about his love for us and what he hopes our response will be. He is using the words that Eliza Doolittle said to Professor Higgins in 'My Fair Lady,' 'Don't just tell me, show me!'

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