

Holy Family

One of the greatest causes of anxiety for parents must be when one of their children wanders away and gets lost. Jesus certainly caused a lot of anxiety in the hearts of Mary and Joseph when he couldn't be found in the caravan travelling back to Nazareth after their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His parents searched for three days before they found him in the temple teaching the teachers there about God's law. Luke tells us that "they were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been looking for you.'"

Getting lost and being found again is a very familiar theme in the Gospel of Luke. There are three stories in chapter fifteen of the gospel about the lost and the found. For Luke, being lost was another way of saying that someone was dead. Being found was another way of speaking of them as being restored to life again. We see that especially in the story of the lost son.

There are other things in today's gospel that prepare the way for Jesus' own death and resurrection. It is after three days that Jesus is found in the temple. Jesus rose on the third day. The question he puts to his parents, "Why were you looking for me?" is very much like the question the angel asked the women when they were

searching for the body of Jesus when he had already risen. Jesus goes on to ask Mary and Joseph, "Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?" This is a moment when God's divine plan for his Son breaks into the ordinary human life that Jesus had been living with his parents in Nazareth. Something of what God was calling him to be is revealed. Jesus would spend much in his adult life sitting in the temple among the doctors of the Law listening to them and asking them questions.

This divine intrusion into the family life of Jesus Mary and Joseph can say quite a bit to us. The God who revealed something of his plan for Jesus speaks to every family about his plans for the children they nurture. When God entrusts a child to the care of his or her parents, he commissions them to speak and act in his name. The love and care that a child receives in their family is an expression of the love and care that God has for them. It is God's plan that each one of us comes to know who God is through the love that we receive in our families. In our imperfect world that sometimes doesn't happen in the way God plans it. God needs to use other people and other ways to allow us to experience his love more fully.

The Holy Family of Nazareth can be taken as a model for any family who looks closely at them. The gospels

don't give us much detail about how they lived their lives. But the few episodes that Luke and Matthew present to us can give us much to think about. Today we notice that they were devoutly religious people. They made the effort to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the feast of the Passover. By the age of twelve Jesus must have been well schooled in his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. Mary and Joseph would have played a big part in making him familiar with the Scriptures and teaching him about his Jewish faith. They would have been the ones who taught him how to pray.

Sometimes parents today forget how much they can teach their children about the God that they know so well. Sometimes parents feel insecure about handing on their faith to their children. Speaking about our faith in a secular world can be difficult for any of us. Speaking to our children or grandchildren about who Jesus is for us can be a very beautiful thing to do. Explaining why we do things such as praying or coming to Mass or being a St. Vinnie's volunteer, is a good way to start. Being ready to answer any of our children's questions can test us, but it is well worth while. Children bring to our attention things that we might have forgotten. They often cause us to think again about what we do and why we do it as people of faith.

Of course, talking about our faith is not the first thing that we do. It is how we live our lives as people of faith that speaks most clearly about our relationship with God to our children and others. Our concern for what is just can speak to others about the just God that we believe in. Our generosity invites others to discover the generosity of God. Calling our family to give thanks before a meal can say quite a lot about our understanding of how God provides for us. Allowing our children to hear how we pray can reveal to them something very beautiful about our relationship with God.

The last part of our gospel today is a little summary of how God was at work in the family of Nazareth. We are told that Jesus lived under the authority of Mary and Joseph. Mary his mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and people.

Like Mary we can ponder upon what happens in our families and store up in our hearts all the good things that God has done there. Like Mary there will be things that we do not understand so well. But we trust that God is there even in those things. Today we can give thanks to God for the authority that we have been given to create a home where our children have increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and with others.