

The Holy Family, Year C

GOSPEL

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Every year the parents of Jesus used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When they were on their way home after the feast, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was with the caravan, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere.

Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. 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.'

'Why were you looking for me?' he replied. 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' But they did not understand what he meant.

He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority.

His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.

(Luke 2:41-52)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Passover was one of the three Jewish feasts that needed to be celebrated in Jerusalem at the temple if at all possible. It was common that many people from a town, or an extended family, would travel together to Jerusalem for Passover, mostly for reasons of safety on the road.
- This text demonstrates yet again that Mary and Joseph were devout and pious Jews who observed all the rituals and customs of Judaism.
- This is the only scene focusing on the boyhood of Jesus in any of the gospels. Luke includes it to highlight one of his central motifs: Jesus' later journey to Jerusalem to the cross—the new Passover.

EXPLORING THE WORD

It is highly likely that Jesus had been to Jerusalem many times before with his parents, but at the age of twelve, his experience is deepened significantly. The timing of his listening and questioning may have had to do with the normal education in the Jewish faith that he would have been receiving as part of the preparation for his 'bar mitzvah' at age thirteen. At thirteen, a Jewish boy becomes 'bar mitzvah'—a 'son of the law'—which means that henceforth, he must observe all the dietary and religious laws of Judaism.

This is the final episode in Luke's story of the birth and childhood of Jesus, and it is Jesus himself who announces the project for the remainder of the gospel: he will be 'busy with my Father's affairs'.

The natural responses of Mary and Joseph—consternation, anxiety, fear and confusion—cause them to ask in admonishment, 'Why have you done this to us?' But Jesus, in his confident response, shifts the discussion to another level—the will of his heavenly Father.

- Have you ever needlessly worried about something?
- What part has worry, confusion or misunderstanding played in your own journey to faith?
- Can you now answer confidently that you are focused on 'your Father's affairs'?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Try to imagine the anxiety and fear that Mary and Joseph would have felt at being unable to find their son for three whole days!
- How has your family reacted to your decision to be 'busy with my Father's affairs'?
- Have you ever learnt a valuable lesson from a child?
- This week, take a note of all the questions you would like to ask about your new life of faith. Ask them next week.
- Reflect on your own experience of family life. Can you discern ways in which you came to experience God's love in your family? In what ways is the love of God for all his children reflected in the love shared by family members? Share your reflections.
- Use the responsorial psalm as your prayer this week.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
Lord, God of hosts.
My soul is longing and yearning,
is yearning for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my soul ring out their joy
to God, the living God.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

This special feast is always celebrated on the first Sunday after Christmas Day. The feast of the Holy Family is a relatively new one in the Church's calendar, having only been introduced in 1920, although devotion to the family of Jesus has a longer history. While this feast day provides us with an opportunity to reflect on human families and their importance for our growth and nurturing, that is not its only strength. Coming as it does within the Christmas cycle, it is an opportunity to continue reflecting on the reality of God's incarnation in the human story. Jesus was born into a human family, all the members of which are models of steadfast and committed service to God. We are not only members of our human family but also members of God's family, and this brings responsibilities with it.

- What responsibilities come with belonging to our human family?
- What responsibilities come with belonging to God's family?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Despite the worry that he caused them in this episode, Jesus returns to Galilee to live in obedience to Mary and Joseph, just as he was obedient to his heavenly Father. This episode shows that even at an early age, Jesus is focused on the will of the one who sent him and on his search to know God completely.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- In what ways does your community celebrate families or provide opportunities for families to grow in faith together? Can catechumens become involved in these?
- You could invite participants to bring photographs of their family as a focus for prayer. Pray for your own family and especially for families who are struggling with conflict. A suitable song could be 'This is my will' (GA 465). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in the RCIA at §94F.

NOTES

A vertical column of 30 horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.