

HOLY FAMILY C/2006

Today we are celebrating one of the most precious gifts God has given us, that is, the gift of life through the existence of our families. As the readings of this feast suggest, we want to meditate on the reality of family in the company, and in the paths, of Hannah, Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

From the outset, it is better to recognize, before the Almighty God who has created the human family, this simple and yet true reality that we are not our own origin and master. Our life as well as our history, is but a gift from God. We are ourselves as well as our children but God's gift. Everything we are in this world, and anything we have in this world, comes from God, as a gift and grace.

The recognition of this fact, and the awareness that life in all its forms is God's gift, should lead the human family to be a pilgrimage in faith and a place of thanksgiving. Elkanah and his wife have understood that as Hannah brings her son, Samuel, in the temple to consecrate him to the Lord. This is also true for Mary, Joseph as they bring Jesus to Jerusalem for the annual pilgrimage and the day of prayer.

To understand the gesture of Hannah and her husband, we have to bear in mind that it was at the moment when the couple was barren that God visited them and gave them a child. What a wonderful way, for Hannah, to be thankful to God than to let Samuel serve the Lord in his temple and become his servant. More than a simple obedience to the law of Moses that recommended the first born to be consecrated to the Lord, there is a personal act of faith and the witness to the truth that the giver of gift, God, is worthy of receiving what is the most precious in the world to somebody, like a unique child.

In the same way, Mary and Joseph, by taking Jesus to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage, witness their attachment and faithfulness to the tradition they pass on to their child. But, at the same time, they realize that the child has to take his own way, independently of what they would expect. Thus, when, anxious and worried, they find Jesus in the temple, they are surprised to hear him saying that he should be at the business of his Father.

The Gospel of this Sunday has for us a strong message. First, it teaches us that parents have the responsibility and the obligation to introduce their children to the fullness of life including spiritual life, so that in the future they become good citizens in society, and good Christians in the Church.

However, to recognize that children are God's gift means also that they belong primarily to God and not to their parents. That is why the parents should recognize the freedom of their children and help them make good choices for the future, including the choice for religious consecration. This means, in other words, that it is in God's plan that children grow up, become adults and decide on their own about their lives and, even take some distance from their parents. To respect the choice of children is to respect their identity and to let them be what God wants them to be. I am not talking here about the relativism of our culture that confuses virtue and vice, and takes counter-values as legitimate values.

We should not forget, in the other hand, that there is no better teaching than the example we give. Who can give to others what he does not possess? How can parents give good education to their children, including Christian education, if they do not live what they teach? It seems to me that the wisdom and age and grace in which Jesus advanced were received first in his own home, before they were reinforced through the interaction with public milieu and scholars in society.

By recalling this fact, it is not my intention to blame parents, as though they do not do enough for their children. As a teacher and an educator, I know the many difficulties parents have nowadays for the education of their children, especially with regard to the evolution of our culture. I know the suffering many of them experience to see their children taking a way that is totally the opposite of what they have received as education in family.

My intention, however, is to bring to our awareness the fact that the more these challenges are burning, the more we have to offer our children in a continual prayer before the Lord so that he may guide them in the right paths of life. We should keep hoping for the days of grace and visitation from the Lord. Any prayer offered in the name of Jesus will never remain unanswered forever. May the example of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, helps us persevere in prayer for our children.

A family that strives to live its commitment faithfully and lovingly is always a strong shelter for the children. A couple that strives to live faithfully its vows by placing Jesus at the center of its life and in spite of possible problems and conflicts, is able to cross the storm the head above of the waters.

Let me finish by reminding you that the institution of marriage, and thereby, the family is in crisis. The first sign of that crisis is the divorce, and the first victims are the children. How can we make our families stable? I continue to believe that a family whose life is based on a sincere faith and practice of the word of Jesus is able to resist the temptation of minimal effort and least resistance that is characteristic of our time and culture. Without fleeing conflicts, which are inevitable, it can become strong, like Mary and Joseph, and have the interior force and wisdom that help support and live the reality of family otherwise.

May the celebration of Holy family bring us to pray for the unity of our families! May the blessed parents intercede for the children whose parents are separated! May parents find joy in the realization of the project of life of their children! May God touch today the hearts of all the children who have abandoned their parents and do not care about them! May God bless you all!



Homily Date: December 31, 2006

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Document Name: 20061231homily.pdf