

## **Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph C/2012**

The readings of this feast of the Holy Family reflect on the reality of family and its demands in the light of the Family of Nazareth. They invite us to situate our families in the context of our culture and look for God's wisdom in order to manage them.

The first reading tells us the story of the birth of Samuel and what his parents did in order to fulfill their obligations toward God. It shows also that Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, willingly gave their son to the service of the temple according to the promise the mother made when she was pregnant.

What is behind this text is the idea that God answers the prayers of those who call upon him in their distress. Whoever prays to him can receive, because nothing is impossible to him. In that perspective, children are God's gifts and blessings. Because it is so, to let children serve God is not only an honor for parents, but also a glory for God.

This text allows us to understand today's Gospel as it talks about the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. First of all, the Gospel says that each year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. According to their custom, they did it again when Jesus was twelve.

But this time, an incident happened to them, because they lost the young Jesus on their way back. Although they thought he was with relatives and acquaintances, they realized that he was not. After three days as they returned to Jerusalem, they found him in the temple among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

All who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. His parents were astonished, too. They asked him why he did that to them by leaving them with so much anxiety. In his answer, Jesus questioned the reason why they were looking for him while he should be at the house of his Father.

But, his parents did not understand what he said to them. Even so, he returned with them to Nazareth and he was obedient to them. As he was growing up, Jesus advanced in wisdom and favor before God and man. His mother, for her part, kept all these things in her heart.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to single out is the sense of responsibility. In fact, when I baptize children, I often ask those who are parents for the first time what they feel. Most of the time, they say that they feel a tremendous responsibility toward that little baby they have to protect and to care for.

I believe that they are right; but the truth is that as the small one is growing up, the responsibility diminishes, as other priorities take precedence in the life of parents. As a consequence, children are left alone, with so many things to deal with, without guidance. That is how many find themselves in crimes, drugs or similar things.

I will never forget this young man who killed himself because he had the impression that his parents did not need him, that he was a burden to them as he prevented them to have their tranquil life. I will never forget the story of this young boy who asked the father how much money he earned for one hour of work. As the father said twenty dollars, he asked him to lend him ten dollars. As he did, he added ten more and gave to his father in order to buy one hour of his time to spend with him.

I do not tell this story, because it is amusing; but rather because it makes one think about the responsibility of being a parent. Moreover, I am not minimizing the complexity of the situation of parenting and the difficulties due to the evolution of our culture. What I want to say is just that when we look at Joseph and Mary dealing with their own family and their own crisis, like in the loss of Jesus in the temple, one can find some markers that can help found a strong and spiritual family.

The second thing I want to highlight is the difficulty of parenting. In fact, to be a parent is a very difficult task. The context in which we live, as well as the culture that surrounds us, does not make things easier. By human experience, we know that the good will of parents to raise the children according to God's standards is not enough. Sometimes, children do just the opposite of what their parents want for them.

Today, I have to sincerely congratulate parents for all they do for the good of their children, namely their sacrifice, their patience and endurance, etc. I also encourage them not be discouraged when they have the impression that they have worked so hard in vain as their children turn away from the right path they taught them. Never regret the good you have done for them; it will one day bear fruit.

Give the best of yourselves to your task of parenting by being close to your children physically and emotionally. Even if they criticize you now, a day will come when they will appreciate the work you have done for them.

Because we live in a dangerous world and difficult times, do not forget to pray every day for your children, even if they now have their own family. Take for example St Monica, the mother of St Augustine, who spent the whole of her life praying for the conversion of her son. After many years of disordered life, St Augustine converted and even became a priest and bishop.

Finally, teach more by the example of your own life than by the simple words. Do not forget that what counts is not what one says, but what one does. A family that strives to live its Christian commitment faithfully is a strong shelter for the children. A couple that strives to faithfully live its vows by placing Jesus at the center of its life, in spite of possible crisis, is able to cross the storms of life with the head above of the waters.

Remember that nobody can give to others what he does not possess. If as parents you do not live what you say and teach, your impact on your children might turn negative. The wisdom and age and grace in which Jesus advanced when he was young was received first in the home of his parents. In that sense, the home is the beginning of good grace someone can receive in his or her life. Let us pray for the unity of our families. Let us pray in particular for the children whose parents are separated. Let us pray for all parents abandoned by their children. May God bless you all!

**1 Samuel 1: 20-22, 24-28; 1 John 3: 1-2, 21-24; Luke 2: 41-52**



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