

Feast of the Holy Family C/2018

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 time, but by looking for God's wisdom in order to manage them.

The first reading tells the story of the birth of Samuel and the action of his parents in fulfilling their obligations toward God. It also shows the generosity of Samuel's parents in offering their son for the service of the temple according to his mother's promise.

What is behind this text is the idea that God answers the prayers of those who call upon him in their distress. Another idea is that children are God's gifts and blessings. The last idea is related to the truth that parents have a big influence for the future of their children.

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 states that each year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.

Then, it reports an incident that happened to them, as they lost Jesus among the pilgrims on their way back home. After that, the Gospel reports on his recovery as they found him in the temple among the teachers of the Law.

The Gospel speaks also of the reaction of the people who were astonished by Jesus' intelligence and of his parents who were complaining that he stayed in Jerusalem without warning them. The Gospel finishes by mentioning the growth of Jesus in wisdom and his return to Nazareth with his parents.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the chance of a family grounded in God. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, the Gospel of this feast states that while Mary and Joseph were returning home after the pilgrimage, their boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem without having told them anything to the point that they were concerned and were looking for him.

I believe that any parent in such a situation would be concerned not only for the safety of the teen, but also at the idea of being separated from one's child without knowing where he is. I believe also that such a situation can be identified as a moment of crisis for both parents and the child.

I call it a moment of crisis because anytime that children cut any link with their parents and want to affirm their independence vis-à-vis them, they create a little bit of headache for their parents. In such conditions, the parents wonder how to handle such crisis without too much damage for their relationship with their children and for their good.

To me, all that is just an iceberg that hides many problems that parents battle on a daily basis in their family with regard to their children and themselves. Those problems are made difficult today by the ambiguous context of our culture in which there is a continual confrontation between the values of society and the Christian values learned from family.

There is no doubt that our society is built on success. Any parent wants to succeed in his undertakings in order to assure a decent life for his family. For that reason, many parents are very busy and run after many things. Their schedule is so busy that it does not always leave them a lot of time to spend with their children or to know deeply of their problems. But, at the same time, the question of God becomes secondary in their family life, if not a simple matter of Sunday practice, as the whole focus is on work.

It seems to me that the solution to the crisis of family would come from the re-thinking of the model of work based on success at all cost and the deliberate choice of making God the center of the family life. I am inspired here by the example of Mary and Joseph who looked at their own a child as a gift from God and kept him in perpetual contact with God by bringing him regularly to the temple.

At the same time, it means that parents have to learn how to create some break in their job so that they give their time to their children and to God as well. The obsession for success kills the harmony of family and makes the question of God marginal.

I certainly know that it is not by bad faith that parents give more time to their job than to their family. I certainly know that many parents live in fear of what the economy could be tomorrow, the uncertainty of what the medical cost would be if by any chance they get seriously ill, or the concern for the future if their financial resources would meet their needs.

Humanly speaking, those fears and concerns are legitimate. However, we have to face those problems not only with human intelligence, but also with God's wisdom. The Psalm 127 says: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch. It is in vain for you to rise early and put off your rest at night, to eat bread earned by hard toil - all this God gives to his beloved in sleep".

That is why I think that parents have to put God at the center of their family life. They need to have a vision of hope even in the middle of difficulties. As human experience has taught us, every night as long as it might be has always a dawn. If things are tough today, it does not mean necessarily that tomorrow, they will be the same. Parents need to be patient, courageous, trusting in God and believing in the potential they have to resolve the crises crossing their family life.

Because we live in a very dangerous world and in difficult times, parents, I invite you to pray every day for your children. Even if they already have their own families or they have rejected the faith you taught them in their young age, please pray for them. Do not forget the example of 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.

Remember that the wisdom and age and grace in which Jesus advanced when he was young, was received first in the home of his own parents. In that sense, the home is the first school of the initiation to the things of God. Parents who strive to live their Christian commitment faithfully are a strong shelter for their 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 the waters.

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 Juan 3: 1-2, 21-24; Luke 2: 41-52



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