

Father O'Connor's Homily for 29 December 2024
Feast of the Holy Family-C

1 Samuel 1: 20-22, 24-28

1 John 3: 1-2, 21-24

Luke 2: 41-52

There are certain things that have happened to all of us that are stored in our minds and hearts. Today's Gospel passage concluded with this line: "Mary, His mother, kept all these things in her heart."

If you had the chance to interview our Blessed Mother, what questions would you like to ask her?

She would probably want to talk with you about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. She might want to recall the wedding feast in Cana where Jesus turned water into wine. She would certainly wish to reflect upon His crucifixion and His resurrection. And, very likely, she would bring up today's Gospel because it says that she "kept all these things in her heart."

On this Holy Family Sunday, it is good for us to realize that even in the family life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph there could be tensions and misunderstandings. [And if tensions and misunderstandings happened in their holy lives, why should we think that such things should never occur in our family and extended family lives?]

The Gospel begins by telling us that every year the Holy Family went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. On this pilgrimage, Jesus was twelve years old. When Mary and Joseph were heading back home to Nazareth, Jesus stayed behind – unbeknownst to them. When they realized Jesus was missing, Mary and Joseph left the caravan and spent three days searching for Him.

Now put yourself in their place. How would you feel? And then they found Jesus in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers," the Gospel says.

And Mary was quite understandably upset: "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."

And Jesus replies: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Jesus did not answer in a smart-alecky way. But it was a mysterious answer that Mary and Joseph did not fully understand at the moment. And so Mary "kept all these things in her heart."

The whole scene tells us that even in the Holy Family there were times of tension and misunderstanding. And we see how they handled those circumstances.

Mary did not get into a shouting match with Jesus. But she did make it very clear, as His mother, that she did not appreciate His disappearing act – and that He had better not do that again. Yet she treated Jesus, and Jesus treated her, with respect and with love.

In your own family life, and extended family life, how do you handle tension and misunderstanding? We look to the Holy Family for their prayers and example.

Listen again to today's Opening Prayer: "O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity."

A medical research scientist, who had made several significant discoveries, was asked how he got interested in this field. He responded with something that had happened at home when he was a child and that he kept in his heart all these years. Here is what he said:

When I was a little boy, I went to the refrigerator for a glass of milk. I took hold of that plastic gallon jug, took off its cap, lost my grip and it fell on the floor, splattering milk everywhere.

And then my mother walked into the kitchen. [Put yourself there!] And she said, "Robert, I don't know that I have ever seen such a colossal mess with spilt milk before. But since the damage is already done, would you like to play in it for a couple of minutes?" [Is that something that you might say?]

After I had frolicked in the froth, she said, "Now it's time to clean this up and I would like you to help me. Would you like a mop or a sponge?" I chose the sponge and together we cleaned up the mess.

Then my mother said to me, "Robert, this was kind of a failed experiment in getting that large bottle of milk out of the refrigerator. Let's take that empty container out in the back yard and fill it with water. Then you can practice handling it full so that the next time you go to the refrigerator for a glass of milk, you will be able to do it without having an accident."

That left a lasting impression on him. It told him that he was going to make some mistakes in life, but he could turn those mistakes into power if he learned from them. And it led him to become a research scientist.

“After all,” he remarked, “what is research anyway? You try things and they don’t always turn out the way you think they are going to turn out. Sometimes you clearly make mistakes. But sometimes the unexpected happens that leads you to a real discovery!”

It was a lasting lesson for life that he learned from his mother – and which he kept in his heart – and all over the way she had handled some spilt milk in the kitchen.

How do you handle tensions and misunderstandings in your family life? Like the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph?

A kindergarten teacher noticed that one of her students was having trouble putting on his boots. So she knelt down to help him and had a dickens of a time getting them on. When she finished, he said: “Teacher, you’ve got them on the wrong feet.” And so she had.

So she took them off and put them back on again, and it was still a struggle. Then he said: “Teacher, these aren’t my boots.” So she bit her tongue lest she say what she was thinking, and took the boots off again.

And then the little imp said: “They’re my brother’s boots. My mom couldn’t find mine this morning so she made me wear his because it was snowing outside.” So she put the blasted boots on one more time.

Then she asked: “Now where are your mittens?” And he said: “I didn’t want to lose them so I stuffed them in the toes of these boots.”

Kids, you can drive your parents crazy. And parents, you can drive your kids crazy too – no matter what their age. Why? Because in family life there will always be tensions and misunderstandings. The question is: how do we handle those situations?

We should imitate the Holy Family – with their respect and their love.

And how did today’s Gospel finish? It says: “Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth **and was obedient to them**... And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”

And so should we – as we imitate the Holy Family in our own family circles.

Let us listen again to today’s Opening Prayer – and keep its meaning in our hearts: “O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.”