

Homily on Luke 2:22-40

December 27, 2017

Intro: It is right that we celebrate the Holy Family, but there is precious little in the gospels of their life. Luke 2 and Matt 2 give us fragments and we must fill out the rest as best we can surmise. Today's gospel records an incident immediately after his pious parents had him circumcised, the mark of the Jewish boy.

Luke 2: Mary and Joseph bring him to the temple to offer him to the Lord. Jews of course offered the first fruits of every harvest to God as an act of thanksgiving and dedication to the Lord of the Harvest. But the offering of the first-born male son was especially significant. The first born male was the principal inheritor of the family's goods and its identity. He was the future of the whole family, and so offering him to God so totally that he had to be bought back meant that you were dedicating the whole family to the Lord.

This is the key to the Holy Family: there were totally dedicated to God.

What this will mean is told them by the prophet Simeon. He had been promised that he would not die before he saw the Messiah, and now the Spirit of God leads him to the temple, and when he sees the child Jesus he takes him in his arms and tells God that he can now die, for he has seen the Messiah, "a salvation prepared in view of all nations, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel." It is a recollection of the glorious messiah which the angel Gabriel had promised Mary.

But then what had shadowed the child from his mysterious conception through his birth on the road becomes the shadow of his disruptive ministry and torturous death. He will be destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and will be a sign of contradiction to those who expect a triumphant messiah. Finally, turning to Mary, Simeon prophesies that a sword will pierce her heart. How would you react to such a troubling prophecy?

They return to their home in Nazareth, where the boy Jesus grew up like any other boy in that small village. He played in the streets, he learned to obey his parents with love, he learned Joseph's craft, and he was raised devoutly in the synagogue's practices of his faith. They loved him as their child, and the thoughts of triumphant messiahship faded from their minds--mostly. The Holy Family was a holy Jewish family, and that was the wisdom in which he grew strong.

The Meaning for us:

The way to being a holy family is by loving obedience to the ordinary tasks of everyday life. *For Mary* it was cooking, washing the clothes, cleaning the house, caring for the child, loving attention to her husband, and making everything a prayerful service of her God. In this way she modeled for Jesus what it was to be holy and wise, to be truly human.

For Joseph it was going to work every day, coming home tired and yet caring for his wife and his boy, teaching him his basic skills and taking him to the synagogue on the Sabbath where he could hear the Law and the prophets. And working with him on his prayers. In this way he modeled for Jesus what it was to be holy and wise, to be truly human.

For Jesus it was learning what it was to be a good Jewish boy, learning to be friends with the other kids on the block, learning respect for elders and obedience to his parents, learning the Law and the prophets, and finding God in all that he was and did. In this way he reflected back to them what it was to be holy and wise, to be truly

human.

Look at your day and your week, and you will find the ways to become a holy family after their model.

But we too must look at today's first example of the Holy Family. When you bring your child for baptism, are you offering him or her to the Lord? Do you raise your children to make God the central reason for all that they do---their chores in the house, their studies at school, their growth in friendship with kids whose parents have the same goals? Do they come to their Eucharist each Sunday as an opportunity to surrender to God, and so receive God into their weekly lives?

Have you so surrendered this gift from God as your gift to God? Would you want your children to know the joy of being a priest or a sister, dedicating their lives totally to God? If you do, then all the rest will fall into place in your holy family.

Be their good news.