

Homily on Luke 2:41-52

December 26, 2018

Intro: We are the daughters and sons of God. This is an awesome mystery. But, sadly, in our daily lives we overlook this mystery, and so we begin today's liturgy with an act of sorrow and a request for healing.

Readings:

Luke gives us our only glimpse into the child Jesus. As part of a pious Jewish family he goes with his parents to the annual pilgrimage feast of Passover in Jerusalem. This time he was 12 yrs. old, the time when Jewish boys today celebrate their bar mitvah, becoming a son of the law.

When the Passover feast was over, his parents headed home, thinking the boy was in the Nazareth caravan. At the end of the first day, they looked for him among their relatives and did not find him. So they hurried back to the city, where for three days they frantically searched for him. Finally they found him in a corner of the temple, seated among the teachers of the law, listening to them and asking them questions. They were astounded that he was indeed not just a child of the law but a master of it.

When his parents found him they were astonished, and chagrined. Mary asks him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And they get an astonished answer: "Why were you searching? Didn't you know that I would have to be in my Father's house?" Now Mary and Joseph are astonished by this answer. In effect, Jesus is claiming that God is his father. (Jews know that God is the father of Israel, but God is never considered to be the personal father of any individual Jew.) They don't understand him, because they expected him to be a messiah, but he is claiming to be mysteriously much more than that. They were looking for their son, but they found the Son of God. Mary ponders all these mysterious things about her son, who returns with them to Nazareth and leads the life of a normal child and dutiful son. Mysterious!

Today's second reading, from the first letter of John doubles the mystery: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us, that we may be called the children of God...His commandment is this: we should believe in the identity of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him and he in them..."

The Meaning for us: We Catholics are to believe two things:

First, that Jesus is not just the messiah, but the eternal Son of God, who, with the Father and in the Spirit, created this whole universe. This belief is what makes us Christians. *Second*, we are to believe that when we are baptized into his Body, we are truly beloved children of God.

I often wonder which of these two is the harder to believe. That God became a first-century Jew, one like us in all things but sin, is profoundly mysterious. But that we ourselves, sinners and misfits as we know ourselves to be, are, in Christ, sons and daughters of God who dare to call God "Our Father"---that is also profoundly mysterious. Like Mary, we need to keep pondering each of these mysteries until we see how great is the love the Father has bestowed on us.

When we see and accept that love, when we know that Christ remains in us and we in him, then we will begin to "love one another just as he has commanded us."

Many of our contemporaries think religion is a matter of morality. It isn't. Religion is recognizing the reality of God's love. Religion is not doing God's will; it is falling in love with God. The way to fall in love with God is to believe, more deeply than any of our other knowing, that God became one of us to make us one with God's own self. From that flows the good work of loving the vulnerable, the alien, the enemy. But the belief is always first.

This Christmas ponder this double mystery, and then embrace it. This mystery is the good news of Christmas, the good news of this Eucharist, the good news of you.