

HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH, Year C

“THE OBEDIENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST”

Today’s Gospel gives an account of Jesus when he was just twelve years of age. The family was respecting the religious practices of their day by going on an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Joseph and Mary travelled for an entire day, comfortable with the assumption that Jesus was his relatives in the caravan.

Not finding him at the end of the day, they then spent three days looking for him. Finally, to their astonishment, they found Jesus in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, not only listening to them and asking them questions, as any child might do, but also answering their own questions with great clarity and understanding.

There are three things that strike me about the events described in today’s Gospel:

1. Jesus’s Obedience to His Father’s Will

When Mary gently asked, **‘Son, why have you done this to us?’**, Jesus replied, not with a rebuke, but, rather, an instruction that Joseph and Mary’s parental role must be subordinate to the will of his heavenly Father:ⁱ

‘Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’

Fr. Gabriel of St Mary Magdalen comments on this verse:

‘These are the first words of Jesus which we find recorded in the Gospel. He spoke them in order to declare His mission and to affirm the primacy of the rights of God. When hardly an adolescent, Jesus taught us that God and the things of God must always come first. [God] must hold the first place in our lives, and we must obey Him regardless of all other considerations, even if it means sacrificing the rights of nature and of blood. Yielding to relatives and friends is no longer a virtue - and may even be sinful - if it leads us away from the will of God or hinders its fulfilment.’ⁱⁱ

2. Jesus’s Obedience to Joseph and Mary

Both Joseph and Mary have an important part to play in Jesus’s mission, as shown by his humble submission to their care. We heard in the Gospel:

‘He went ...with them ... to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.’
In obedience to his heavenly Father, Jesus subjected himself to Joseph and Mary! The Son of God subjected himself to mere creatures!

St Bernard of Clairvaux (†1153) reflects on this verse of scripture:

‘Who obeyed? Whom did He obey? God obeyed man! Yes, the God to whom the angels are subject ... was subject to Mary, and not only to Mary, but also to Joseph. For God to obey a woman is humility without parallel ... Learn then, man, to obey; learn, O earth,

to be submissive. God subjected Himself to men; and do you, desiring to rule others, place yourself above your Creator?’ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus is a model of obedience for us. It is in the context of the family that we learn to listen to our parents; we learn to be obedient; we should learn that obedience is a gift, and not a curse.

3. Jesus advanced in wisdom

As the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, Jesus knows all things and is incapable of gaining new knowledge. However, the human development of Jesus was a process of building character and acquiring experiential knowledge that kept pace with his physical and psychological growth. At the end of these developmental stages, Christ’s life as a man was a perfect reflection of his divine Sonship.

The Catechism (n. 472) makes a comment on this:

‘[The] human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge. As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time.’

It was in the context of the family that Jesus Christ learned from very earthly experiences and used these experiences in his own ministry.

Today's feast calls our attention to our obligations to God and to our family. Our obligations to God do not in any way imply that we have license to neglect our duties toward our family of origin.

We are invited to follow the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, in ordering all things to the glory of God. To this end, the Second reading (Col. 3:12-21) shows us the virtues that we should practice:

'Put on ... heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.'

May we look always to imitate the members of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in practicing the virtues of family life and in the exercise of charity!

ⁱ See commentary to Lk 2:49 in the *IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE: NEW TESTAMENT*, 2010, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 111

ⁱⁱ Fr. Gabriel of St Mary Magdalen, *DIVINE INTIMACY*, 1996, TAN Books, and Publishers, Inc., Rockford IL, p. 124

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Bernard of Clairvaux, as quoted in *DIVINE INTIMACY*, p. 124