

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

Feast of the Holy Family

First reading: (Samuel 1.20-22, 24-28)

The Promise of a Son

The stress of these readings is not so much on the domesticity of the Holy Family as on leaving the family in the service of God. This is something which many Christians are called upon to do, though it is often the warmth and love of the early years in the family which enables them to do it.

The birth of Samuel was regarded as a special act of God. The concept of miracle did not yet exist, since there was no concept of 'the laws of nature' which could be observed or broken. Science was not yet sufficiently steady and predictable. Samuel's birth was, however, a special act of God's mercy, since Hannah had long been barren. The child was an answer to prayer. There is therefore a certain similarity to Mary's virginal conception of Jesus.

However the chief emphasis of today's readings is on the presence of the child (Samuel and Jesus) in the Temple as a sign of their entire dedication to God. In Samuel's case he leaves his family because he is presented to the LORD in the Temple by his mother. In the case of Jesus he 'escapes' from his family, and his unique position in the Temple and his unique relationship with his divine Father is acknowledged by his parents.

Question:

How does a family provide the basis for a holy life?

Second reading: (1 John 3.1-2, 21-24)

God's Children

On Holy Family Sunday this lovely reading from the First Letter of John takes its clue from the saying of the child Jesus in the gospel. He is wholly absorbed in his Father, with the total absorption of a 12-year-old, star struck and unaware of anything else in the world. On this relationship of Jesus to his Father depends also our relationship with God our Father. By our faith expressed in baptism, we too are God's children, bathed in his love, pampered by his lavish gifts, and committed to doing whatever pleases him, like young children with any loving father. Furthermore, it is repeatedly stressed in this letter that the vertical relationship of love to the Father has its equivalent in a horizontal relationship to our brothers and sisters around us: we cannot claim to love our heavenly Father, whom we cannot see, unless we love the members of our family whom we can see. On a human level it is important for our understanding of Jesus that we should realise that Jesus' concept of love, of family, of fatherhood was founded on the pure, generous and unstinting love of his human parents. It was the love of Mary and Joseph that taught the child Jesus what a fully loving relationship was.

Question:

How can human love enrich our concept of God's love?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

Gospel:

(Luke 2.41-52)

The Child Jesus in the Temple

This little incident, the only one told of Jesus' youth, has two attractive lessons for us. First, it is a joy to see Jesus behaving just like any other 12-year-old. He was a real child, and a child of that age goes off exploring, adventuring, sure that the all-powerful, all-knowing parents will know where he or she has gone. Parents meanwhile worry themselves sick at the unexplained disappearance. Mary, the young mother, knows her son and the ways of the 12-year-old. She does not scold or expostulate, but just accepts him with love and relief.

Second, Jesus' reply gives us a glimpse of his relationship to the Father. Whether the correct translation is 'in my Father's house' or 'on my Father's business' matters little. Just as his questions to the teachers showed his wisdom, no doubt as yet unsharpened, so his reply to Mary shows his total absorption with his Father, inarticulate also. Jesus' human mind needed to develop and become fully articulate. Even he needed to go on learning and clarifying to himself who and what he was. We learn only gradually who and what we are. A child's development - even a divine child's development - is not to be rushed.

Question:

Am I content to await God's good time?
