

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Feast of the Holy Family

First reading: (Ecclesiasticus 3.2-6, 12-14) *Honour Your Father and Your Mother*

The Book of Ecclesiasticus is a collection of wise instructions on how to behave in accordance with the Law.

The author must have been an expert in the Law, living in Jerusalem. He sees the Law not as a tiresome set of rules to be obeyed, but as God's loving gift to his people, to show them how they should act to keep close to God. It is therefore to be treasured, a guide of inestimable value.

The reading for today is a meditation and expansion on the commandment, 'Honour your father and your mother', explaining just how this should be put into practice.

What was Jesus like as a baby? Did he cry? He must have done, to make his baby feelings known. Did he bawl and howl? Did he cry when he scraped the skin of his knees? Did he fall out of trees and break his arm? Did he make mistakes? Did he play pranks? He must have made jokes. He must have been a wonderful joy to his parents, loving, delightful company, full of the devastatingly simple wisdom of children. And they must have been loving, wonderful company for him, too, an anchor of affection and security.

Question:

How to honour father and mother in later life - or to honour children?

Second reading: (Colossians 3.12-21) *The Overcoat of Love*

In an incredibly short space, the Letter to the Colossians gives a whole series of instructions on living in community: compassion, forgiveness, love and peace - not to mention gratitude. Love is a sort of overcoat, holding all the other qualities together. If we reflect on these and put them into practice, there can be no rivalry or hostility in the Christian community - even within a family, where the strains of Christmas often make love grow thin.

However, a loving family is the model for the different relationships of a loving Christian community. God's fatherhood and motherhood is the model for human parentage, and Christ's devotion to his body the Church is the model for the devotion of spouses to one another.

The reading begins with an inspiring reminder that we form the Chosen People of God; God's choice leaves us little alternative to the attempt to behave as God's people. The paragraph ends with the counsel to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus; Christians are those over whom the name of the Lord Jesus has been called, making us members of his company and putting us under his power. This is the challenge really to act as God's people.

Question:

Is it really possible to regard the Christian community as a family?

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Gospel: (Luke: 2.22-40)

The Presentation in the Temple

The story of the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple is dominated by Simeon's welcome, 'a light to enlighten the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel', and by his warning to Mary, 'a sword will pierce your heart'. Simeon reiterates the angel's promise that the child would fulfil the destiny of Israel and Israel's task to the nations.

Much like in any family life, the promised future included the delights of the growing, developing child, and the background fear that the great destiny of each child may include sorrow and even heartbreak.

How much did Mary and Joseph know about the precious child they were nurturing? As he grew to independence, did he become more loving and supportive? How did his contemporaries find him? Was he a leader? Did he stand out from the pack?

Each of us has a private picture of the child, the boy, the adolescent, the young man. All we know for sure is that 'the child grew to maturity' and that Mary 'pondered all these things in her heart', with Simeon's welcome and warning before her mind.

Question:

What would Mary have felt and thought as she went home from the Temple?