

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
December 26, 2021
Reflection by Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB
Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-17 1:1-18; Luke 2:41-52

Happy day after Christmas, a Sunday, the feast of the Holy Family and in other years would be the feast of Stephen.

Having grown up as a child of the Christian Family Movement with its introductory guide entitled “For Happier Families”, I might have chosen to talk about family today as will probably be done in most parishes today. I even found a good entry to that topic which I will share:

Some researchers set out to find the town which had the lowest incidence of cancer in the country one year. They expected to find a population that was non-smoking, ate in a healthy way, exercised often etc. Instead, they found the one common trait in the town was the quality of family life people experienced.

I did not choose to go that route!

Instead, I was moved to reflect once again on the theme of searching, of seeking...

- Beginning with Mary and Joseph seeking Jesus for three days and finding him in the place they had just left - in the temple,
- And moving to Jesus, on the brink of adulthood, seeking the meaning of his own life,
- And ending with our own call to seek...

Know this story is part of the Lucan infancy narratives whose historicity is questioned by some, I am nevertheless going to take it as Luke tells it and probe a bit into the reactions therein as it might relate to our own lives.

Luke is the only evangelist who tells this story. It ends his infancy narrative in the temple as that narrative began there with Zechariah.

The story Luke records is of a faithful Jewish family traveling to Jerusalem to fulfill their part in a sacred tradition – the men journeying apart from the women and children going in between the groups. Their son “was not where they expected”. So, they set out, probably a bit frantic, on a search for three days and found him where they did not expect to find him.

Searches often go that way and what is being sought is found in an unusual place or not found at all. Their search ended with the family being reunited and returning home together. That is the narrative!

On another level, Mary feels a pang as she realizes, according to Luke, that neither she nor Joseph really understand this child who in one year will be considered an adult eligible for the rite of passage (Bar Mitzvah) that will symbolize that stage in his life.

Perhaps she realized that her little one was beginning to move on. In pain and in loss sometimes we recognize a truth and yet realize that we don't quite grasp it totally.

Many parents probably resonate with the loss and parental confusion she is experiencing in this adolescent child of hers who seems now different from what she expected.

Another element of search in this story lies in Jesus' own decision to stay in Jerusalem. Here is a boy becoming a man. Perhaps this trip to the feast seemed different for him and he decided to stay behind in the temple. Perhaps he was intrigued with what he heard from these learned men.

Luke says the Jesus was "listening to them and asking them questions." He was learning from these seasoned men. Apparently, he gave some answers too, for "they were amazed at his understanding". Imagine what those temple men thought and what they might have wanted to ask these parents about their son.

Adolescence can be a time of confusion and a time of breaking away from parents as one experiences new things in life.

Imagine the moment when Mary confronted him. He responds quickly. Then, apparently, he thought about what he heard in her voice for he went home to Nazareth with them, and he grew in wisdom and age.

In so doing, he and they could be seen to have some of the qualities that Paul urges the Colossians to have in the second reading – kindness, humility, gentleness, patience.

So what's in this story of search for us today?

As Mary and Joseph, we seek and find the Divine

- sometimes in panic, as they,

- Sometimes it is in the place where our journey began (as the temple was in this story),
- Or in the institutional setting (as the religious leaders in the temple circle),
- Or sometimes in silence,
- In a crowd,
- In a conversation,
- In a liturgical service,
- Or in just being.....

Often, we get a new insight to the presence of God in places or in people where we do not expect it.

We, as Jesus, continue to look for who we really are meant to be in God's eyes and for who God really is.

Our efforts to seek God are daily.

One verse that I received from a friend this Christmas seems a fitting way to end:

May the child discover for you the infinite horizon of his call!

Stop, where are you running to?

Heaven is within you and to seek God elsewhere is to miss God always. (from Angelus Slesius)