

Holy Family Sunday
December 26, 2021/ Cathedral of Saint Paul
Sirach 3: 2-6,12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52

It is fitting that the Feast of the Holy Family is situated within the great season of Christmas. Many of us have been spending more time than is typical with our family and relatives. It is a great benefit of the season. It is equally true that for our families to remain united in Christian charity, we need more than nice dinners and an exchange of gifts. Family life forms the heart of the Church– it is incomprehensible without families.

Jewish Law prescribed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on three major feasts, though custom excused those who lived at a distance from all but the Passover pilgrimage. It was not uncommon for entire families to journey together, so it is not at all unlikely that Jesus was walking for a time with other members of his village. Mary and Joseph had no reason to assume that anything was amiss. Suddenly, they realize he is not traveling with the crowd, and they became extremely worried.

One of my earliest memories occurred when I was in pre-school. Owing to my insistence that my brother was walking me home, I passed on the carpool! And waited and waited for a brother who never came. Due to the kindness of two teenage girls, I managed to recall my phone number and was brought safely home, but only after an ice cream cone at Bridgeman's!

I imagine my mother was worried, for it is a parent's worst nightmare to lose sight of a child. Upon finding Jesus, Mary must have been filled with a mixture of emotions—joy, relief and perhaps a measure of frustration.

Understandably, Mary wrestled with the implications of her motherhood, as well as how the life of Jesus would unfold. Scripture indicates that she pondered on these things in her heart, and it seems quite reasonable that this occurred over time. Today's episode is one such example. Still, Mary's lack of understanding of the mission of her son reveals no weakness; is an example of the unfathomable depths of God's Providence.

It is beyond our human capabilities to comprehend, and we are left to bow before the mystery in awe and reverence, much as we bow before the crèche in silent adoration.

We pray for peace and tranquility in our families, or if necessary, we begin by praying for healing. Some families demonstrate heroic virtue in accepting particular crosses and challenges. Others feel at times or even in large part that the crosses have been too heavy and burdensome, and feel crushed by their inability to bear them in faith and trust.

To these families, the Church's promise of prayers and support must be heard and proclaimed. Your witness is tremendously edifying to those of us who have answered the call to a religious vocation, for our own vocations were borne from loving families, imperfect as we may all be.

May children be able to see the love of their parents, not just when they are showered with gifts, but more importantly when they are showered with questions, including those that begin with "why, where, when, with whom?" That is deep down a sign of love and concern.

May parents be able to discern when their own motivations in regards to their children are pure and when they may be clouded by unrealistic or unnecessary expectations.

Most of all let all these challenges be subordinated under the banner and headship of Jesus Christ, who is himself the head of all households. Any human authority is derivative from Christ's headship within the family.

In honoring Jesus, Mary and Joseph today, we also honor all those who strive in their own families to emulate their example. May God's grace always be close at hand for each of you on this great feast.