

SERMON AT BRUNSWICK: 31/12/2000: GEOFF CHADWICK: LK 2:41-52:

“THE HOLY FAMILY”

Traditionally, today, the first Sunday after Christmas is the feast of the Holy Family. So just when you thought you’ve done all the banqueting, there’s yet another feast on! This feast of the Holy Family is today because we hear in the readings the only hints we have of Jesus’ early life, Nowhere else except in today’s little portion of Luke’s gospel do we hear of the boy Jesus. Luke, of course, describes an ideal picture of what the holy family should be like. Joseph and Mary continue their faithfulness of the early years and take Jesus on pilgrimage to the temple at the age of 12. This is still a part of the rites of faithful Jews today where their boys become men at their *bar mitzvah*.

So we have a story of Jesus becoming a man and what a torrid time it is!

- Firstly, his faithful parents lose him.
- Secondly, the relatives on faithful pilgrimage also lose him.
- Thirdly, when he is found Jesus “answers back” to his parents: “Why were you searching for me?”
- Fourthly, Jesus snubs his earthly Father for his heavenly Father “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Interestingly, this is the first reference to God as Jesus’ father in Lk’s gospel. Up until this point Joseph is referred to as Jesus’ Father).
- Fifthly, the parents don’t understand the child. “But they did not understand what he said to them.”

Somehow, when we think of the Holy Family we think of perfection. We have this naive Christmas Card view of what Jesus' earthly family must have been like. Somehow we equate the perfect humanity of Jesus to mean that he was never a "naughty boy". Well, the biblical story says otherwise. At least in today's Gospel reading the view we have is one of reality. We discover a boy soon to become teenager being lost, not only from his parent's view, but also from their understanding. Teenagers and teenagers' parents losing each other seems to be pretty normal to me! Even more interestingly, Luke writes the story in such a way that the teenager is the hero and the parents are the "dumbos". (So here is one victory to the adolescents of the world at least!) Jesus is in control, Jesus has knowledge greater than the teachers or scholars in temple, and Jesus invokes a higher authority (ie God hid father).

I take great pleasure in noting that the scriptural view of the holy family is a little more "gritty" than the "sugar sweet, Christmas Card" view. I take pleasure in this because most families have a bit of "grittiness". All families in there own sort of way suffer from the same sorts of issues confronting Mary, Joseph and Jesus in today's passage.

- Name any family where devoted and faithful parents don't "lose" their child.
- Or where, the relatives completely understand the perplexities and failings of their fellow family members.
- Or where a child doesn't not "answers back" their his parents: (At least once)“
- Or where a child has never "disowned" their parents
- Or where the parents just don't understand their child.

Families are full of this sort of grittiness. Of course every family is different, but I believe every family has some anxious situations to deal with in its pilgrimage. Indeed family life gives us much material to “ponder in our hearts.”

- Faithful parents who may lose their children from time to time.
- Relatives who fail to see the plight of others.
- Children who “answers back”.
- Snubbers
- And those who don’t comprehend

Now I would be so bold to suggest that church “families” also suffer from these “anxieties” from time to time. This however does not mean disaster. It simply means that we are real families dealing with the realities of life. We make our pilgrimage in faithfulness not knowing what surprises might meet us on the way.

Now this might sound a bit negative but there is a glimmer of hope. After all the anxious moments during the pilgrimage to the temple “His mother [Mary] treasured all these things in her heart.” (Lk 2”51, NRSV). In the midst of it all-and in hindsight- families bring us treasures. Even the grit of family life, in time can be polished into treasured gems.

May this church family be such as this- a place of treasuring (or as in another translation “pondering”). A place where our pilgrimage towards God as family will bring us ever closer to our Father’s business. A place where faithful parents, developing children, those learned in the things of faith and those searching for the Christ may find amazement. A place where all grit becomes treasure.

The Lord be with you

And also with you.