

HOMILY – FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

“There’s No Place Like Home”

(1 Samuel 1:11, 20-22, 24-28; Psalm 84; 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24; Luke 2:41-52)

Did you notice something about the carols and songs that are played on the radio at Christmas time? Many of these songs speak of going home, being at home, being reunited with a loved one, being somewhere where we belong.

To be really at home, believe in Jesus and live in love.

The gospel today about the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple has resonated with parents and children for ages – perhaps because it is so real and universal. Jesus seems to “get lost” in the Temple, only to return with his puzzled and concerned parents to grow in age, wisdom and grace. This speaks to all families. How many parents have not had to try to figure out their children, and how many children have not had to struggle to understand and obey their parents?

Ultimately, this is a story about being at home with our God. It is a story of faith in God who is love. To a lesser degree, it is a story about our faith in each other, and about our love for one another - and what better place to learn to love than in our family? To love is the ultimate challenge of our human existence.

To love another human being is to learn how to be close, and how to respect distance. Listen to these words by Rainer Maria Rilke’s in *Letters to a Young Poet*. They reflect the dynamics that take place in our own relationships with family and friends. And they reflect what is happening in the gospel story.

“For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparatory. Loving does not at first mean merging, surrendering, and uniting with another person – it is high inducement for the individual to ripen. Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest people infinite distances exist, a marvellous living side-by-side can grow up for them, if they succeed in loving the expanse between them, which gives them the possibility of always seeing each other as a whole and before an immense sky.”

Is this not what is happening in the gospel story? Look at the dynamic between Jesus and his parents:

“Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”

“Why were you searching for me? Did you now know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

‘He was obedient to them – his mother treasured all these things in her heart ... Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.’

His family for Jesus was not just his home, but also his prelude to his eternal home, with the Father. And so it must be for us. Home is where we prepare for life in our real, eternal home. Our faith is in eternal life with the heavenly family of the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But to experience that home, we must learn to live in love in our present human families.

It is in our families that we are meant to experience an unconditional love that will give us a sense of security, belonging, peace, order and finally, a sense of mature, free, happy human wellness.

It is in our families that our deepest human needs to be loved, to belong and to be valued should be met. The best way to make sure that those needs are met is to keep the great commandment that Jesus gave us: love God, love each other, and love ourselves.

I was visiting a friend one day when his fifteen year old daughter returned home from a soccer tournament in Prince Albert. She burst into the house, dropped her bags, sat on her dad's lap and threw her arm around his neck. She then snuggled up to him, leaned her head against his, and just stayed there for a few minutes, soaking up his presence. Then without a word she got up and left.

I was deeply moved and dumb-struck, while he just carried on his conversation as if nothing unusual had happened. The other kids continued about their play, and his wife continued cooking supper. It dawned on me that this was normal for this family, and deep in my spirit I gained strength and hope from this experience. Would that this could be said of all our families! Would that this could be said of my own family when I grew up! What a powerful example of a strong family united in love.

This is a family that reflects what God is like. What I saw was a father and mother in a committed married relationship. The love between them produced their children. And there was lots of love, affection, unity, oneness, intimacy and deep relationship in that family.

That, to me, is an image of God. God is family, Father and Son bonded in an eternal relationship. The bond between them is the Holy Spirit. So God for me is family, relationship, intimacy, unity, and above all, love. And we are given this same Holy Spirit to heal our own families and help them become more like the Holy Family, one in love.

The Eucharist we share today is our family meal, where we gather around the table of the Word and Eucharist, to be fed and nourished as a family, to grow deeper in love with each other, and to be sent out to other families to strengthen them.

So, to be really at home, in our own family, and in God's family, let us place our complete faith in Jesus, and learn to live in love.