

Feast of the Holy Family - C

For those of us who have the habit of praying the rosary, this passage is easily identified as the 5th Joyful Mystery—Finding Jesus in the Temple.

To be honest with you, I'm not sure "joyful" is the proper term for what's going on here. "Relief" seems like the better fit.

When we look closely at the text, there does seem to be a certain amount of tension involved. After all, Mary and Joseph had been looking for Jesus for three days.

Parents, can you imagine the state you would be in if your son or daughter had gone missing for three days? Can you even imagine going to sleep that first night after discovering he wasn't with the group you had been traveling in?

And what was Jesus thinking that first night when he went to bed in Jerusalem? Was he so consumed with the thought of studying the law that he didn't give his parents a second thought?

A relative tells the story of the time they left one of the kids at the rest stop on a trip to Colorado. What a harrowing experience! But at least they had good reason to expect that when they turned around to go get him, he would be there waiting for them. And he was.

Being lost for three days is another story altogether.

And Jesus is blissfully ignorant of the stir he has caused by remaining behind and "being in his Father's house."

When confronted with the anxiety he has caused, he doesn't seem to get it. I suppose we've all encountered 12 year olds who are that clueless when it comes to the larger realities of family life.

What I wonder about is, how did the aftermath of the encounter play out? The passage in Luke says that Jesus "went down with them and ... was obedient to them."

Thank God for that! But did he ever openly acknowledge the pain and suffering he had caused? Did they all just pass over it in silence?

I'd like to think that he did. It would have been an important gesture. It would have gone a long way in restoring the sense of trust necessary for parents to rest easy when their children begin the inevitable task of finding their own way in the world.

Edward Hahnenberg, a parent and a professor of theology at the University of Dayton, reflected recently on the experience of being a parent, and quoted Elizabeth Stone as saying "Making the decision to have a child...is to decide forever to have your

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heart go walking around outside your body.”

From what I’ve learned from parents there’s an undeniable truth to this statement.

That’s not something kids really know about or can even imagine until they have children of their own. And so, sometimes they unknowingly tread on the hearts of their parents without meaning to.

When that happens and they come to realize it, it’s important to acknowledge it. It’s a way of honoring the third commandment.

Thinking about God as parent, we have to consider the possibility that the same holds true for God.

The Incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmas, can be seen as God’s decision to allow the Son—God’s own heart—to go walking around in the world.

Creation is God’s decision to allow us—God’s own children—to go walking around outside God.

Can we imagine that? That God would have the same all-consuming concern that any parent feels when a child goes missing?

Can we picture God frantically scouring the city for us, and

experiencing relief, unfathomable relief when we let ourselves be found?

When we attend to our family life, in whatever complexity and messy state it might find itself, we are giving God a chance to find us—us whom he has seen fit to bind together—and to experience the relief of knowing that we are on our way, together, into the future he has prepared for us—life with him in the family of the elect.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family today we do well to recognize the profundity of our own family lives and to honor them.

Crazy as it sometimes may seem, God’s own heart is in the midst of them, loving each of us, caring for us, and hoping that we will know enough to do the same.