

**GOSPEL**
*Luke 2:41-52*

Every year the parents of Jesus used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When they were on their way home after the feast, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was with the caravan, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere.

Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' 'Why were you looking for me?' he replied. 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' But they did not understand what he meant.

He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.

**HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II**
*27 December 1987 (Excerpt, translated from Italian)*

1. Today's Sunday, which closely follows the solemnity of Holy Christmas, is dedicated by the Church to celebrating the Holy Family. After having concentrated our attention in recent days on the mystery of the Son of God, who became a child for the salvation of all, we are invited to meditate on that cradle of love and welcome, which is called "family".

The official title of the liturgical feast is "The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph". And the title alone expresses the entire sublime reality of a human-divine fact, presenting to our eyes a model to be reproduced

in life, so that every family, especially the Christian one, commits itself to realizing in itself that harmony, honesty, peace, love, which were the wonderful prerogatives of the Family of Nazareth.

2. The sanctity of the family is the royal road and the obligatory path to build a new and better society, to restore hope for the future to a world burdened by so many threats. May today's Christian families, therefore, learn from that center of love and unreserved giving that was the Holy Family. The Son of God, having become small, like all those born of women, received there the constant care of his Mother. Mary, who remained ever a virgin, daily consecrated her life to the sublime mission of motherhood, and for this reason too all people today call her blessed. Joseph, designated to protect the mystery of the divine sonship of Jesus and the maternal virginity of Mary, carried out his role consciously, in silence and in obedience to the divine will. What a school, what a mystery!

3. The Son of God came to earth to save every human being, transforming him profoundly from within, to make him like himself, the Son of the heavenly Father. In carrying out this task, he lived the greater part of his earthly existence in the bosom of a family, to make us understand the irreplaceable importance of this first cell of society, which virtually contains the entire organism.

The family is sacred in itself because human life is sacred, and only within the family institution is it generated, developed and perfected in a manner worthy of man. Tomorrow's society will be what the family is today.

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Unfortunately, this is currently subjected to all sorts of snares on the part of those who seek to tear its fabric and undermine its natural and supernatural unity by disintegrating the moral values on which it is founded, with all the means that today's permissive society makes available, especially with the mass media, and by denying the essential principle of respect for the sacredness of every human life, right from the first stage of existence. It is necessary to recover the living sense of the human and Christian prerogatives of the family and of its essential function: that of being a community profoundly united by love so as to offer nascent life a warm and safe nest, in which the new human being can be educated to respect himself and others, to recognize true values, to know and love the heavenly Father "from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth takes its name" ( Eph 3:15).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, so that the unparalleled gift of the sanctity of the family may be reborn everywhere.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** What would you say the world would describe the purpose of the family to be in society? Does it necessarily include being a "warm and safe nest" for new life?



**Heart:** How are relationships in your family, particularly your immediate family? How could they improve? Share to whatever extent you feel comfortable.



**Hands:** Many families in our parish communities struggle in their day to day lives. How, as a community, could we better support them?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.