

Scripture Study

Feast of the Holy Family—Cycle B



Opening prayer

Sirach 3:2-7,12-14

(Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5)

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:22:40

Overview of the Gospel:

- The Feast of the Holy Family, which developed in the 17th century, honors the family group of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Built on the Gospel accounts, this family is looked upon as a model of ideal family life. To promote family life and build up devotion to the Holy Family, Pope Benedict XV established this feast for the Universal Church in 1921.
- The story we hear in this Sunday's Gospel (which we know as the Fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary), like many others found in the "infancy narratives" appears nowhere else besides in Luke's Gospel. The infancy narratives end in the same location as they began, in the Jerusalem Temple (Luke 1:8, 2:52).
- According to Jewish law, the firstborn male child belonged to God, and the parents had to redeem or "buy him back" on the 40th day after his birth, by offering a sacrifice of a lamb or, for the poor, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24). This was to be completed in the temple (thus the "presentation" of the child). On that same day, the mother would be ritually purified (thus the "purification"). Mary and Joseph kept this law, even though, since Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Christ (CCC 499-501), she would not have had to go through ritual purification.
- Our Gospel reading for this feast stresses the holy family's strict obedience to the Law of Moses. Luke 2:21 also notes that "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived." Circumcision is a sign of the covenant between Abraham and God. a mark which designates that they belong to God's chosen people, a requirement of the law grounded in Genesis 17:12 (see also Leviticus 12:3; CCC 527).

Questions:

- In light of the 1st reading, in what condition is your relationship with your parents (regardless of how old you are)? If you are married, keeping in mind the 2nd reading, how well do you respect your spouse?
- Of all the virtues listed in the 2nd reading, which are most and least characteristic of you? (How readily would your closest friend agree with your assessment?)
- In the Gospel reading, what Mosaic laws are being fulfilled in the Presentation (Leviticus 12:1-8; Exodus 13:2, 12, 14)? How do these events foreshadow Jesus' mission?
- What impact would the startling predictions by Anna and Simeon have on all who were listening that day? On Mary and Joseph as they returned home (verses 33-39)?
- Why do you think Luke included this episode in his Gospel? How did Luke know about this, and other details surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood (see verse 51)?
- While it may be easy to see how Jesus might be "set for the rise of many" (verses 34-35), how might he be destined for their fall? In what ways has Jesus and his message been a stumbling block for you? How have you surmounted the problems?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 711, 529, 583, 695, 618, 149

Closing prayer

I turn to you, dear parents, and implore you to imitate the Holy Family of Nazareth. -St. John Vianney

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

“And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him...”

Meditation: Is your life in tune with the Holy Spirit? Simeon was a man who was just towards others and devout towards God. He gladly accepted the mission God called him to perform with much fervent prayer and with patient expectation. His whole life was in tune with the Holy Spirit. His was found daily in the temple in prayer and worship and in humble and faithful expectation for the day that the Lord would comfort his people. As the days and months grew into years he never lost hope. When Joseph and Mary presented the child Jesus in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized the Lord's presence in his temple. Through eyes of faith he saw the infant Jesus as the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies, hopes, and prayers of the people of Israel. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he prophesied that Jesus was to be "a revealing light to the Gentiles". Jesus came not only as "light and salvation" for the people of Israel, but for all nations as well.

Jesus is the new temple (John 1:14; 2:19-22). In the Old Testament God manifested his presence in the "pillar of cloud" by day and the "pillar of fire" by night as he led them through the wilderness. God's glory visibly came to dwell over the ark and the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38). When the first temple was built in Jerusalem God's glory came to rest there (1 Kings 8). After the first temple was destroyed, Ezekiel saw God's glory leave it (Ezekiel 10). But God promised one day to fill it with even greater glory (Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 8-9). That promise is fulfilled when the



“King of Glory” himself comes to his temple (Psalm 24:7-10; Malachi 3:1). Through Jesus' coming in the flesh and through his saving death, resurrection, and ascension we are made living temples of his Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Do you recognize that you are God's temple and that his Spirit dwells within you?

Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph and he prophesied to Mary about the destiny of this child and the suffering she would undergo for his sake. There is a certain paradox for those blessed by the Lord. Mary was given the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. She received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. But her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life fully surrendered to God with faith and trust?

What do you hope for? The hope which God places in our heart is the desire for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. Hope grows with prayer and age. Anna was pre-eminently a woman of great hope and expectation that God would fulfill all his promises. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she was found daily in the house of the Lord, attending to the Lord in prayer and speaking prophetically to others about the Lord's promise to send a redeemer. She is a model of godliness to all believers as we advance in age. Advancing age and the disappointments in life can easily make us cynical and hopeless if we do not have our hope placed rightly. Anna's hope in God and his promises grew with age! She never ceased to worship God in faith and to pray with hope. Her hope and faith in God's promises fueled her indomitable zeal and fervor in prayer and service of God's people. How do we grow in hope? By placing our trust in the promises of Jesus Christ and relying not on our own strength, but on the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. Does your hope and fervor for God grow with age?

“Lord, may I recognize your visitation and be prepared for your action today, just as Simeon was prepared and ready to respond to your visitation and action in his day. Like Anna, may I never cease to hope in you and to trust in your promises. In flame my zeal for your kingdom and increase my love for prayer, that I may never cease to give you praise and worship.”

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