

Jesus' family helped shape who he became

Thomas Gumbleton | Jan. 2, 2014 The Peace Pulpit

The Feast of the Holy Family is a recent feast in the liturgy of the church, and by that, I mean within the last 100 years or 150 years that we began to celebrate such a feast. It doesn't go back to the early days of the church, like the Feast of the Nativity or the Resurrection and so on. The people who put together Scripture readings in order to celebrate this Feast of the Holy Family had some difficulties, obviously, because there's very little about the Holy Family in the Gospels.

In fact, almost all about the Holy Family is what we hear during this Christmas season -- the first couple of chapters of Luke's Gospel and these parts of Matthew's Gospel. After that, there's only one other mention of Jesus during his childhood, and that's when he was just becoming a teenager and was lost in the temple. His parents, after only feeling great distress for a number of days, found him, rejoiced, and brought him back to Nazareth.

That's about the end of what we hear about the childhood, the family life of Jesus. Yet, as we listen carefully to the Scriptures today, we will discover something about what Jesus learned and how he developed as a child and entered into his family life. Today's Gospel lesson, even though it's not so much about the family life of Jesus -- in fact, it's much more about what we celebrate at Christmas, the extraordinary mystery of the Incarnation.

God has entered into human history, has become one of us, like us in every way except sin, fully human, and yet at the same time, Son of God in power -- that's the mystery that we celebrate at this time of the year. One that is profound and beyond our understanding, of course, and yet we keep probing that mystery to try to get a deeper grasp of this truth that God, the Son of God, becomes a human being, part of our human family. Even from this, though, we can learn something about how Jesus does become part of this human family.

When Herod discovered who Jesus was, intending to kill him, Jesus entered into an experience of human beings throughout history that is extraordinarily common right now, and one we don't think about often enough -- the tens of millions of people who are refugees in our world, people fleeing for their lives desperately because of economic circumstances or political circumstances [or] the military force being used against them.

In many parts of our world, including our own country, people come as economic refugees, and Jesus came into our human history, became part of our human family, to experience what we experience. It shows how clearly Jesus became one of us in every way except sin. He entered into the difficulties, the turmoil, the stress and the sufferings of human people.

As you think about that, of course, one of the things that we should be reminded of is that those people who are desperately coming to our shores or in other parts of the world desperately seeking refuge: Jesus is living with them. Jesus is part of them. If we have any concern or love as we have for Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary, we should be reaching out to those people. Pope Francis went where that ship was shipwrecked right off the shore of Italy -- migrants coming, fleeing terror, violence and economic stress.

He went right there to be with them because he recognized that this is Jesus coming to our shores. We must

begin to have that attitude as part of the human family in celebrating the fact that Jesus has become part of our human family. Also, in the more narrow sense of everyday life, we can turn to the Scriptures and get a sense of how Jesus did grow into a full human being.

You remember at the end of that story of when Jesus was lost in the temple, when Luke describes that he says, "They went back to Nazareth, and there, Jesus was subject to his parents and he grew in wisdom, age and grace." If Jesus is growing up within the confines of his family, he was growing not just physically, which he was, but also in wisdom, in grace. He was becoming a more fully developed human being.

He learned some of how to do this from his family, of course. It wasn't just Mary and Joseph and Jesus; he had an extended family. Many times in the Scriptures, we're told about brothers and sisters of Jesus. Now, we usually interpret that to be cousins of Jesus, but they were part of his extended family, and as he was growing up, he interacted with them. He had to learn how to interact with others.

The virtues that Jesus demonstrated in his life, in his public life especially, we see how Jesus was all of the things that St. Paul says in that letter to the Colossians: "Clothe yourselves in Christ. Put on compassion, kindness, meekness and patience. Bear with one another. Forgive whenever there is any occasion to do so." Go to the Gospels, and Jesus does all of these things. He's so compassionate.

Of many instances, the one I always think of is when he was going to Jericho, and the blind man is on the side of the road being pushed aside while people are saying, "Get out of sight. He's a poor beggar," but then he cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus hears it, and he stops because he has compassion for this one person, even though the rest of the crowd is saying, "Stop! Get away!" Jesus calls that person. Where did he learn that compassion?

Like all children do, he learned it from his parents. Not by what they say so much, but how they act. Mary and Joseph must have been very compassionate people. Jesus learned from them those other things too, like forgiveness. Did you ever wonder if Jesus ever had to ask his parents for forgiveness? What do you think? I bet most people would say, "No, of course not. He was perfect." Well, not everything we do which makes difficulties for other people is a sin, so of course Jesus didn't sin. He was like us in every way except sin.

Even that time when he left his parents and stayed on at the temple, his parents were distraught. They came looking for him. Mary says, "Why have you done this to us?" They were desperate, and he caused it. Don't you think that afterward, he must have said at some point, "I'm sorry I upset you so much"? I think he would have. He really developed that ability to forgive so that as he's dying on the cross, he's forgiving the people putting him to death, loving those who hate him.

This is what Jesus learned in his family life from his parents and his extended family. He took it into himself and became the example for all of us. In all of those virtues that Paul lists, and also what we hear in that first lesson today about care for the elderly -- our parents or other relatives or even neighbors -- there are so many people in this country and other parts of the world that as they grow older and older and become more feeble, they need assistance.

We develop ways of assisted living and hospice and things like that, but it takes that personal care and love that really would make a difference in the lives of elderly people. As our society becomes more and more elderly, this virtue is going to be called for more and more. Today, then, as we celebrate this Feast of the Holy Family, it's important for us to think of Jesus as becoming one, a part of a human family, growing within that family, learning from that family, and becoming that full human being that he is -- one like us in every way except sin, but also Son of God in power.

If we try to reflect more and more on this life of Jesus and how he acted and we try to "clothe ourselves in

Christ," as Paul says, put on those virtues that Jesus shows us in our families, in our extended family, in our neighborhood which is part of our human family, in our parish family, and in the whole human family -- if we began to act with these virtues, what a difference we would make in every part of our lives and the lives with all those we share life with. We would bring the peace, joy, and fullness of life that Jesus offers into our family and into the whole human family. Paul would be blessed as we learn these virtues of family life and live them out.

[Homily given at St. Hilary, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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