

Holy Family A 2019 SML
MT 2:13-15, 19-23

This evening's/morning's gospel picks up where the Three Kings leaves off. "They returned home another way." No one who ever met Christ with good intentions returned home the same way.

Baffled in his designs to kill the Christ Child, paranoid, psychopath King Herod ordered the indiscriminate slaughter of baby boys two years old and under. These baby boys, the first to shed their blood because of Our Blessed Lord, are called the Holy Innocents. Today/yesterday, December 28th is the Feast of the Holy Innocents.

Therefore, the revelation of an angel, most likely Gabriel, instructed Joseph to take the Child and His Mother and flee to Egypt. Exile was to be the lot of Our Blessed Lord so millions of exiles from persecuted lands would have a God Who understood the agony of homelessness and flight.

Our Blessed Lord's return to Egypt consecrated a land that was once the enemy of His ancestors, and it would give hope to lands that would later reject Him.

How ironically time replayed itself:

As the Hebrew families fled Pharoah, likewise the Holy Family fled Herod.

As Pharoah ordered the first born of the Hebrews to be killed, likewise Herod ordered all baby boys two years and under to be killed.

As Moses received a theophany in the form of a burning bush to go to Egypt, likewise Joseph received a theophany in the form of an angel to go to Egypt.

As the Hebrew families made their exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, likewise the Holy Family made their exodus from Egypt to Promised Land, Nazareth to be exact, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

At the time of Our Blessed Lord, the term "Nazarene" would elicit reactions like, "you gotta be kidding me, or for crying out loud." The little village of Nazareth was:

- ✓ off the beaten path,
- ✓ away from the main roads
- ✓ out of reach
 - to the merchants of Greece,
 - to the legions of Rome
 - and the journeys of the sophisticated
- ✓ it was a backwoods town.

Nazareth was mentioned not even once in ancient geographies. In fact, it was not even mentioned in the Old Testament. When Matthew said Our Blessed Lord dwelt in the town of Nazareth to fulfill what was said through the Prophet, "He shall be called a Nazarene," Nazareth was implied through the root word *neser*, or stump. When Isaiah said, "A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse," Isaiah was referring to Nazareth – a stump. Nazareth, a stump. Are you kidding me? For crying out loud! A stump!

When Philip told Nathanael, "We have met the man spoken of by Moses in the Law, and by the prophets: Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth," (JN 1:45), Nathanael's woeful reply was, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (JN 1:46) A modern day analogy comes to my mind when I was on my leave of absence and lived in Roanoke, VA. Roanoke is called "the Star City of the South," and in my estimation, it was a star city. But snide remarks were often made by the people of the "Star City of the South" about the "hillbillies and hillbilly towns of West Virginia."

Big cities are thought to contain all the wisdom, while the little towns are looked upon as backward. Christ chose:

- ✓ insignificant Bethlehem for the glory of his birth;

- ✓ ridiculed Nazareth for his youth;
- ✓ glorious, cosmopolitan Jerusalem for the infamy of his death.

Do you see the irony?

"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" was a prelude to "Can anything good come from a man who died on a cross?"

An address given by St. Paul VI lists three things to learn from Nazareth:

her silence,
the value of work,
and family life.

Since this is the Feast of the Holy Family, it is the third lesson on family life that I will speak about.

It is no secret the Holy Family had some serious problems. In fact, right out of the gate, it was one big mess after another:

- ✓ Mary conceived the child out of wedlock, which if discovered, would cost her her life as she would be stoned to death, according to Jewish law;
- ✓ Mary conceives this child by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is unheard of;
- ✓ Joseph does not follow the dictates of the law and does not divorce her, which also put Joseph at risk;

- ✓ Mary gives birth to a son, only to be visited by kings just a few days later, again unheard of;
- ✓ Herod puts a contract on the head of the Christ child and kills all baby boys, two years old and younger;
- ✓ Joseph, following the instructions of an angel in a dream, travels with his wife and son, first to Egypt:
 - to a country they've never been,
 - to speak a language they didn't speak,
 - with a lousy economy,
- ✓ and then to backwoods Nazareth. Are you kidding me?

It was a mess!

Quoting Paul VI, "Nazareth serves as a model of what the family should be. It shows us the family's holy and enduring character and its basic function in society: a community of love and sharing, beautiful for:

- ✓ the problems it faces,
- ✓ the problems it endures,
- ✓ and the rewards it brings,

in sum, the perfect setting for rearing children – and for this there is no substitute."

Every family has its problems, its messes: some from dysfunction, some just from circumstances, and the Holy Family was no exception.

Perhaps that's why my Mother's favorite ejaculation, at every turn, was Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Every time we kids did something stupid or wrong, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" My Dad often got the same reaction, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" Because the Swift Family, like every family, has endured, and continues to endure its messes. So every family should take great comfort in the trials and tribulations of the Holy Family.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us.