

Holy Family – (Year C) – December 30, 2018

1 SM 1:20-22, 24-28; PS 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10; COL 3:12-21; LK 2:41-52

Sometimes there's a conflict between the wishes of parents for their child's future, and a **son's or daughter's call** to serve the Church in a **consecrated vocation**—to be a **priest**...or a **nun**.

The incident in the Gospel passage for today's celebration of the **Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph** provides an **opportune context** to consider how to navigate this type of clash of "**calls**".

On the one hand, we have the **4th Commandment**:

Honor your father and mother.

It would appear, at first glance, that, Jesus **disobeyed** or **dishonored** Mary and Joseph, by staying back in the Temple without telling them, and letting them return home without him. Even the **dialogue** between Mary and Jesus seems to suggest this:

When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. (Lk 2:48-50)

Here, it's Mary's question, "**Why have you done this to us?**" that suggests dishonor—a **violation** of the **4th Commandment**.

And here we have a classic example of how **Christians** must interpret **Sacred Scripture** when there **appears** to be a conflict, but there cannot actually **be** one.

Since we know—*from Scripture*—that **Jesus never sinned**—we have to conclude something else here—something **other than**—disobedience or dishonor.

And here we see the **primacy** and **priority** of a **vocation** to **serve God** over a **parent's worldly desires** for his or her son or daughter. So, it's not that Scripture contradicts itself...or that Jesus was actually sinful. The *apparent conflict* helps us determine whose will—**God's**...or the **parents'**—has ultimate priority!

Here we recall something that Jesus said many years later in his **public ministry** as an adult:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Mt 10:34-39)

Jesus **wasn't** bragging about being a **home-wrecker** here. And he **wasn't** saying that this state of things is what he *wants*. He was simply teaching that in any family, **some family members** will sense the **Lord's call to faithfulness** to him...and **others** will not. And this will cause conflict because a **supernatural** outlook will *inevitably* conflict with a **secular** one.

Sometimes when you ask parents about a vocation to **priesthood** for their **son**—or a vocation to **consecrated religious life** for their **daughter**—the parents actually say, “**I don't want my son to be a priest**” or “**I don't want my daughter to be a nun**”. “**I want them to be happy!**”

And here is where Scripture must serve as a **corrective** to such a **distorted view**—*not* that it's distorted thinking to want a son or daughter to be **happy**!

But it *is* distorted thinking that **doing what God has created a person for will lead to their unhappiness!**

Anecdote: Pilgrimage to Utah—cloistered Carmelite Nuns

Here was an obvious display of the **profound interior spiritual consolation** that flows from **following the Lord's call**. The *joy* of these sisters was **unmistakable** to the pilgrims...even if it was not *understood* by most of them.

At other times, however, it's not so much a question of the **happiness** of a son or daughter as it is a **father's or mother's issue with the Church** or with **religion** in general, that leads to a **parent's hostility** toward their **son or daughter's attraction to the faith**.

You would be blown away if you could hear the stories a priest hears on a regular basis!

Anecdote: A son or daughter who is afraid to tell their parents that the reason they leave so early for school is so they can go to daily Mass.

So, keeping the **4th Commandment** does not **necessarily** mean doing **exclusively** what the parents want for a child. This is particularly the case when there is a conflict between a **son's or daughter's call to follow Jesus** in a consecrated vocation, and the parents' desire for **grandchildren**...or the desire for a **successful secular career** for their son or daughter...*without regard for* what is actually happening in the **son or daughter's heart and soul**.

It's ironic that, in seeking their child's happiness, **parents often ignore the stirring in their own child's heart**—where happiness is actually experienced.

Such a conflict is mitigated or even avoided when God is *already* the **highest priority** for each of the parents.

As we heard in today's **Gospel**, by the time Jesus was twelve years old, his parents had already provided a beautiful example of **faithfulness** to God and **obedience** to their religion:

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. (Lk 2:41-42)

For a poor family like the Holy Family, making this **65-mile trek** on foot would have been both **expensive** and **inconvenient**.

What a contrast we see between **Mary and Joseph...and many Catholic parents today** who fail to take their children to Mass because the Church is **too far away** or because **Mass interferes with sports** or some **other activity**. And even if they *do* go to Sunday Mass, the message—*far too frequently*—is that Mass is something to be “**crammed in**” between more “**important**” activities.

Any parents who don’t think their kids pick up on this **subtle message** are **kidding** themselves. Sadly, it’s only when their **adult children abandon the faith** many years later, that many parents **finally** realize this.

Much of this **parental pain** can be avoided by following the example of **Hannah** in the **1st Reading** today from the **1st Book of Samuel**. She said:

I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the LORD. (1 Sam 1:2-28)

Here we see that a **parent’s orientation to God from the start** not only helps to avert the apparent conflict between **God’s call** and **human parents’ preferences**. It also brings a **supernatural peace and joy to a parent’s heart** when his or her will **already** aligns with God’s will.

There’s a **great sign of hope in the Church today**—something we priests encounter more and more frequently these days. Many young parents today display a beautiful conformity to God’s will when they say, “**We would love it if our son became a priest!**” or “**We would love it if our daughter became a nun!**”

This phenomenon demonstrates God the **Father’s concern** for his **hurting Church** because he wants to raise **great Saints** in the Church—from among *your sons and daughters*—to bring about the **reform** and **renewal** that the **Church**—and the *world*—so desperately need today.

One mother, blogging on the **Catholic Exchange** website, wrote:

[Good and healthy parents] expect obedience from young children and respect from older children, but they will also love their children in a way that respects their own little personhood. They will acknowledge that God's will for their children come before their own plans, keeping in mind that their children ultimately belong to Him... Likewise, children will strive to obey the just expectations of their parents. They will try to love and honor their parents, while still putting God's plan for their lives first.

<https://catholicexchange.com/the-holy-family-and-holiness-in-ordinary-families>

This mother exemplifies the dynamics of a faithful Catholic home as described by **St. Paul** in today's **2nd Reading**, taken from his **Letter to the Colossians**:

...let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another...with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:15-17)

Clearly, holiness was not meant only for the **Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph**. Rather, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is **meant to be a model** for every Catholic family.

Today's **Gospel** tells us that **after** the incident in the Temple:

[Jesus] went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man. (Lk 2:51-52)

Thanks to Mary and Joseph's **faithfulness**, Jesus not only found his vocation.

In finding his vocation, he **opened Heaven for all of us**.

And that's because **God the Father's plans for us...and for our children...are always bigger...and better...than anything we can ask...or imagine** (cf. Eph 3:20).