

Sunday in the Octave of the Nativity (12/27/2020)

We are in the Octave of the Nativity. Only days after celebrating Christ's birth, and we continue to celebrate. We celebrate that the almighty and eternal God would deign to come to us in the form of one of us. God does this because of a love for us, a love that causes God to wish to save us from the sinful situation we have placed ourselves in. Jesus imitates our weak human condition, and entrusts care of His sacred Body to Mary and Joseph. A lot of confidence to place in humans - a great example - such does our heavenly Father wish to teach us by this action.

In the Gospel, Jesus is brought to the temple to be presented. Mary and Joseph fulfill the prescriptions of the law with regards to the first born son and they hear prophecy concerning the baby - a prophecy that we see come true in time, and which is still unfolding in our world. A wonderful plan of God - to come to save us and to leave behind that Body to be with us till the end of time in His Body the Church, and in the species of the Eucharist. It is good that today we reflect on the devotion that brought Mary and Joseph to the temple, the desire to follow God, the desire that as a family they should be joined together in their worship of God - our families should also be bound by such communal devotion to God. The Holy Family is bound together in love and familial connections both to each other and to God. Family life is not always easy, but as a family they persevered together. Joseph was ready to leave the family when he found out about Mary's "irregular" pregnancy, however, he followed not his own desires to escape discomfort and problems, but trusted the words of God spoken by the Angel. He not only became a father to the Holy Family, but also its protector.

Mary was a model of faithfulness and love and stayed with her son to the bitter end cradling his lifeless body at the foot of the cross with the same tenderness as she does in the temple today. It would have been easier to not be there - it would have been easier to deny the prophetic words Simeon spoke about her heart being pierced - but she was not going to abandon her child. Jesus we are told elsewhere was obedient to Mary and Joseph, and one of his last acts was to be sure his mother would be taken care of after he died. He placed the duty of family above asserting his own power and superiority as God. Each could have left, each could have taken an easier path, each could have walked away from family duty - but they did not. The result was a family that was strong and something to imitate.

We see also a wonderful example in Anna who came to the temple daily, and in Simeon who hoped with faith for the coming of salvation. We too can place faith in this child, we too can realize that although He sometimes is a source of contradiction in our lives and in the world, He is also the only sure way to the Father. The only sure path to salvation, the only sure path of reconciliation of the human family with its Heavenly Father. Jesus is a source of strength and unity in our human families, He is the one who provides a point of unity for the Church, and He is the one who connects us in unity to the God who alone can satisfy our longings. This is the continuing unfolding of the events that began with the Nativity.

We hear also today that Jesus grew in strength, in wisdom, and in the grace of God. As we join more deeply into the Body of Jesus, as we are privileged to take that presence within us at Communion, we become more deeply connected to that source of strength, wisdom, and grace. All of this made possible because God our Father has mercy on us, all this possible because God our Father humbled Himself - emptied himself - being born in the form of a creature to save those creatures by offering His own life in exchange for theirs. What a stunning act of parental self-sacrifice for a child! We heard in the Epistle the desire of God to adopt us as children, God provides the body of the one only Son for us to be joined to so that we too can be more than servants - we can be sons in the Son - and heirs. That the Divine Creator desires us to be children and cry out Abba, Father is a supreme act of love and care for us.

We must do as the Lord God who is highest, yet humbled Himself to save his children. We must follow the call of the God who summons us to a larger family with Himself as divine Father. God binds us together in the pattern of a family - a family modeled for us in the Holy Family - who by devotion to God and humble love for each other, draws for us a pattern for family life. May we pray and work to heal the divisions in our personal families, in our family of the church, and in the larger human family. Let us desire to live together with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, and gentleness - for this is part of why He came - to be a sign of contradiction to the human tendency to division and self-love, to model the humility with which the head of a family can exercise that position, to be the example of complete self-sacrifice and loyalty to family; a sacrifice that is completed in his death and resurrection. Let us continue to give thanks for that birth, and grateful for the great gift that we continue to celebrate today.