

Luke 2:41-52

Deacon Thomas Winninger 612-801-3194

Dec 27th, 2009 We are family.

Homily 141

1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

Many of us have traveled in our lives, in fact a number of us have traveled as part of our career. On the days I was traveling for work, I would arrive home and as my tires would cross the threshold at the entrance to the driveway our children would immediately line up in front of the house by size and age, calling out to me, "It's dad, it's our world leader, it's our spiritual guide, it's our father of the year!" ... Wow, what a great scene if it were true, but it is not. Actually, the kids were in every yard but ours! When I called to them they would say, "Oh it's dad now we probably have to go home for dinner." Then they would drag themselves home to spend a little time with dad. Now I am exaggerating because those same children of mine would say none of this is true.

Sounds a little like the gospel reading today, except that it did not say Jesus dragged himself home to spend the next 18 years with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. Just think, how many of us did things our parents did not find out about till later or perhaps not at all? Though, it is probably safe to say that none of us ran off to spend 3 days in a Church and claimed it was to do our Father's business.

It is interesting to note that many people tune out these readings today. Partly because we are still caught in the Christmas experience, partly because they think the definition of Family seems to have changed. Some tune out the readings because this experience of the Holy Family does not seem relevant in light of the complexity of society today and unfortunately some can't connect to the reading because they don't feel that they are part of a Family. In part, this is caused by the lack of clear understanding of Family, a clearly expressed theology of Family. There are no courses on how to be Family and what is Family, rather we have the portrayal of "Family" as we see it in the movies and on television as non-Family. Certainly Family today is not, "little house on the prairie", or "Ozzie and Harriet", or "Father knows best", that's a bad example today, the show would be "Mother knows best." And there might not be a father present in the home at all. But is it really so different than the first Family of the Christian faith, Jesus, Mary and Joseph?

When a Family loses a child don't we all seek to find him, if not physically at least we support them with our prayers? Isn't Family still the nurturing place for leaning and understanding the lessons of life? Isn't Family still the place where we seek for shelter from the challenges of life? Aren't we all bothered when our families don't seem to work because of anger or jealousy? Think about it for a minute, God came into the world to begin the process of redemption from the heart of a Family. The first thing that Jesus sanctified was the home. It was in the Family that Jesus grew physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually for the work that lay ahead of him. John Paul, II in his encyclical *Christifidelis Laici*, declared that the Family is the domestic church, the natural and fundamental school of formation. The Family is the ecclesiology of the

Church, it is where we learn to love, to pray, to forgive, to nurture, to learn, to respect, to be patient. It is where we learn to make right choices. For some, if we don't learn it in the Family setting, unfortunately have to learning it in the world of hard knocks. The cliché of Family as the basic unit of society is not a cliché at all, it is a theological truth revealed by Christ by using the Family as the foundation of his earthly journey to save us. If the Family fails, society fails.

The theme of today's readings reveals one of the significant answers to making successful families: dedication. Any Family demands dedication, a foundational commitment that no matter what happens we are in it together to rise up each other, to love each other, to nurture each other through all that can happen and does happen to drive us apart. In the first reading from Samuel, Hannah was dedicated to her son; she then dedicated him to the Lord. In the Gospel reading at the age of 12, Mary and Joseph made the customary trip the temple, traveling some 85 miles to dedicate their son to the Lord. Some have asked how Jesus was missed. It was also customary in those days that the men and women separated into two groups and the children could travel with either group. Like any parent it must have been devastating to discover that Jesus was missing and they would end up searching for him for three day's. in Hebrew numerology, three is the number of completeness and is a symbolic reference to the three days Jesus spent in the tomb. In addition, as now it appears, twelve is the age of puberty, that age when kids want to break away and discover independence.

So what are we called to do as a result of these readings? First, we are call to define the Family more clearly, a Family can be traditional, a Family can be extended, a Family can be a community, a Family can be dysfunctional, but we cannot change the definition of what Family means. Just like America, we cannot change our founding purpose, for if we dissolve the purpose of Family our society fails. As such, if the Family fails, so does are Catholic Faith, for our faith was founded by the notion of Family. As Family we are all called to *dedicate* ourselves to prayer, to love, to nurture, to educate, to forgive, and to make room for Christ. We must dedicate ourselves to protect the Family from attacks by the same society that it make possible.

Second, practice unconditional love. It is hard to love those who hurt you, but the saving grace of the Family is unconditional love. The primary dissolver of Family, just like marriage, is self-centeredness. It is the same with all communities; be it our Church, be it our country, be it our Family. Personal agendas at the expense of the common good, personal agendas at the expense of natural law, personal agendas at the expense of others in the Family destroys the basic unit that makes life work, that makes faith work.

Third, remember as the song says, "We are Family!" Perhaps we could make this the Year of the Family here at St. Olaf. We could focus on getting to know each other better. We could focus on supporting each other. We could work to hold each other up in our diversity of community of Family. Think, for us this is being in the temple, this is being about our father's business.

For as Jesus said do you not know that we must be in the temple, in community about our father's business.