

Holy Family - C
I Sam. 1:11, 20-22, 24-28;
I John 3:1-1, 21-24;
Luke 2:41-52
Little Flower - 12/26/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Holy Family. Today's Gospel is the only Gospel story from Jesus' childhood. Why did Luke choose to include this one story of Jesus' childhood in the Gospel?

One Scripture scholar has suggested that the Church reflected on Jesus' divinity backwards. In other words, the Church recognized Jesus' divinity first in his death and resurrection and only then in his public ministry. As the Church continued to reflect, it realized that Jesus must have recognized his own divinity, including his identity as Son of God, as soon as he became reflectively conscious of his identity. It is usually around twelve when we become reflectively conscious of our identity. Hence, Luke included in his Gospel the finding of Jesus in the temple.

Identity is a relational concept. Our identity is not a given. Nor does it develop in a vacuum. Rather our identity is shaped first of all within the relationships of our family. For example, our first awareness of ourselves is as our parents' son or daughter. Likewise, our thoughts and feelings about ourselves are also shaped within our families. How our parents and family members respond to us shapes how we think and feel about ourselves. In an affirming family, we are more likely to develop a positive self-image which leads to healthy self-esteem which leads to self-confidence and competence.

Affirmation, however, is only one component of healthy self-esteem. Many young people do not lack self-esteem because they lack affirmation. They lack self-esteem because they have never been taught boundaries or limits. One psychologist wrote that many parents today are more concerned with making their children happy than teaching them how to cope.

In the final analysis, parents play the major role in how children think and feel about themselves and whether or not they have self-confidence. In the first reading, Hannah was so grateful to God for the gift of Samuel that she offered Samuel back to God. Parents and all adults who work with children need to recognize that all children are gifts from God. God entrusts them to us so that we may give them back to him to answer his specific call to them and to carry on Jesus' mission and ministry in the world.

Likewise, although they may not recognize it, children can have a major impact on their parents' self-image, self-esteem, and self-confidence as well. It is very important for children of any age to remember that their parents are persons with feelings like theirs and to respect their parents' feelings.

My brothers and sisters, I think the Church chose today's second reading to remind us that the concept of family should not be limited to our immediate families or our blood relatives. According to John, because of God's love, we are called "*children of God*." If we are children of God, then we must be brothers and sisters of one another. Therefore, it is important that we see and treat each other as brothers and sisters.

Our challenge today as persons and as Christians is to create communities that are families. Families are networks of knowing, caring, affirming relationships in which we call forth the best in each other. To create communities that are families, we must begin within our immediate families and within our faith community. However, as Pope Francis so often reminds us, our challenge as families, as Church, and as the human family is to reach out to those who are marginalized within our families, within our Church, and within the human family.

We live in a time in which so many marriages tragically end in divorce with so much damage to everyone in the family, a time in which the bonds of trust which are necessary for healthy communities have been shattered. Therefore, we should make the Holy Family the ideal for our time.