

## **Sermon for 3 January 2010 Christmas 2C – St. Francis**

Have you ever noticed that certain Bible verses can carry different meanings depending on when you hear them? I think today's Gospel story is one of those for me. I remember hearing this story when I was a child and thinking "Jesus did that?" I wondered with amazement that Jesus could break away from his family for 3 days and seemingly not miss them. Once a mother myself, I found myself feeling physically ill as I pondered hunting for my child for three days. And when I was a mother of a 12 year old son I most certainly read some male adolescent attitude into Jesus' response to his frightened parents who had spent three frantic days searching: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Truth be told, this is an uncomfortable story for many to hear because of the daily level of fear we harbor about those we love.

I suspect I am not alone in wondering why this is the only story we have in all four of the Gospels about Jesus' childhood. If I were putting together Jesus' "baby book" I would have wanted other stories included. Yet, Luke tells us that Mary "treasured all these things in her heart." Mary treasured these things just as she "treasured" all the words the shepherds shared when they came to adore the baby Jesus at his birth. On the face of it this is a type of coming of age story about Jesus.

Twelve year old Jesus was traveling with his parents and others to make the yearly pilgrimage at Passover to Jerusalem as was and still is the practice of many faithful Jews. Traveling "en masse" (think about the annual camping trip so many at St. Francis join in) it is understandable that Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was with friends. But what about Jesus' perspective. Noting that he was 12 years old is important. The next year he will be 13; the age at which he will be Bar Mitzvahed; the ceremony that recognizes a male Jew as a full adult member of the congregation. This is his last Passover in which he will be regarded as a child.

Now, from a very human perspective we could argue that he acted just like a child staying behind without regard to his parent's feelings or concerns. But, from a more heavenly perspective he is responding to the growing understanding about himself and about his unique relationship to God. Jesus is maturing just as a human child does and as a man of faith should indeed this story demonstrates clearly the tension with which Jesus will live as he understands what it means to be the Son of God.

What does it mean in a person's life to be caught between worthy claims of loyalty to family and the call to serve God in ways that may lead one away from those family claims? That is not a question that just Jesus must answer. Certainly, Mary herself continues to struggle with this as 6 chapters later Luke has her come to see Jesus only to be kept away by the "crowd" around him. If we are honest we are often faced with the tension of choosing between the demands of those around us and a niggling urge to do more for God and for all God has made. Mary said yes to God and bore this special child. But her yes would mean more and more adjustments in her ways of thinking, in her ways of acting, in her ways of being a mother, and in her own faith journey. That one yes was not a one-time event but a daily acknowledgement of her very identity and that of her son. The twelve year old child she could require to come home with her will grow into a man who will tell her: "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." Then, all too soon she will have "a sword pierce" her "own soul" as she witnesses what no mother should ever have to, the death of her beloved child.

In my years of dealing with grief professionally as a Priest and as a Hospice Chaplain and personally I have come to understand so much of life is not always understood in the moment. We act so often in the heat of a moment and then have years to remember and consider a particular event. Mary frantic from searching cannot refrain from questioning her son as to his actions. She knows better than anyone else Jesus' unique relationship with God because of her own relationship with God. Still, despite her special relationship with God Mary does not fully grasp the glimpses of the divine she catches in the son she had. The events she could not fully comprehend at the time of their occurrence stay in her heart. The memory of these times work in her memory and take on new meaning as she continues to grow in faith just as her son grows into manhood and son of manhood. Likewise, we do not always understand what a yes to God can mean in our lives.

We want to believe that we can negotiate with God what it means to serve the Lord. But to be about God's business may well pull us just as it pulled Mary and pulled Jesus out of the known expected ways of life and relationships into moments of uncertainty and discomfort. My ways are not your ways says our God. So, let us have the courage to ask God: What would you have me do? Then let each and every one of us be about Our Father's Business.

