

## SPIRITUALITY

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Col 3:15a, 16a

R<sup>7</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

Let the peace of Christ control your hearts;

let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

R<sup>7</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Luke 2:41-52; L17C

**Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom.**

**After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.**

**Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.**

**After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.**

*Continued in Appendix A, p. 267.*

### Reflecting on the Gospel

"Family" today has many cultural and moral connotations and challenges for Christians. The "Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph" may seem to exist on another planet or, at least, be light-years away from twenty-first-century relevance. Yet the gospel truth that the word of God for this feast affirms is that family life is "a kind of school of deeper humanity" that is penetrated by the

spirit of Christ. It is a challenge to live in mutual respect and love: for parents to honor the dignity of their children, and children to respect the dignity of their parents, each one bound to the other in the love that God has lavished upon us, as John writes in today's second reading.

Our understanding of what we usually call "the finding in the temple" has often been sabotaged by artistic depictions of a precocious child Jesus, haloed and white-clad, lecturing (and even berating!) the religious teachers. Yet if we are attentive to the text, Jesus is described as first listening to the temple teachers before asking questions at what was a customary festival and Sabbath question-and-answer session (as opposed to a judicial one). "Searching" and "finding" are important gospel themes in Luke. They reflect the human experience that our questing so often involves questioning in the hope of finding that something more: more love, more wisdom, more truth.

Any parent can appreciate Mary and Joseph's desperate search for and relief at finding Jesus, but there is another search, another finding that is of central importance. It hangs painfully on Jesus's response to his mother's question, "Son, why have you done this to us?" The first words of Jesus in Luke's gospel are his response: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"—the affairs that will take Jesus through a life of obedience, through another Passover of pain, another three-day loss in the tomb and into his new and risen life. The most significant developmental task of adolescence is the search for and gradual finding of one's identity, and as R. Alan Culpepper comments in the introduction to *The New Interpreter's Bible*: "What defines one's identity—family ties, religious experience, a sense of vocation, a personal creed, or one's dreams and ideals? Jesus found his identity by affirming his relationship with God."

For Mary and Joseph, as for all parents, there is the pain of allowing this child his independence, his identity, loving him, not possessing him or punishing him, but not fully understanding him. Surely a sword passes also through Joseph's heart as, in response to Mary's words about "your father and I," and as if gently contradicting her, Jesus refers to "my Father." For us, as for Joseph, commitment to gospel priorities will always cause some pain. Parents know this in a special and poignant way. For now, this "passover" of the adolescent Jesus is a theological sign of what is to come.

After this, Jesus returns to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and is obedient to them. In the verse preceding this gospel (Luke 2:40), Luke had written of Jesus's growth in human and divine wisdom after his presentation in the temple. The last verse of this temple incident with which Luke ends his narrative of Jesus's childhood is again a comment that it was in this human family that such



**Gospel (cont.)**

Luke 2:41-52; L17C

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.  
He 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.

**FIRST READING**

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14

God sets a father in honor over his children;  
a mother’s authority he confirms over her  
sons.  
Whoever honors his father atones for sins,  
and preserves himself from them.  
When he prays, he is heard;  
he stores up riches who reveres his mother.  
Whoever honors his father is gladdened by  
children,  
and, when he prays, is heard.  
Whoever reveres his father will live a long life;  
he who obeys his father brings comfort to  
his mother.  
My son, take care of your father when he is  
old;  
grieve him not as long as he lives.  
Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him;  
revile him not all the days of his life;  
kindness to a father will not be forgotten,  
firmly planted against the debt of your sins  
—a house raised in justice to you.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM**

Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

**R.** (cf. 1) Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways.  
Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,  
who walks in his ways!  
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;  
blessed shall you be, and favored.  
**R.** Blessed are those who fear the Lord and  
walk in his ways.  
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine  
in the recesses of your home;  
your children like olive plants  
around your table.

**R.** Blessed are those who fear the Lord and  
walk in his ways.

Behold, thus is the man blessed  
who fears the LORD.  
The LORD bless you from Zion:  
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life.

**R.** Blessed are those who fear the Lord and  
walk in his ways.

**SECOND READING**

Col 3:12-21

Brothers and sisters:  
Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and  
beloved,  
heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility,  
gentleness, and patience,  
bearing with one another and forgiving one  
another,  
if one has a grievance against another;  
as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you  
also do.  
And over all these put on love,  
that is, the bond of perfection.  
And 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,  
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs  
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.

Wives, be subordinate to your husbands,  
as is proper in the Lord.  
Husbands, love your wives,  
and avoid any bitterness toward them.  
Children, obey your parents in everything,  
for this is pleasing to the Lord.  
Fathers, do not provoke your children,  
so they may not become discouraged.

or Col 3:12-17

Brothers and sisters:  
Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,  
heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility,  
gentleness, and patience,  
bearing with one another and forgiving one  
another,  
if one has a grievance against another;  
as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you  
also do.  
And over all these put on love,  
that is, the bond of perfection.  
And 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,  
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs  
with gratitude in your hearts to God.  
And whatever you do, in word or in deed,  
do everything in the name of the Lord  
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