

## Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family.

THE GOSPELS DON'T TELL US A LOT ABOUT THE LIFE OF THE HOLY FAMILY, JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH, AND WHAT THE GOSPELS CALL JESUS' BROTHERS AND SISTERS – WHO ARE PROBABLY COUSINS OR CHILDREN OF JOSEPH FROM AN EARLIER MARRIAGE. BUT JUST BECAUSE THE DATA IS SO LIMITED, FOR THAT REASON IT IS PRECIOUS. NOT A WORD IS WASTED, AND WE CAN LEARN A LOT FROM WHAT WE ARE GIVEN, ESPECIALLY BY READING BETWEEN THE LINES.

IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT, BESIDES, THAT WE CAN LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT THE HOLY FAMILY FROM THE WORDS AND ACTIONS OF THE ADULT JESUS. WHAT JESUS LEARNED IN HIS FAMILY SETTING AS A CHILD AND ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT, CERTAINLY IS REFLECTED IN HIS ADULT LIFE. IN PARTICULAR, JESUS' MANY PARABLES CAN GIVE US SOME GLIMPSE INTO THE WAY THINGS WERE IN THE HOLY FAMILY OF NAZARETH.

EVERY SPRING, WHEN JESUS WAS GROWING UP, MARY AND JOSEPH WOULD BE IN THE FAMILY GARDEN PREPARING THE SOIL AND PLANTING SEED. MARY CAREFULLY PLACED THE OKRA, TOMATO, ZENIA AND OTHER SEEDS INTO THE SOIL AND COVERED THEM, NOT WASTING ONE SEED. SOMETIMES JOSEPH WOULD TAKE A HANDFUL OF SEED AND TOSS IT ON THE PATH OR PUT IT IN A LITTLE CLAY DISH FOR THE BIRDS. MARY WOULD GENTLY SCOLD HIM FOR THE WASTE, BUT JOSEPH LAUGHED AND SAID, THE BIRDS HAVE TO EAT, TOO! THEY LET JESUS PLANT SEED TOO, AND SOMETIMES HIS SEED GOT OUTSIDE THE TILLED AREA. JESUS WOULD WATCH THE SEED GROW, AND HE NOTICED THAT SOME OF THE SEED THAT JOSEPH PUT ON THE PATH, OR THAT FELL ON THE UNTILLED GROUND, CAME UP AT THE SAME TIME AS THE SEED HIS MOTHER PLANTED SO CAREFULLY; BUT HE SAW THAT IT DIED PRETTY SOON, WHILE HIS MOTHER'S SEED ALL CAME UP.

JOSEPH AND MARY LIKED SIMPLE THINGS. SMALL THINGS. THEY LIKED HOMEMADE ENTERTAINMENT. JOSEPH MADE TOYS FOR JESUS, AND MARY MADE CLOTHES. WHEN THEY WENT ON WALKS TOGETHER, THEY MADE A GAME OF NOTICING THINGS OTHER PEOPLE PASSED OVER: TINY BROWN SPARROWS, COMMON WILD FLOWERS, LAME AND BLIND PEOPLE HELPING ONE ANOTHER, A POOR WIDOW WEARING A BRIGHT CLEAN DRESS GIVING MONEY TO A BEGGAR.

JOSEPH AND MARY TAUGHT JESUS THAT IN HIMSELF – IN HIS HEART – WAS WHERE THE REAL TORAH WAS, AND TOLD HIM THAT WAS WORTH MORE THAN A HUGE PEARL FROM THE SEA OR EVEN A BURIED TREASURE.

OFTEN, JOSEPH TOOK JESUS TO THE SEA OF GALILEE. THIS WAS FAR FROM NAZARETH SO THEY

SLEPT UNDER THE STARS. THEY WALKED THROUGH MEADOWS OF FLAX AND FIELDBIND AND MORNING GLORIES AND JESUS LEARNED FROM JOSEPH THE HABITS OF FOXES IN THEIR HOLES AND OF BIRDS IN THEIR NESTS. THEY SAW FARMERS BURNING CHAFF FROM WHEAT HARVESTS, AND THE FIRE AND THE SMOKE OF IT. AT THE SEA, THEY WATCHED THE FISHERMEN WITH DRAGNETS, AND JOSEPH REMINDED JESUS THAT A MAN IN HIS LIFE HAS ALL KINDS OF EXPERIENCES AND EVEN CHOICES, GOOD AND BAD; AND THAT JUST AS THE FISHERMEN TAKE OUT THE GOOD FISH AND THROW BACK THE POOR, SO A WISE MAN LEARNS HOW TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES.

AT HOME IN NAZARETH, FRIENDS OF JOSEPH WOULD ASK IF JESUS COULD WATCH THEIR FLOCKS FOR A WHILE WHILE THEY WENT OFF TO LOOK FOR A SHEEP THAT GOT LOST, AND MARY WOULD ALWAYS SAY "GOD IS LIKE THAT" AND JESUS DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SHE MEANT. ALSO, MORE THAN ONCE JOSEPH LEFT HIS WORK FOR HOURS AT A TIME TO LOOK FOR JESUS, WHO NEVER GOT OVER HIS HABIT OF GETTING DISTRACTED OR WAYLAID OR LOST, THOUGH JESUS NEVER ADMITTED HE WAS REALLY LOST. BUT JOSEPH WOULD FRET, AND GO LOOK FOR HIM. BUT JOSEPH NEVER GOT MAD, REALLY. HE WALKED HOME WITH HIS ARM OVER JESUS' SHOULDER, HAPPY, TO BE HONEST, THAT THIS SON HAD SUCH A FREE SPIRIT.

JESUS ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS FUNNY WHENEVER MARY LOST SOMETHING. THAT WAS ONE QUIRK ABOUT HIS MOTHER. SHE WAS OBSSIVE ABOUT HAVING THINGS IN ORDER. SHE COULD NOT BEAR LOSING EVEN THE SMALLEST THING, A THIMBLE OR A COIN, AND WOULD SEARCH AND SEARCH UNTIL SHE FOUND IT. JESUS WOULD LAUGH AS HE WATCHED. HE'D HELP MOVE THE FURNITURE AS SHE SWEEPED THE HOUSE TO FIND WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS NOT WORTH THE TROUBLE; AND SHE WOULD LAUGH AT HERSELF: "A CHANCE TO CLEAN THE HOUSE REAL GOOD," SHE'D SAY. IT SEEMED HIS MOTHER NEVER GOT OVER HER CONCERN FOR LOST THINGS, EVEN THE POOREST THING.

SOMETIMES JESUS STAYED OUT LATER THAN HE SHOULD HAVE AND CAME HOME WITH FRIENDS SINGING AND LAUGHING. HIS FRIENDS COULDN'T BELIEVE IT, BUT MARY AND JOSEPH NEVER LOCKED HIM OUT OR GOT MAD. INSTEAD, THERE WAS A WARM FIRE AND WARM FOOD AND DRINK FOR HIM AND HIS FRIENDS, AND SOMETIMES MARY TOOK THEIR DAMP SHOES AND GAVE THEM CLEAN SOX TO PUT ON. ONE FRIEND TOLD JESUS, "MY FOLKS'LL WHUP ME WHEN I GET HOME," AND IF JESUS' COUSIN SAUL WOKE UP AND HEARD THE FUN SOUNDS HE NEVER CAME OUT OF HIS ROOM BUT COMPLAINED THE NEXT DAY THAT MARY AND JOSEPH WERE ONLY SPOILING THEIR SWEET LITTLE JESUS.

ON A FEW OCCASIONS, MEN WOULD COME AND TALK QUIETLY, SERIOUSLY, WITH JOSEPH. JESUS PRETENDED TO BE CONCENTRATING ON HIS WORK IN THE SHOP, BUT WOULD REALLY

BE STRAINING TO HEAR THE SOMBER WHISPERS. USUALLY IT WAS A CUSOMER OR CLIENT WHO COULDN'T PAY HIS BILL RIGHT AWAY, OR AT ALL. ALMOST ALWAYS, JOSEPH LISTENED, THEN TOOK THE BILL AND ADJUSTED THE FIGURES OR THE TERMS OF PAYMENT; WHEN THE CUSTOMER LEFT, JOSEPH WOULD SAY, "FORGIVE US, GOD, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS."

THERE WAS A REALLY SMELLY AND SORT OF CARZY MAN WHO BEGGED AROUND, AND WOULD ACT LIKE A DOG AND CRAWL ON ALL FOURS AROUND PEOPLE'S KITCHEN TABLES BEFORE THEY HAD TIME TO KICK HIM OUT. SOMETIMES HE CAN TO JOSEPH AND MARY'S. JESUS ALMOST THREW UP THE FIRST TIME HE SAW HIS MOTHER CLEAN THE MAN'S SORES, AND HE NOTICED HOW JOSEPH SAT DOWN AND TALKED TO THE MAN LIKE A REGULAR PERSON OVER A CUP OF COFFEE. BUT THEN JESUS GOT USED TO IT AND EVENTUALLY REALLY LOOKED FORWARD TO THE BEGGAR'S VISITS, WHOSE NAME, HE LEARNED, WAS LAZARUS.

OFTEN, WHEN JESUS WOULD AWAKE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT HE WOULD FIND HIS MOTHER STANDING IN FRONT OF A LIT MENORAH, A PRAYER SHAWL OVER HER HEAD. IN SOFT BUT SOMETIMES ALMOST ANGRY TONES, SHE WOULD BE RECITING PSALMS: "HOW LONG, LORD, WILL THE WICKED PROSPER;" "HOW LONG WILL YOU HIDE YOUR FACE?" "ARISE, O GOD, AND JUDGE THE EARTH." "WHY DO YOU HOLD BACK YOUR HAND?" JESUS COULD HARDLY IMAGINE SOMEONE TALKING LIKE THAT TO THE TOWN JUDGE, LET ALONE TO GOD HIMSELF. BUT THAT WAS HIS MOTHER.

JOSEPH OFTEN NEEDED HELP IN HIS SHOP, MORE HELP THAN JESUS AND HIS BROTHERS ALONE COULD GIVE. SO JOSEPH WOULD SEND JESUS TO THE SQUARE WHERE THE DAY-LABORERS HUNG AROUND FOR HIRE. THE MEN ALWAYS PERKED UP WHEN THEY SAW JESUS BECAUSE THEY LIKED WORKING FOR JOSEPH. JOSEPH WAS SOMEHOW NOT ALL THAT CAREFUL ABOUT KEEPING THE TIME CARDS STRAIGHT. SOMETIME HE'D PAY YOU FOR FOUR HOURS WHEN YOU ONLY WORKED TWO. IF YOU TOLD HIM HIS MISTAKE, HE'D JUST LAUGH AND SAY, "JUST TAKE IT. MAYBE NEXT TIME I'LL SHORT CHANGE YOU!" AND SOMETIMES HE DID. BUT MOSTLY, YOU CAME OUT AHEAD AND BESIDES IT WAS JUST A NICE PLACE TO WORK. ONE OF THE BENEFITS WAS, IF THERE HAPPENED TO BE A PARTY, LIKE A WEDDING, GOING ON IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, JOSEPH WOULD CLOSE THE SHOP AND TAKE EVERYONE WITH HIM, AND MARY WOULD ALWAYS HAVE SOME CLEAN DRESS CLOTHES READY THAT THE MEN COULD SLIP ON OVER THEIR OVERALLS AND FIT RIGHT IN WITH THE OTHER GUESTS AND NOT BE EMBARRASSED, OR, WORSE, GET THROWN OUT.

JESUS LEARNED MANY THINGS FROM HIS TIME AT HOME, TILL HE WAS AROUND THIRTY. BUT ONE DAY, WHEN HE WAS AROUND THIRTY YEARS OLD, JOSEPH ARRANGED WITH JESUS AND HIS COUSIN SAUL TO HELP HIM WITH A SPECIAL THREE-MAN PROJECT THE NEXT DAY. BY THIS

TIME, JOSEPH WAS HAVING TROUBLE WITH ARTHRITIS AND HIS EYES WERE NOT SO KEEN ANY MORE AND HE REALLY RELIED ON SAUL AND JESUS. SAUL SAID, "GOSH, SORRY UNCLE JOE, BUT I'VE GOT OTHER PLANS FOR TOMORROW." JESUS AND JOSEPH CAUGHT EACH OTHER'S EYE AND SMILED. SAUL ALWAYS DID THAT. HE SAID NO BUT DID YES. HE WOULD BE THERE TOMORROW. JESUS SAID, "OF COURSE, DAD, YOU CAN COUNT ON ME. I'LL BE THERE IN THE SHOP BEFORE YOU."

TOMORROW CAME AND JOSEPH AND SAUL MET IN THE SHOP BUT JESUS WAS NOT THERE. HE WAS NOWHERE AROUND. THEN WORD CAME HE WAS IN THE SYNAGOGUE GIVING A SERMON. WHAT! SAUL AND JOSEPH AND MARY WENT AND JOSEPH WAS A LITTLE MAD. "YOU TOLD ME YOU'D HELP ME, SON. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

HE SAW TEARS IN JESUS' EYES AS JESUS LOOKED AT BOTH OF THEM, HIS MOTHER AND JOSEPH, AND THEN WALKED AWAY WITHOUT A WORD, AWAY FROM HOME, FOREVER. JOSEPH MADE LIKE TO CALL AFTER HIM, BUT MARY STAYED HIM WITH A HAND, AND SAID, "LET IT BE."

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