

ZE09122204 - 2009-12-22

Permalink: <http://zenit.org/article-27916?l=english>

# "The Future of Humanity Passes Through the Family"

## Reflection for Feast of Holy Family Year C

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, DEC. 22, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- In the afterglow of Christmas, the Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Family, inviting the faithful to reflect on the gift and mystery of life, and in particular the blessing of family.

Today's Gospel story (Luke 2:41-52) relates an incident from Jesus' youth that is unique in the New Testament. Luke's infancy Gospel, however scarce in details concerning the first part of Jesus' life, mentions that "his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover" (2:41), an indication of their piety, their fidelity to the law and to the tradition of Israel.

"When [Jesus] was 12 years old, they went up according to custom" (2:42). "When they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, without his parents knowing it" (2:43). After searching for three days "they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (2:46).

Jesus' mysterious words to his parents seem to subdue their joy at finding him: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49). This phrase can also be translated, "I must be immersed in my Father's work." In either translation, Jesus refers to God as his Father. His divine sonship, and his obedience to his heavenly Father's will, take precedence over his ties to his family.

Apart from this event, the whole period of the infancy and youth of Jesus is passed over in silence in the Gospel. It is the period of his "hidden life," summarized by Luke in two simple statements: Jesus "went down with [Mary and Joseph] and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51); and "He progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men" (Luke 2:52). With this episode, the infancy narrative ends just as it began, in the setting of the Jerusalem temple.

We learn from the Gospels that Jesus lived in his own family, in the house of Joseph, who took the place of a father in regard to Mary's son by assisting and protecting him, and gradually training him in his own trade of carpenter. The people of the town of Nazareth regarded him as "the carpenter's son" [Matthew 13:55].

When he began to teach, his fellow citizens asked with surprise: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mark 6:3). Besides his mother, they mentioned also his "brothers" and his "sisters," who lived at Nazareth. It was they who, as the evangelist Mark mentions, sought to dissuade Jesus from his activity of teaching (Mark 3:21). Evidently, they did not find in him anything to justify the beginning of a new activity. They thought that Jesus was just like any other Israelite, and should remain such.

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### School of Nazareth

The words of Pope Paul VI spoken in Nazareth on Jan. 5, 1964, are a beautiful reflection on the mystery of Nazareth and of the Holy Family. His words inspire all of us to imitate God's family in their beautiful values of silence, family life and work.

He said: "Nazareth is a kind of school where we may begin to discover what Christ's life was like and even to understand his Gospel. Here we can observe and ponder the simple appeal of the way God's Son came to be known, profound yet full of hidden meaning.

"And gradually we may even learn to imitate him. Here we can learn to realize who Christ really is. And here we can sense and take account of the conditions and circumstances that surrounded and affected his life on earth: the places, the tenor of the times, the culture, the language, religious customs, in brief everything which Jesus used to make himself known to the world. [...]

"First we learn from its silence. If only we could once again appreciate its great value. We need this wonderful state of mind, beset, as we are, by the cacophony of strident protests and conflicting claims so characteristic of these turbulent times. The silence of Nazareth should teach us how to meditate in peace and quiet, to reflect on the deeply spiritual, and to be open to the voice of God's inner wisdom and the counsel of his true teachers. Nazareth can teach us the value of study and preparation, of meditation, of a well-ordered personal spiritual life, and of silent prayer that is known only to God.

"Second, we learn about family life. May Nazareth serve as a model of what the family should be. May it show us the family's holy and enduring character and exemplifying its basic function in society: a community of love and sharing, beautiful for the problems it poses and the rewards it brings -- in sum, the perfect setting for rearing children -- and for this there is no substitute.

"Finally, in Nazareth, the home of a craftsman's son, we learn about work and the discipline it entails. I would especially like to recognize its value -- demanding yet redeeming -- and to give it proper respect. I would remind everyone that work has its own dignity. On the other hand, it is not an end in itself. Its value and free character, however, derive not only from its place in the economic system, as they say, but rather from the purpose it serves."

### Challenges for today

Today we are witnesses to a worrisome lack of educational environments not only outside the Church, but even within the Church. The Christian family is no longer capable on its own of passing on the faith to the next generation, and neither is the parish, even though it continues to be the indispensable structure for the Church's pastoral mission in any given place.

As a Christian community and as a society in general, we must do more to encourage the committed relationship of man and woman that remains so basic to all civilizations, and has proven to be the best support for the rights and needs of children. We must reflect carefully on the social consequences involved in the redefinition of marriage, examining all that is entailed if society no longer gives a privileged place and fundamental value to the lifelong union of a man and a woman in marriage.

As the keystone of society, the family is the most favorable environment in which to welcome children. At the same time, freedom of conscience and religion needs to be ensured, while also respecting the dignity of all persons, whatever their sexual orientation.

Two distinct challenges emerge from this great debates of our times surrounding marriage and family life.

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Today's feast of the Holy Family issues an urgent invitation, especially to lay people, to uphold the dignity of the important institution and sacrament of Marriage. Support the Marriage Preparation Programs in your parish communities. Insist that in your parishes and dioceses, there are solid vocational programs for young adults and young people. Parishes, dioceses and lay movements that do not have creative pastoral strategies and vocational programs about marriage for young people leave the door open to tremendous moral confusion and misunderstanding, misinformation, emptiness.

At the same time, we cannot forget that other bonds of love and interdependency, of commitment and mutual responsibility exist in society. They may be good; they may even be recognized in law. They are not the same as marriage; they are something else. No extension of terminology for legal purposes will change the observable reality that only the committed union of a man and a woman carries, not only the bond of interdependency between the two adults, but the inherent capacity to bring forth children.

On this feast of the Holy Family, let us recommit ourselves to building up the human family, to strengthening and enshrining marriage, to blessing and nurturing children, and to making our homes, families and parish communities holy, welcoming places for women and men of every race, language, orientation and way of life.

### Foundation of society

"The future of humanity passes through the family," as the Venerable Pope John Paul II would say so often. Today's readings remind us that the family has a vital impact on society.

The foundation of society is the family. And the foundation of the family is marriage. The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman. As the keystone of society, the family is the most favorable environment in which to welcome children.

We need young adults to say their "I do" with joy, conviction, faith and hope. They are our future and our hope. Without married people, we cannot build the future of society and the Church. Without committed, married people, we will not have holy families today.

[The readings for the feast of the Holy Family are Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 or 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28; Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17 or 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24; and Luke 2:41-52]

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