

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Feast of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary & Joseph, December 26, 2021

Who's like Mary and Joseph and has 'temporarily misplaced' a child? Once on a family vacation to DC, we learned the hard way that it doesn't do you much good to count heads after everyone gets off the Metro in Washington DC. Because by the time you count heads and figure out you are one short – the doors of the subway have closed and it's moving to the next stop and you've lost a child.

So if you have been like my wife and I, you totally get what Mary said to Jesus: "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." Do you think there were a few more choice words rather than 'great anxiety.'

This nice story is unique to Luke – it's not in any other gospels – it's Luke's transition between his infancy narrative and Jesus public ministry. Luke states that Jesus was 12 years old – close enough to be called the teen years - that time in a child's life when there is tension between strict obedience to parents versus the inner feeling of a calling, hearing a voice – a voice other than the voice of parents.

Today's gospel - a story about growing up - but Jesus is not the only one growing up. It is about Mary and Joseph growing up. It's about you and me growing up. Not how old we are – but growing into a deeper and more authentic relationship with God, our world, each other.

Children, it seems, are always calling their parents into new ways of seeing the world. Recently one of the twins was brushing his teeth with his sister and she left the water running. As he turned the water off he said: "Don't waste God's gift of water!" Our grandson was right.

Children challenge us adults to look at our world, our lives, and ourselves in new, different and sometimes painful ways – pushing us beyond what we thought were **our** boundaries.

Mary and Joseph were challenged by their child Jesus as he matured into his teen years, and we can only imagine how Jesus continued to challenge his parent's unconditional love years later as Jesus loved the unloved, served the underserved,

welcomed the unwelcomed. And the pain of experiencing the death of their child – something that some of you have had done – is unfathomable to me.

Our own children challenged us to share what I never thought we'd have to completely share: our children. As our children began to marry, I was quite disappointed to finally realize that they may not live here in Little Rock close to their parents. They were choosing to build their lives in places like New Orleans, St. Louis, Kansas City and Memphis. I was not ready to share what I loved the most! But I finally came to an understanding that our children's spouses and our children's in-laws . . . well, they loved our children too. I had to understand I had to share my most precious possessions. And as another dad whose two oldest girls recently married and moved away with their new husbands told me: Sharing sucks.

He was right. It's easy to share money, time and material possessions, but the most difficult things I had to learn was to share what I valued the most – our children. But the rewards of grandchildren and an even larger family have made it most worthwhile!

Growing in wisdom, age and favor before God and others. We must pass on what we've been given – God's love and God's blessings. Not always easy - but so important to our relationship with God, family and friends.

I pray, I pray sincerely that you and your family, wherever they are, are having a most blessed Christmas.