

Feast of the Holy Family

(Introduce the Holy Family theme with the icons.

Neighbor, we are just ordinary families doing the best we can.

John Shea reflecting on the feast of the Holy Family shares a good insight about families as we gather this, Christmas season. He says

“During the Christmas season there is a raft of new and old stories about family gatherings at the holidays. The stories have predictable plots. Adult children from many parts of the country journey back to their childhood homes with spouses and children of their own. For the most part their aging parents are glad to see them. But the holidays stir up old antagonisms and push people to reveal the secrets and confess lies that have haunted the family for years. There is usually the loveable aunt or peculiar uncle who is too understanding for their own good. For good measure and to increase dram, one of the parents may have a terminal disease. The family has gathered. Expect fireworks.”

Yes, we are just ordinary families doing the best we can.

The challenges of family life reminds me of the gospel of today. It was not the feast of Christmas, but the feast of Passover which the Holy Family were celebrating. And they had traveled to Jerusalem for the feast. Everything was going quite well until it was time to travel the sixty miles back with the relatives and friends. Jesus was nowhere to be found. Expect fireworks!

Mary and Joseph were frantic, searching for him and then hurrying back to Jerusalem. They found him among the teachers in the temple asking them questions and teaching them. They, like most parents, were very frustrated with this blossoming adolescent son. “Why have you put us through so much worry and anxiety? We have been searching for you.”

Jesus responds, “Did you not know, I must be about my father’s work? This is the classic standoff between a teen becoming self-aware and his bewildered parents. It happens in life when one person changes and the others around him were not ready for it. Jesus’ actions call for a change in his parents. How do they grow to a new understanding of who their son is?

Mary and Joseph and Jesus were just an ordinary family doing the best they could.

I recently had the privilege of watching this happen in reverse fashion. A mother came in to register with her thirteen year old son. She had been raised in the Church with many years of Catholic schooling under her belt. But she had wandered away from the faith and felt a need to return. The son listened carefully as his mother shared her story with me. Then she turned towards her son and said, “ I would really like you to come and know more about this faith which I am returning to. In a number of years you will be making your own decisions about faith, but for now I would like you to learn about a faith community and a God which I treasure. Because of her gentle handling the blossoming young man was open to the invitation.

Yes, this mother and son are just an ordinary family of faith doing the best they can.

Usually the search and deepening of faith and life can take young adult children just the opposite direction. We may find one of our children coming home from college announcing to us that they do not believe in God or at least, that going to church is not something they value anymore. Parents question themselves about what the efforts all the years of raising the child in the faith, introducing them to the sacraments, and possibly even paying for a Catholic education has

resulted in. Yet, the search for God continues in both adult children and parents.

For we are all ordinary families doing the best we can.

Maybe that is exactly what Jesus was trying to say to his parents in today's gospel. He must be about his father's business. He was gaining a new insight into who he was and who God was. He could not return to his limited understanding of the one he now called Father.

Often throughout the journey of life we go through a period when we need to cast off our current understanding of God. It just doesn't fit all the challenges which we are dealing with. I once read a book called Your God is Too Small. It talked about the many reasons we need to outgrow and throw off our incomplete understanding of God and embrace a much bigger one. We may go through years of unbelief.

It is obvious in today's gospel story on that day at the temple Mary and Joseph were being challenged to expand their understanding of who this son of theirs was.

Scripture tells us that Mary, would keep pondering all these things in her heart. The challenge for her did not end until her crucified son rose from the dead.

No, Jesus, Mary and Joseph were not just an ordinary family doing the best they can, and neither are our families. For the Spirit of the Living God weaves in and out of our journeys of life. Let Mary be our example,

whether we are a teen breaking into adulthood,

a young adult setting out our own way of living

or a parent who continues to witness to God's presence in good times and bad,

let us, with Mary and Joseph on this feast of the Holy Family, ponder all these things in our hearts, trusting that the Lord who has begun our family on this journey of life, will bring us to fullness in Him .