

HOMILY

The Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

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As you heard the passage from Luke's Gospel about an incident in Jesus' life, the first question we might ask is this:

Is Christ missing from your family?

He is evidently missing from a lot of families. As an article in *Newsweek* pointed out, the upheaval is evident everywhere in our culture. Babies have babies. Affluent yuppies prize their BMWs more than children. Rich and poor children alike blot their minds with drugs. People casually move in with each other and out again. The divorce rate has doubled since 1965, and people who study profiles project that half of all first marriages today will end in divorce. Six out of ten second marriages will probably collapse. One-third of all children born in the past decade will probably live in a step-family before they turn 18. One out of every four children today is being raised by a single parent. About 22% of children born today were born out-of-wedlock; of those, about a third were born to a teenage mother. Most of these children live in poverty. It would be difficult to paint a bleaker picture.

How about your family? Is Jesus missing? A family may consist of only one person, but the question is relevant.

In one of Tennessee William's plays, a mentally ill woman is in her garden sitting at a card table working a jigsaw puzzle. She is tense and her hands are shaking. She tries to force pieces of the puzzle together that do not fit. Some of the pieces fall off the table. The pain and frustration are evident in the woman's face. She cries to her daughter, "The pieces don't fit together. The pieces don't fit together!"

Williams could have been describing the person who seeks to live without Christ. The pieces don't fit together. How can they? Without Christ there is only emptiness where there should be meaning and purpose. Is Christ missing from your family or from your life? That's the first question.

The second is:

When shall we begin searching for Him?

You and I are painfully aware of our need. We sense the emptiness, the loneliness, the fear. When shall we begin searching diligently for the one person who alone can meet our deepest needs?

According to an old legend, when the Magi were following the Star of Bethlehem, they came to the house of a certain woman. They said to her, “Come with us! We have seen His star in the east and we are going to worship Him.” “Oh,” she said. “I would love to go. I heard that He would be coming one day and I have been looking forward to it. But I can’t come now. I must set my house in order; then I will follow you and find him.” But when her work was done, the Wise Men were out of sight, the star shone no more in the heavens, and she never saw Jesus. There is a lesson here. The truly vital matters of life dare not be put off.

The last words written in Sir Walter Scott’s diary were, “Tomorrow we shall....” But there was no tomorrow for him. He died with good intentions to accomplish a certain goal—a goal that was not to be reached by him. Every thinking person has goals and dreams he longs for, plans for and even begins to reach for. Yet many people fall short of their goals simply because of limited time or opportunity. That is why it is always important to get busy and do the right thing immediately. Never delay that which needs to be done today. Is Jesus missing from your family, from your life? When shall you begin searching for him? Tomorrow? Next month? Next year?

This brings us to our last question:

Where shall we find him?

The answer, of course, is everywhere.

Some people find him in the beauty of nature. Thank God we have our four seasons and the Michigan landscape to enjoy. I love the clear windows on our church. We have the best of both worlds—we can sit inside and look out and see God’s handiwork on display. Yes, God is in the world he has made.

Likewise, there are no atheists in foxholes. Just like during World War II, one chaplain who has served for over 25 years in the Army has never seen so much spirituality from our service men and women as those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Having clergy that represent almost 85 religious groups, many people

do find God in such circumstances. Times of great stress, great heartache, and great concern will often turn our hearts to the one who can meet our deepest needs. But it would be far better if we settled the vital issues of life before a time of crisis.

Where, then, shall we find him? Most of us find him just where Mary and Joseph found him long ago: “In his Father’s house.” Here in this community of faith is where most people find God.

I know for some church is not always the most exciting place to be. A mother recently wrote in to Reader’s Digest that she once asked her young son what was the highest number he had ever counted to. He replied, “Five hundred thirty-seven.” She asked, “Why did you stop there?” He replied, “Church was over.”

Granted, for some, church is not as exciting as a football game or an action-filled movie picture. But this is where God may be found by any who are truly searching.

I heard of a recording that’s doing wonders in a certain nursery. This is a nursery full of infants and sometimes all of them will start crying at once. But the nursery workers have found out that when they put on this recording it seems to have a soothing effect on the infants. Before long, all of them stop crying. It’s the sound of a mother’s heartbeat. Apparently, the infants have some memory of life before birth in their mothers’ womb and the calming, reassuring effect of that heartbeat brings peace into those young lives. If we are quiet enough and still enough in this place, you and I can hear the heartbeat of God.

Is Jesus missing from your family or from your life? Who does not seek him out today? He has promised that if with all our hearts we truly seek him, we shall surely find him. He is here now. He is waiting, calling your name. Won’t you open your heart and let him come in?

