

FIRST READING – B-1 HOLY FAMILY

A reading from the book of Sirach.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord honours a father above his children,
and he confirms a mother's right over her sons.
Whoever honours their father atones for sins,
and gains preservation from them;
when they pray, they will be heard.
Whoever respects their mother
is like one who lays up treasure.
The person who honours their father
will have joy in their own children,
and when they pray they will be heard.
Whoever respects their father will have a long life,
and whoever honours their mother obeys the Lord.
My child, help your father in his old age,
and do not grieve him as long as he lives.
Even if his mind fails, be patient with him;
because you have all your faculties
do not despise him all the days of his life.
For kindness to your father will not be forgotten,
and will be credited to you against your sins –
a house raised in justice for you.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – B-1 HOLY FAMILY

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with compassion,
kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another and,
if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other;
just as the Lord has forgiven you,
so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
and with gratitude in your hearts
sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

Children, obey your parents in everything,
for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord.

Fathers, do not provoke your children,
or they may lose heart.

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – B HOLY FAMILY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses,
Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;
this man was righteous and devout,
looking forward to the consolation of Israel,
and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit
that he would not see death
before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple;
and when the parents brought in the child Jesus,
to do for him what was customary under the law,
Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary,
"This child is destined for the falling
and the rising of many in Israel,

and to be a sign that will be opposed
so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed —
and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

When Mary and Joseph had finished everything required
by the law of the Lord,
they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;
and the favour of God was upon him.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

This passage is obviously a commentary on the fifth (fourth) commandment: Honor thy father and thy mother. It adds the point that obedience to this commandment atones for sins (Sir 3:3, 14), an ideal typical of later Judaism.

This latter point should not be taken with full theological seriousness. The central message of the New Testament is, of course, that atonement for sins is through Christ alone.

The point should be taken merely as an incentive or inducement to obey this commandment, for in a loose, non-theological sense it may well be said that love of one's parents makes up for many sins.

or

Reading I: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3

God has promised Abraham that his descendants will become a great nation. This seems a most unlikely prospect. He and his wife are childless; she is well past the age of child-bearing, and he is a very old man.

In this situation Abraham is provided with an assurance: if YHWH can make all the stars of heaven, he can certainly make Abraham's descendants just as many in number

In verse 6 Abraham takes YHWH at his word. This is quoted by Paul as one of the pivotal verses in his exposition of the righteousness that comes through faith (Rom 4:3, 9-22), that is, a right relationship with God.

The second part of the reading, from Gen 21, speaks of the fulfillment of the prenatal promise in the birth and naming of the child. This whole story line is repeated in the narratives of the birth of Jesus in Matthew and Luke—the promise of (supernatural) birth, the birth, and the naming.

Responsorial Psalm: 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

This wisdom psalm, with its introductory beatitude ("Blessed is every one who fears the Lord") presents the fear of the Lord as the basis of family, social, and economic prosperity.

On a superficial level, it seems to express a naive, Deuteronomic confidence that obedience to the law will be an insurance against disaster, and a conviction that disaster can always be explained as punishment for disobedience, views seriously questioned already in the Book of Job.

Yet, there is something to it.

Where there is a wholesome respect for God and his will, human relationships do stand a better chance of being well ordered and harmonious. Those who fear the Lord are not tempted to put themselves in the place of God, to boast in their personal achievements.

Such persons are therefore freed to love their neighbor and make it easier for the neighbor to love in return.

or

Responsorial Psalm: 105:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

The response highlights the theme of covenant, an image not actually present in the Old Testament reading, though the first part of it (Gen 15:1-6) is followed immediately by a covenant ceremony.

Reading II: Colossians 3:12-21 (long form) or 3:12-17 (short form)

This is part of the “parenthesis,” or ethical section, of the letter to the Colossians. Such exhortations follow a regular pattern that is widely believed to reproduce the structure of a primitive Christian catechism.

The passage begins with a list of virtues, introduced by the imperative “Put on.” This language reflects the vesting of the candidate as he or she came up out of the baptismal font. This imperative may be preceded by another, namely, “Put off,” followed by a list of vices. This recalls the stripping of the candidate prior to baptism.

Following these general exhortations, there is often, especially in the later New Testament letters, a “Haustafel,” or household code, listing the various members of family and society and their respective duties.

Such codes were apparently derived from Stoic teaching via Hellenistic Judaism, whence they passed into Greek-speaking Christianity. That is why they reflect the subordinationist ethic of contemporary society (“Wives, be subject”—not an idea that is likely to appeal to feminists!).

But this subjectionist element, derived as it is from Stoicism, is not the distinctively Christian element in the code. That is found in the words “in the Lord”; in the injunction to husbands to love their wives; in the earlier definition of love as forgiveness; and in specifying the motivation for forgiveness as Christ’s forgiveness of sinners.

Here we should be able to find the raw materials for the formulation of a Christian ethic for a society that is not organized on a hierarchical, subordinationist pattern.

or

Reading II: Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Hebrews 11 is often called “the roll call of the heroes of faith.” Yet, strictly speaking, the Bible knows no heroes, for heroes are witnesses to their own achievements, whereas in Heb 11 the great figures of salvation history from Abraham to the prophets and martyrs of the old covenant are adduced, not for their heroism, but precisely for their “faith,” which is, in the author’s thought, closely linked to hope.

Faith is taking God at his word when he makes promises for the future. Thus, the Old Testament figures become examples for the new Israel, the new wandering people of God.

The new people has also in each succeeding generation had to imitate Abraham, who “went out, not knowing where he was to go,” and his family, who lived in tents because they had no abiding city here, but “looked forward to the city which has foundations.”

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40 (long form); 2:22, 39-40 (short form)

The caption at the head of both the long and the short form, as well as the text of the short form itself, puts the stress on the growth of the Christ-child to maturity and on the fact that he was filled with wisdom.

The presentation scene and the encounter between the Christ-child and Simeon, the *Nunc dimittis*, and the encounter with Anna are important kerygmatically, but they receive their proper due on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord (February 2), when the same Gospel is read. Our comments today will therefore be confined to the growth of the Christ-child.

Three points may be made here. The first is a dogmatic one. The Christ-child is fully human, and as such he has to grow not only physically but also mentally and spiritually.

If we are to understand the incarnation in scriptural terms, we must not think of it as entailing complete maturity from the outset. Rather, Christ is perfect man with the perfection that belongs to each stage of human growth. At each stage, too, he is the perfect manifestation of God in a manner appropriate for that stage.

The second point is that this growth to maturity takes place in the context of a human family. Apart from the story of the visit to the temple when Jesus was twelve years old, this is the only verse in the New Testament that speaks of his life in the Holy Family. Scripture is very reserved about that life, unlike the later apocryphal gospels.

But this verse is a priceless gem, for it contains all that we really need to know about the Holy Family. First, it was the divinely provided context in which the Christ was prepared for his saving mission. Second, the Holy Family is the paradigm for all Christian family

life, for the Christian family is the divinely provided context in which the Christian child may grow to physical, mental, and spiritual maturity.

The third point is typological. This verse points back through Lk 1:80 to 1 Sam 2:26. Jesus stands in the prophetic succession. He is the last and the greatest of the prophets but transcends them all, for he is the eschatological prophet. But he is still a prophet.

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