

December 29, 2019

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

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

When the Magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazorean."

Background:

The church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family the Sunday after Christmas, a time when many families have come together for the holidays. Because the reading describes Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fleeing into Egypt as a family, it is easy to presume that they are a family much like those with which we are familiar, even though we are aware that, for many, the "family unit" can be very diverse.

The typical family of Jesus' day was different in a number of ways. The strongest emotional bond was between the mother and her oldest son. The bond between husband and wife was usually the weakest. The typical family was part of a large, extended family. It is likely that Mary and Joseph had relatives in Bethlehem. Nazareth being a small hamlet of about 100 persons, it is likely that everyone was related to Jesus in a number of different ways.

Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the fulfillment of the Hebrew prophecies regarding the messiah, and he is presented as a kind of second Moses. To that end, Matthew presents the events of Jesus' life in way that mirrors the events of the life of Moses.

During a time of world famine, the Hebrew people found refuge in Egypt. Later in their history, Moses had to flee Egypt because a wicked pharaoh was killing infants that he believed to be a threat to his reign. As an adult, Moses was called by Yahweh to lead the Hebrew people out of Egyptian slavery to a new land and a new relationship. In today's gospel, Jesus too must flee to Egypt because Herod wants to kill him, and through another intervention Jesus is called out of Egypt to safety so that he can become the Messiah and savior.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are the events, struggles, and blessings that shaped the dynamics of your family?
2. How have those events also helped to shape your relationship to God and/or religion?
3. As Matthew presents Joseph in this gospel, what roles does he play in the life of his family?
4. Who played those roles in your own family?
5. Have you played similar roles in the lives of others?
6. What family values are being modeled in this text? What sacrifices are being made so that those values can be maintained?
7. Can you take some time now to talk to God about how God seemed to use Joseph in the life of Jesus, Joseph's trust that it was God who was speaking to him in his dreams, or your own desire to respond as Joseph does in this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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