

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Feast of the Holy Family—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

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

Readings

Gn 15:1-6; 21:1-3

The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying:

“Fear not, Abram!

I am your shield;

I will make your reward very great.”

But Abram said,

“O Lord GOD, what good will your gifts be,

if I keep on being childless

and have as my heir the steward of my house, Eliezer?”

Abram continued,

“See, you have given me no offspring,

and so one of my servants will be my heir.”

Then the word of the LORD came to him:

“No, that one shall not be your heir;

your own issue shall be your heir.”

The Lord took Abram outside and said,

“Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can.

Just so,” he added, “shall your descendants be.”

Abram put his faith in the LORD,

who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

The LORD took note of Sarah as he had said he would;

he did for her as he had promised.

Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age,

at the set time that God had stated.

Abraham gave the name Isaac to this son of his

whom Sarah bore him.

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

R. (7a , 8a) The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name;

make known among the nations his deeds.

Sing to him, sing his praise,

proclaim all his wondrous deeds.

R. The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

Glory in his holy name;

rejoice, O hearts that seek the LORD!

Look to the LORD in his strength;

constantly seek his face.

R. The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

You descendants of Abraham, his servants,
sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!
He, the LORD, is our God;
throughout the earth his judgments prevail.
R. The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

He remembers forever his covenant
which he made binding for a thousand generations
which he entered into with Abraham
and by his oath to Isaac.
R. The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Brothers and sisters:
By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place
that he was to receive as an inheritance;
he went out, not knowing where he was to go.
By faith he received power to generate,
even though he was past the normal age
--and Sarah herself was sterile--
for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy.
So it was that there came forth from one man,
himself as good as dead,
descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky
and as countless as the sands on the seashore.
By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac,
and he who had received the promises was ready to offer
his only son,
of whom it was said,
“Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name.”
He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead,
and he received Isaac back as a symbol.

Heb 1:1-2

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets;
in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

LK 2:22-40

When the days were completed for their purification
according to the law of Moses,
They took him up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord,
just as it is written in the law of the Lord,
Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,
and to offer the sacrifice of
a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,
in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.

This man was righteous and devout,
awaiting the consolation of Israel,
and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

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

He came in the Spirit into the temple;
and when the parents brought in the child Jesus
to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,
He took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go
in peace, according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;
and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is destined
for the fall and rise of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be contradicted
—and you yourself a sword will pierce—
so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

There was also a prophetess, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

She was advanced in years,
having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,
and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.

She never left the temple,
but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.

And coming forward at that very time,
she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child
to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions
of 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 favor of God was upon him.

Exegesis

Gn 15:1-6; 21:1-3

Abraham throughout the centuries has been appropriately referred to as our *father in faith*. Note that Abraham was formerly called Abram which is translated as lofty or exalted father. After the promise of God has been fulfilled and Sarah gives birth to Isaac his name is changed to Abraham which means *father of the multitude*. When the power of God and our response in faith meet, miracles happen. Abraham and Sarah who are childless are now advanced in years, far beyond natural childbearing; yet, through the power of God they bring forth a miraculous birth. Through the offspring of Isaac, Abraham becomes the father of the multitude and our father in faith.

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

Psalms 105 is a song celebrating Israel's history from Abraham to the Exodus. It is a celebration of God's faithfulness to His Covenant with the people. It is important to note the Jewish notion of God's remembrance, i.e. we continue to exist because God holds us in his memory. That memory is steadfast and eternal. When God chooses to remember not our sins, our sins cease to exist. From this promise, the promise of His love and mercy, we give thanks to the Lord, praise His name, and proclaim His wonderful deeds. Throughout this psalm gratitude to God in being sung.

Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Chapter 11 of *Hebrews* is titled *Faith of the Ancients*. It begins with a definition of faith: "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the Word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible." (Heb. 1:1-3) The Greek word for faith is *pistis*. The etymology of the word supports the definition in Hebrews verse 11:1. Realization and evidence are very experiential in nature. We can experience evidential reality in and through the Spiritual realm. Through faith, *pistis*, the believer can experience and come to know, *gnosis*, in a very real, tangible, and personal way, the invisible world, i.e., invisible reality.

It is through that level of faith that the ancients lived and moved. The author of Hebrews speaks of this faith in Abel, in Enoch, in Noah and finally in Abraham. Think of the faith that Abraham must have had to uproot his entire family, and an entire people and begin a blind sojourn. By faith he moved and trusted that God would lead and guide him to a place he knew not. By that same powerful faith, he offered up his only son, Isaac. He had faith in God no matter the cost. Through this faith he was able to reason a life beyond death in this world. He had faith that God would provide the Lamb, and God did when He offered His Only Son. This vision of Life beyond the corporeal world in which we live is called faith.

Exegesis (Continued)

LK 2:22-40

Joseph and Mary are fulfilling the Law prescribed in Leviticus Chapter 12. Note that the law required “a yearling lamb for a holocaust and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.” (Lev. 12:6). Also, note that there is an exception to this rule: “If, However, she (mother) cannot afford a lamb, she may take two turtledoves or two pigeons, the one for the holocaust and the other for the sin offering.” (Lev. 12:8). I would think that Joseph as a successful carpenter and provider could have afforded a lamb of sacrifice. Perhaps Luke is portraying Jesus as the Lamb of God being offered up to the Father.

Certainly, the Spirit of God is making the long-awaited return to the temple. Throughout his Gospel and *Acts of the Apostles* St. Luke reverberates the idea of people including Jesus Himself, or especially Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, and gifting that same Spirit. Simeon whose name means “God has heard,” is led by the Holy Spirit into the temple. The Holy Spirit is upon him, he came in the Spirit, and the Spirit revealed to him the Savior. In the temple he seems to be giving voice to that same Spirit. It is a universal Spirit and a universal savior. Like the light followed by the Magi, the child is a light to the gentiles, a light for all to see. Luke is proclaiming the gift of salvation of all people. In contrast with the Hebrew notion of a Savior of Israel from the line of David, Jesus came to save all people. Jesus may be the glory of Israel but, He is the savior of all.

The holy prophetess Anna whose name means “grace or favor or gift,” gives thanks to God and speaks of the child to all. Out of gratitude for the gift before her she becomes a witness and an evangelist. The Holy Spirit is evident in her as well.

Reflection

On the first Sunday after Christmas, we always celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. A few years ago, I was preaching at school Mass, and we were celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family. I asked the children why Jesus, Mary and Joseph are called the Holy Family. A little girl looked at me as if I had just asked the dumbest question ever, so I called on her. As she gave me “the look” she said, “Because Jesus is a part of the family, and He is the Son of God.” My response was, “Good answer.” The Holy Family is holy because Jesus is a part of the family. Every family is called to be a holy family. If Jesus is a part of the family, the family will be holy. Jesus must be the bond of love that holds the family together in good times and in bad.

God chose the family structure to enter the world. By being born into a human family Jesus sanctifies the human family forever. Jesus was not only the Son of God but also the son of Mary and foster son of Joseph. Like any child he was totally dependent on his mother and father for survival.

St. John Paul, II called the human family, the sanctuary of life. Joseph and Mary held the child Jesus in their arms. Mary nursed him. Warned in a dream they packed up and fled into Egypt for a period for the child’s safety. They returned to Nazareth and “The child grew and become strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him.” Mary and Joseph taught Him to walk, to read and write. As good Jewish parents they would have taught Him sacred scripture as well. Jesus grew up working in His father’s carpentry shop. He learned by working with and watching His father.

My own father was a very gifted carpenter. He built our home, several garages, and storage buildings. As a child I worked with him often. For me it was always fun to learn new things and to build things with my hands. Over the years I too have been involved in numerous building projects, including remodeling old houses, building houses, garages and camps, etc. I have done everything involved from concrete and block, to framing, to wiring and plumbing, to drywall and finishing work. I have never had any formal training or taken a trade class. All my building knowledge came from working side by side with my father.

My faith came to me in the same way. It came by watching and learning from my parents and grandparents. I learned more about God and about living a life of faith from them than I did in all my years of formal faith formation, including five years of intensive seminary training. The formal training helped me to articulate the faith that I already had, faith that was passed on to me from my family.

During the ritual of the Sacrament of Baptism parents and godparents are reminded that they are the first of teachers of their children in the ways of faith and they are challenged to be the best of teachers. The best teachers teach first by example. Never underestimate the value of the example that you set by living a devout Catholic life. There are children and grandchildren watching and learning. They learn from the example that we set; both good and bad.

My prayer is that this coming year will be a blessed and fruitful time for your family. Jesus is an integral part of every family and so we are a Holy Family. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In the heart of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,



Personal Witness

I think that all too often we equate holiness with perfection. This is very natural because we equate holiness with God and therefore holiness with perfection as God is perfect. Jesus once said, “You, therefore, be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48) Naturally, like many people, I always struggled with that command. How can we with all our human failings be perfect as God is perfect? The word that we translate as perfect is *teleo* in Greek and *kll* in Hebrew. The etymology of the word means finished or completed. In scripture it means to fulfill, or complete, or accomplish the purpose for which God created something to be. God is love. We were created in God’s image and likeness. We were created out of love and for love. Love is therefore our purpose, love true and steadfast, love enduring and giving.

Within God is this perfect family of love between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is that bond of love that makes God one. By its very nature love cannot be contained in God because it is self-giving. God’s love therefore burst out into all of creation. We are the product of that love. The persons of God define themselves in that relationship, Father to Son and Son to Father. At the Last Supper Jesus prayer, “Father, may they be one as You and I are One.”

The family is God’s plan for us. It is part of His perfect plan from the beginning of time. He made them male and female. He destined male and female to become one, as in one flesh. He told them to burst forth that love and multiply the earth.

I am blessed and eternally grateful to have been born into a loving family. It was not a perfect family as the world defines perfection, but it was a holy family, in that Jesus was a part of our family. The family that I speak of transcends father, mother, and siblings. It includes grandparents, extended family, church family and even neighbors. The multicultural expression “It takes a whole village to raise a child” certainly applied to my childhood experience. It was almost impossible to get away with anything! Multiple caring eyes seemed everywhere.

We were not rich in worldly goods. Both sets of grandparents came from very modest backgrounds. But in the words of my grandmother who was raised with 8 siblings on a very small dairy farm, “we were poor back then but didn’t know it.” They lived through challenging times. They endured the great depression and sent their sons and daughters to fight in the Second World War. They struggled at times to provide the very basics of life for their children. But they were rich in love and family, in faith and community.

They were rich in gratitude. They truly were thankful to God and each other in all circumstances. They were always thankful for the most basic blessings of life. Thanksgiving was more than an annual holiday; it was a way of life. They practiced gratitude.

My paternal grandparents owned a small county grocery and general merchandise store. On a typical Saturday morning I would “help” my grandfather delivering groceries around the countryside. We traveled down remote sideroads to extremely shabby shacks and trailer homes. Most often those abodes were bursting with children. I learned much later in life that my grandfather seldom invoiced for those groceries. He was always helping someone.

A neighbor who was recently married was building a new home and it was just framed in. On Thanksgiving Day, he fell from the roof and ended up in the hospital for weeks. He returned home on Christmas eve to find his home complete. My father, grandfather, uncles, and neighbors finished his home for him and his new wife. They were practicing gratitude!

In that environment I cannot recall ever feeling a sense of entitlement. Back then it was an entirely foreign concept to me. For that I am most grateful!

