

## Holy Family, 2018

Years ago, I had finished up with the 10am Mass at St. Mary, and, after greeting everybody, I noticed that there was a small boy still wandering around. I called him over and asked, "Did they forget you?" He nodded yes. I said, "They'll be back soon." So we sat on the front steps of St. Mary, and in a few minutes, one of the family vehicles approached. A concerned mother hopped out of the van, hugged her son, and he jumped in.

The fifth joyful mystery of the rosary meditates on the story of finding Jesus in the temple. As a Jewish woman schooled in the tradition of the Prophets, Mary never prayed the rosary, but no doubt she and Joseph were glad they found Jesus. Perhaps Mary said to Joseph, "The angel never told me about this." There is no manual for being a parent. Experienced parents aren't really surprised by the mystery of parenting. They just nod and say, "You never know what to expect." And they might add, "The struggles of family life have brought me great growth."

This feast of the Holy Family offers the opportunity to reflect on the mystery of family life. In reality, every family and community share the perplexing, frustrating, demanding challenge Luke describes in today's Gospel. Put most simply, Mary and Joseph faced the difficult discovery that Jesus was not going along with them every step of the way. It is a real story of a family conflict and is symbolic of all kinds of relationships. I would imagine that Joseph and Mary didn't let Jesus out of sight after that.

Having never been a parent myself, 2002 was a rude awakening for me. Mom had come down with Alzheimer's; Dad was suffering from some dementia. I called my brothers in for a meeting. Since neither lived close by, we decided to move them to Carlyle. I became a caregiver for them. I started a journal the day we moved them, chronicling everything that happened the next ten years of their lives and my lives. I quickly found out that I knew very little about looking after them as they moved from assisted living to Carlyle Healthcare and in the end to the grave.

Thanks to my brother's and their families' support and the support of a number of you, my parish family, I started to learn WHAT IT REALLY MEANT TO BE FAMILY AND "IN CHARGE." I've often said that I thought Mom and Dad were finished teaching me. But the real lesson began when they moved to Carlyle. It was a privilege for me AND I also have often said that this experience made me a much better priest than I thought I could ever be. Words like family, compassion, caring, forgiveness, joy, sorrow, frustration, agony, prayer and spirituality ETC. all took on a deeper and REAL meaning for me.

Mom and Dad imaged God's presence for me from infant on up. And in the end, they taught me everything about truly being family. I am lucky and blessed. So was Jesus blessed to have Mary and Joseph as parents. Not every family is so lucky or blessed. We give thanks to God for our families today, and for our part let us progress "steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and all." We are family...God is good...all the time...