

*And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men.*

Today we have this beautiful Gospel scene, the lone scriptural account of the childhood of Our Blessed Lord. St. Bede the Venerable tells us that the childhood of the Son of God, despite his divinity, “is clothed with the fragility of human nature, and in that humanity, had to grow and become stronger, but as the Eternal Word of God had no need to do so. Thus, he is rightly described as full of wisdom and grace”. It is in this context that Holy Mother Church proclaims this Gospel passage on the Feast of the Holy Family.

The Holy Family is the model for our own families and homes. Of course, they are our model, with a Mother born without the stain of sin; a Father, graced with knowing his wife as the Ark of the New Covenant obediently caring for her with love and respect; a child who is the divine Son of God with Virgin birth whose mission was to sanctify the world and satisfy divine justice!

But a model of what? The Holy Family is a model of virtue, but also of the trinitarian life. This is our call too, to be witnesses of the Holy Trinity in the world. God did not make us to remain with the limits of our fragile human nature—simply just to live with our deficiencies. He made us to be lifted into the heart of the life of the Trinity, to “grow and become stronger”, like Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

The operation of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Family are fully expressed in the Church—the family of God, the “mystical extension of the Holy Trinity in time” writes Cardinal de Lubac. The Church is the society of people united by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It not only prepares us for this life of union but gives us a sure guarantee of it; it makes us participate in it. The Holy Family then is a model of Church too.

And so was the Great Apostle Paul, who exhorts us to be models of Church life. Shipwrecked, whipped, beaten, imprisoned but never ceasing preaching the Gospel St. Paul reminds us of our dignity as Catholics and what being Catholic means. Yes, we have our own families, but we are part of a much bigger one, a mystical, spiritual one. And that is the family of the Church.

We are indeed Ecclesial beings, consecrated in baptism and the sacramental life to a higher calling. As the “elect” we are called to become “new men”, to make up the what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ in the ecclesial and spiritual life. By putting on “the bowels of mercy”, which is compassion, to be willing to suffer with one another.

With benignity, or kindness. With modesty, to be free from vanity, to have a high regard for the decency of dress, behavior and speech.

To be patient, especially with the provocations and annoyances from our brothers and sisters, and of course in our own pains and sufferings too. To be forgiving, to have a merciful disposition in imitation of Christ, and rid ourselves of our complaints with one another.

Finally, to be charitable. Without it, we are just noisy gongs, clanging cymbals, our words and works empty of true meaning if we fail to love God and neighbor.

Origen wrote “for myself, I desire to be truly ecclesiastic”. To him there was no other way to be a Christian in the fullest sense. To be ecclesiastic means one “falls in love with the beauty of the house of God; the Church will have stolen your heart. The Church is our native country, our mother and our brethren. We are to be rooted in her soil, formed in her likeness and be made one with her experience. It will be from her that we learn how to live and how to die”.

Is this a description of us, me, our homes, Parish, the Church? Do we think and act this way as the elect of God?

Because we sure have plenty of complaints and grievances against one another, from the bottom all the way to the top right? Some terrible, awful wounds have been inflicted on the Body of Christ, always from outside but now from within too! Is Jesus lost in the Temple?

No. No. Only if we lose him. “The Church”, wrote St. Irenaus, “is always a paradise in the midst of which the Gospel wells up like a Spring. The Gospel is proposed to all, both the great and small of the world, from generation to generation and if it does not produce in us a fruition of life, the fault is ours”.

We make this journey through life together as a people of God, in our fragile humanity as brothers and sisters in faith. We all have our imperfections and sins, and complaints and grievances with one another. We are not perfect, our families are not perfect, and thus we, as a Church aren’t either. And it won’t be until the second coming of Christ, when the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world become one and there is no need for the Church.

Until then, may God see us as, despite ourselves, witnesses of the Holy Trinity in the world; as models of the Holy Family and models of the Church, Christ’s mystical body.

And may we, like the child Jesus, grow and become stronger, and *by the grace of God advance in wisdom and age, and in grace with God and men.*

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us.