

# Homily Holy Family Year C St Pius & St Anthony (2024)

Christmas keeps on! I love how our Catholic tradition makes a whole season out of a day (like the '12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas' song)! I was surprised many years ago when I first heard about some Christian groups that do not celebrate Christmas day. They say we don't know the exact date by scripture and Christ saving us is about more than a day. (I understand their motive if they are protesting commercialization—someone just told me that a store they visited had already removed all Christmas items and guess it, hearts and Valentines are already out!). But to those not celebrating Christmas, we Catholics can say, "Yes, Christmas is more than a day, It is a whole season of days. It is too much to celebrate within one day!" Remember that we prepared thru Advent's 4 weeks (28 days), so of course, when the Christmas comes, we'll celebrate for more than a day (similarly, there's Easter, that goes on 50 days until Pentecost!) So, we'll be singing Christmas carols and viewing decorations for a season, all for the purpose of letting the full significance of God being born like us, taking on our human experiences to save us from within.

But I'd also say that we are not alone in keeping multiple-day religious celebrations. We just read a gospel reading that mentioned Jesus, Mary and Joseph going to Jerusalem to observe the Passover Feast, and it said, "After they had completed *its days*, they were returning..." (Luke 2:43). So, Jesus celebrated religious occasions over several days too (*in His inherited faith of Judaism, they had a Passover of 8 days, like Hannukah's 8 days going on now*). So, we are not alone in seeing the value of having 'multiple-day' feasts. But today's gospel and talk of religious seasons, has me thinking of the use of ritual, that a repeated discipline, or structure to our religious practice reinforces our good devotion. Our religious rituals form us, shape us, and sometimes even carry us, as we see so often with our comforting rituals when we grieve, how they anchor us when we feel our foundations are shattered through the death of loved ones. Or a more happy example is how the military or professional athletes will talk about how 'training, training, training' will guide them through all challenges (fall back on it!) I call such ritual structure/discipline (*word disciple comes from that!*), simply 'tradition' or custom

I mention all this because I know also that at this time of year, often children will ask me, "Father, weren't we just at church? Here we are again!" But tradition is good, and it reinforces our practice and belief!

There is a religious proverb among rabbis, that says, "it is more often the case that the Sabbath keeps the man, than that the man keeps the sabbath." **Our faithfulness to practice** may waver, but the ritual is steady and stabilizing. It holds

us as a grounding anchor secure in faith. And I find that Luke's gospel emphasizes ritual routine (tradition) when it comes to religious practices. He reminds us that Jesus' **family** was serious about keeping to the schedule and customs of their faith (*the first verses of Luke 1 clearly reveal this, where Luke highlights structure, order and sequence*). Today's reading said that, "when he was twelve years old, they went up ***according to festival custom***" to observe the Passover rituals (Luke 2:42). A few chapters later we'll hear in Luke 4:16 that "Jesus came to Nazareth.....and went ***according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day....***", and even at the end of the gospel after Jesus cleanses the Temple--trying to return it to its purpose as a place of pure prayer (*instead of power & politics*) in Luke 22:39 "Then going out he went, ***as was his custom***, to the Mount of Olives" to do what, but vs 41 tells us "to pray"! So, in these examples, Jesus is setting the standard for us to keep a place for patterned purpose for our Souls. Customs are good. We keep the traditions, or rather, the traditions keep us. Their role is to be good formative structures, necessary to help keep us faithful to God (*what do they say, but that if you don't stand for something, you fall for anything....*) So I suggest that Jesus was FOR, keeping a regular time and place for going to God, offering worship and prayer. Our souls require the regularity, repetition? of rituals!

So what happens in the story today, but Jesus, Mary and Joseph go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, they fulfill the observances, and then its time to return Jesus home..... or so Mary and Joseph think! They are about to learn where true home is, for Jesus. As they are caravanning back to Nazareth, they can't find Jesus in the company of family (Did they say to each other, "I thought he was with you" & "No, I thought he was with you.") So, they return to Jerusalem to the Temple, and there Jesus is, not playing fun games in the courtyard with the other kids, but sitting amid the distinguished rabbis, listening and asking questions! Of course, He is the kid prodigy, since He is the Wisdom of God Incarnate (*Word 'of Teaching' made flesh Jn 1:14*) He is the Teacher of the teachers! And Mary and Joseph are 'astonished (Lk 2:48) I don't think they are surprised at his excellence and its recognition by the scholars there. I'd say they are surprised by his not informing them of his plans to make this academic debut in Temple (*maybe Jesus had hinted to them about such a Temple debut, like a child aspiring to be an actor, says, 'one day I am going to Hollywood to make it'*) But I wonder if this may have been His way of drawing them away from the extended family left back in the caravan still, because we'll see how extended family and his own home village react when he debuts later in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:29). He will be rejected, driven out and almost thrown over the hill. So this episode was a precursor, trial-run revelation to Mary Joseph that Jesus was God's wisdom and to be listened to – he had much to teach.

I like how Jesus' response here are His first spoken words in the gospel of Luke, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49). These words might seem dismissive of Mary & Joseph's anxiety, but I hear Jesus saying, "This is my call--I came to fill this house with Spirit again (this house is all of ours!) I think Jesus was reminding Mary, what Angel Gabriel had announced, that her son would be "given to sit on the throne of David (David's connection to Temple-Jesus does what David couldn't do which is to truly build God's temple (The temple is 'God's presence on earth' that is Jesus himself!) Jesus will teach this later in Jn 2:19 after He cleanses the Temple, saying 'Destroy this temple and in **three days** I will raise it up' the Temple that is Him Jn 2:21) and in Mt 12:6 when he reveals that "there is something greater than the Temple here" Him! But Gabriel had gone on to tell Mary, Jesus would "rule the house of Jacob forever" He would lead all the people. Yes, lead them in prayer- pure prayer to the Father- just what He is doing here for Mary & Joseph.

Jesus' response may have even been a gentle reminder saying, "Mom, don't you remember, that you brought me here and dedicated me" at the Presentation (Luke 2:22-40). Jesus is certainly directing them to trust that He knows His call, His mission. Today's event, is a coming of age revelation. He does go back to Nazareth with them, but 'He'll be back', returning to the Temple to build it New! Replacing it with His own self. Jesus is the Temple now-the 'Presence of God' on earth or 'Emmanuel' as we say in Christmas, "God with us". Jesus becomes the Temple for us, and our visiting the Temple happens in every sacrament, our tradition, every Mass, every genuine prayer in His Name. Of course, the Father's house (*sometimes translated as "Father's business" or "Father's work"*) is where we find Jesus. That happens in our prayer when we turn to God. Our regularity (custom) of Prayer is what leads us to Find Jesus. He is there!

*(What do they say, "If you lost God, guess who moved!" Well, go back to Him, get back to the Temple-we'd say get back to Prayer!)*