

Commentary on the Gospel: The Holy Family (Year A)

Gospel for the feast of the Holy Family (Year A), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 2:13-15; 19-23*)

When they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of

Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

When Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Commentary

The Gospel for the liturgical feast of the Holy Family contains two passages from Saint Matthew's account of Jesus' infancy: the flight to Egypt, because of Herod's persecution, and the return of the Holy Family to the land of Israel, to their home in Nazareth. Matthew seems to stress that both the dramatic events in Jesus' hidden life, as well as the more ordinary ones, happened according to the Scriptures. These events, therefore, had a deep meaning in the light of divine providence. The people of Israel had to flee from the dangers of Egypt, as narrated in the book of Exodus; but now Egypt will become, by a happy contrast, the place of refuge for the Messiah. From there, God would call him as his Son, to return to the land of Israel to save his people and the Gentiles. Divine indications and circumstances will

lead Mary and Joseph to settle in Nazareth, where Jesus will spend most of his life.

Regarding the dramatic event of the flight to Egypt, Pope Francis remarked: “today the Gospel presents the Holy Family to us on the sorrowful road of exile, seeking refuge in Egypt. Joseph, Mary and Jesus experienced the tragic fate of refugees, which is marked by fear, uncertainty and unease (cf. *Mt 2:13-15; 19-23*) . . . Jesus wanted to belong to a family who experienced these hardships, so that no one would feel excluded from the loving closeness of God. The flight into Egypt caused by Herod’s threat shows us that God is present where man is in danger, where man is suffering, where he is fleeing, where he experiences rejection and abandonment; but God is also present where man dreams, where he hopes to return in freedom to his

homeland and plans and chooses life for his family and dignity for himself and his loved ones.^[1] Everything that happens in our own lives too contains a meaning that we need to strive to understand and draw good from, with our free correspondence, even if at first it seems painful to us.

The apparently ordinary and unremarkable events in our life also have great meaning in God's eyes. As the Pope went on to say: "Today our gaze on the Holy Family lets us also be drawn into the simplicity of the life they led in Nazareth. It is an example that does our families great good, helping them increasingly to become communities of love and reconciliation, in which tenderness, mutual help, and mutual forgiveness is experienced."^[2]

The Holy Family and especially Saint Joseph are seen in this Gospel passage as an endearing model of

acceptance of God's will and the effort to understand and second it. Thanks to the decisions of Mary and Joseph, the Son of God will fulfill the divine will to live in an ordinary family, which becomes the setting for his daily life for many years. As Saint Josemaría said, "The fact that Jesus grew up and lived just like us shows us that human existence and all the ordinary activity of men have a divine meaning. No matter how much we may have reflected on all this, we should always be surprised when we think of the thirty years of obscurity which made up the greater part of Jesus' life among men. He lived in obscurity, but, for us, that period is full of light. It illuminates our days and fills them with meaning, for we are ordinary Christians who lead an ordinary life, just like millions of other people all over the world.

“That was the way Jesus lived for thirty years, as ‘the son of the carpenter.’ There followed three years of public life, spent among the crowds. People were surprised: ‘Who is this?’ they asked. ‘Where has he learned these things?’ For he was just like them: he had shared the life of ordinary people. He was ‘the carpenter, the son of Mary.’ And he was God; he was achieving the redemption of mankind and ‘drawing all things to himself.’”^[3] —

^[1] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, December 29, 2013.

^[2] *Ibid.*

^[3] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 14.

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