Holy Family C

THE WORD IS WITH US

Allan Moss OMI

www.sjti.ac.za/resources_homily.htm

First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28
Response: “Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord” (Ps.84:5)
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 84:2-3,5-6,9-10
Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-2,21-24

“O perfect love, all human thought transcending, lowly we kneel in prayer before thy throne. That theirs may be the love which knows no ending whom thou for evermore dost join in one.” (Dorothy Frances Gurney)

Dorothy F. Gurney (1858-1932), poet and hymnwriter, whose. Her father and husband were Anglican priests. She became Catholic in 1919. She was asked to write a hymn for a wedding which she did in 15 minutes basing it on the twofold aspect of perfect union, love and life. She felt God inspired her.

Christ was a child on earth and part of the Holy Family. Now as Risen Lord he is a part of every family. Even as marriage begins for Christians in the house of God (Holy Sacrament of Matrimony), may God always have a place in their house.

The great prophet Samuel comes from a holy family life. His father Elkanah, “went up with all his family to offer sacrifice to the Lord” (1 Sam. 20:21).

Samuel’s mother, Hannah, considers her child, Samuel, a gift from God. She offers him back to God, “makes him over to the Lord for the whole of his life” (1 Sam.20:28).

Samuel grows up as one of those “blessed who dwells in the house of the Lord” (Ps.84:5) for the Lord “looks upon the face of his anointed” (Ps.84:10).

Later, for pilgrims, the house of the Lord shifted from holy shrines to the great Temple in Jerusalem, “how lovely is your dwelling place, Lord God of hosts” (Ps.84:1). The dwelling place for Son of God on earth began in the womb of Mary and with the Holy Family.

Holy Family is part of the greater family of God and John tells us how we become part of God’s family if “we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another” (1 Jn.3.23).

In doing God’s will and his commandments that one “lives in God and God lives in him” (1Jn.3.24).

The Gospel portrays Jesus as a child in the Holy Family. Although aware of his mission in Jerusalem, he obediently goes with his parents to Nazareth and “lived under their authority” (Lk.2:51).

In growing up in the Holy Family, the Gospel says that “Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men” (Lk.2:52). Such is a model for child, at home and in the Church.

Today’s Gospel portrays the mystery of finding Jesus in the Temple (Fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary). Jesus was obedient to his parents on earth and to his Father in heaven.

See Jesus at home with his family and involved in the Temple, his Father’s house, the Church.

Church Teachings of the Church emphasize the importance of family life at home and the greater family of God.

Witness to family love at home and see your mission to serve God’s greater family, human family.
“O perfect life, be thou their full assurance, of tender charity and steadfast faith, of patient hope, and quiet, brave endurance, with childlike trust that fears not pain nor death.”

FOR THE CHILDREN

Read and discuss the Gospel of today, the Feast of the Holy Family. Eucharist is a sacred family meal. Begin New Year begin with family at worship in the house of God.

Jesus grew up having learned the sacred Teachings and discussing with teachers of the law.

Jesus’ exemplary Witness is seen in his obedience to his parents and to God.

FOR TEENAGERS (Shared Christian Praxis)

Name the Present Action: What is the significance of the Holy Family to you?

Your Story and Vision: Your experience of family life and what it should be?

Church’s Story and Vision: Here the teacher speaks of family life qua home and Church.

Yours and Church’s Vision: What it means to live and belong to the family of God?

RCIA

Finding Jesus in the Temple is a mystery of faith. What were the dynamics operative in the Holy Family? What were the dynamics in Jesus himself as true God and true man? How much did he know and how much did he have to learn? He certainly amazed his hearers.

PHILOSOPHY (Ancient Greeks)

Anaxagoras born in Ionia (500-428 B.C.), was first pre-Socratic to teach in Athens and taught “Mind over Matter.” He elaborated a theory of matter by which nothing comes into being or perishes. Like Parmenides, no substances emerge that is not already present in the cosmos, so no gap between appearance and reality. Everything we perceive is real and a mixture with a piece of everything in everything else. Everything consists of an infinite number of things, of ‘seeds’ which contain elements of everything and are in everything. Certain elements are in greater abundance creating life’s myriad diversity. Ultimate realities are stuff like water, earth, flesh, bone, and contraries like hot and cold. Everything is a mixture. You are what you eat. There are portions of blood, flesh, bone, hair, nails in wheat, which explains how food makes human bodies. Ultimately, there are tiny things that cannot be cut further. These ‘uncuttables’ or ‘atoms’ form new compounds and indivisible.

In lieu of Empedocles’ ‘Love and Strife’ theory, he believed in existence of a “Nous” (omniscient impersonal Mind) that gives order to the universe. Initial chaos of mixture gives way to ordered cosmos. Nous begins the motion, separating cosmic masses of air, water and earth. Mind is finer than matter. Found in living things but not mix with matter. Anaxagorus, theory of mind is first hint of a mind/matter dualism.

In our age we talk of body, mind and spirit. It is interesting how the ancient Greeks had a notion.

VIGNETTES OF MY LIFE
In 1990, Allan could not have hoped for better, when the Provincial of the Oblates, once his superior at Cedara, Barry Wood, asked him to take over the so-called Coloured Parish of Christ the King in Wentworth. Cyril Carey OMI, the founding father had built it up over a period of twenty-nine years. He was now critically ill. Christ the King had grown into one of the biggest and most dynamic parishes in the archdiocese and Allan saw it as a great challenge to fill in the shoes of a man like Cyril who was highly respected by his confreres and loved by all his parishioners. He was not only big in stature big also had a big and generous heart. Allan could appreciate some of Cyril’s earlier experiences, like beginning a new parish in the middle of nowhere, in one of the worst areas of Durban, not fit for Whites, at that time being marshes and bushes with a derelict army camp. It also consisted of Zanzibari Moslem communities living there. It was long before Newlands East, when the Durban Municipality planned it as a sub-economic housing scheme for Coloureds. Nearby are huge oil refineries polluting the atmosphere and making it a dangerous area to live in. Cyril boldly pitched his camp with his people and identified with them and created a great parish. Fr. Joseph Champlin, a leading Catholic liturgist and theologian, who travelled over two million miles around the world, lecturing on liturgical and pastoral matters as well as conducting retreats and parish missions, visited Wentworth and made Archbishop Hurley proud, in proclaiming that it was one of the best parishes he ever visited. Cyril was considered avant-garde, especially in liturgy, being the first to introduce into his parish: altar girls, liturgical dancers and lay ministers. No doubt, Allan felt that he had more catching-up to do than leading the parish. He was determined not to change anything, at least not for a while, until he got acquainted with the local situation. There was more to learn than he could give. There was also the painful experience in his mind of when he was once a founding father of a parish and his successor taking over, immediately changed everything, upsetting and confusing the people. In this case, Allan was in the shoes of a founding father, “a great man, a godly man,”1 whom he felt he could proudly follow.

The Oblate Provincial and Archbishop Hurley, had to retire Cyril Carey because he had a tumour on the brain which was malignant. He accepted that he was seriously ill but did not know how fatal it would be and his doctor did not tell him. Allan gathered this when he agreed to Cyril’s request to stay on with him at Wentworth. Being a very busy parish, the pressure doubled up with more parishioners and friends flocking to see him. One day while we were having tea together with Rodney Boyd OMI., Rod decided that we should pray. In his prayers, he called upon the Almighty to help Cyril, to heal him and to help him cope with his tumour on the brain. Cyril was taken aback when he heard how bad was the tumour and we had to console him. It was finally decided to settle him at St. Anthony’s in Durban, which was central, quiet and accessible. His health deteriorated. He was hospitalized and soon passed away. Allan was left to continue the monumental work he had begun.

To be honest, it was not only the challenge that attracted Allan but also the opportunity to be able to get out of Cedara. He was however, still bound to teach two days a week at St. Joseph’s. Basically, he was part of the formation team and academic teaching staff but preferred the pastoral work of St. Joseph’s Parish. Allan is academical in his own fashion. He never saw it as a career to dominate his priesthood. His vocation is pastoral. That was his first and most basic calling but was always interested in furthering his knowledge. Circumstances led him on to degrees and then the tail started wagging the dog and he found himself in an academic institution. He enjoys using his expertise more pastorally than in a classroom. When approached overseas and locally, to write an article or supervise a post-graduate candidate writing a thesis, he only accepted to do so once and was not interested in doing it again. He also had the interesting experience, in America, of being on board where a student had to defend his doctoral thesis. Allan does write, not strictly as an academic but rather in his own free-lance style. He is an avid reader in literature with regards to theology, philosophy, science, and classics (ancient and modern). He considers this his past-time, rather than television, games and social events. He treasures his quiet time, not as much for prayer as he should, but more to do his reading.

Needless to say, it did not take Allan long to know his new flock in Wentworth and they soon got to know him, including each other’s good points and faults which will be seen in the course of time.

WHAT AM I THINKING?

Speaking of Samuel in the first reading today, calls to mind a picture that always caught my attention as a child. It portrayed a conservative middle-aged with a big moustache. In spite of his kind face, one sensed he was a man of law. He was a Jew, Samuel Moss, my paternal grandfather. He married Angela, one of the daughters of John Dunn, a White chief of the Zulus. Having Jews in the family, didn’t mean much to me, until later years when I learned more about them from the bible and history. My father learned his faith, not from his Jewish father but from his Catholic mother, and that is one of the greatest heritages in our family. Yet I wonder how much of my grandfather’s blood comes out in us. “Things grow and grow,” says the philosopher, “but go back to their roots.” The old picture looks conservative. My sisters think my brother and I could be taking after him, being somewhat old-fashioned, but we think it is more the girls. Ask my brothers-in-law!


IMPORTANT WORD: “How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of hosts” (Ps. 83:1).

‘Dwelling place’ translates from Hebrew משכן, mishkenah, meaning habitation, i.e. habitation of God, the temple, the sacred tabernacle. The root of the word is שכן (shakan), meaning dwell from which comes the divine word שכינה (Shekinah), referring to the Presence of God in the midst of his people, as seen in the pillar of cloud, the tabernacle and the Temple of Jerusalem. Interestingly, the Hebrew translation for Word made flesh “and dwelt amongst us” is ובתכנו (vayishekon bethokhenu) (Jn.1:14). The original Greek is εσκηνοσε (eskhēnōsen) derived from σκηνή (skēnē), a tent, meaning to pitch a tent, encamp, dwell. Such is the term for God enfleshing himself into our lives, being with us ‘conceptual and perceptible,’ as Pseudo-Dionysius would say, “supra-existent Being, Mind beyond mind, Word beyond speech.”

Do we accept him in our midst or is he still a stranger? Celebrating Christmas tells the truth.

2 PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS. Opus cit. p.50.

Watchword: “His mother stored up all these things in her heart” (Lk.2:51).

Hebrew: אשת שמרה דבריה大全 בלבה אשתשה - המריה המלוה
(Ver‘immo shamrah belibah eth kol-hadebarim ha’eleh).

Greek: Καὶ η μητέρα αὐτοῦ διετήρα παντα τα Ρημάτα της καθ’ οiros παθης.
(Kai he meter autou dieterai panta ta remata en te kardia autes).

Latin: Et mater ejus conservabat omnia verba in corde suo

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