

# Feast of the Holy Family

December 27, 2008

QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA  
Rev. Jeff McGowan

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3**

"Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Just so, shall your descendants be."

**Psalm 105**

Glory in his holy name; rejoice O hearts that seek the Lord!

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19**

He went out not knowing where he was to go.

**Gospel: Luke 2:22-40**

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

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As a child, I was told that I would learn to read in first grade. Somehow, I had the impression that I would learn to read on the first day, that learning to read was just a secret that would be imparted to me at the proper time...I didn't grasp that learning to read was a process. I guess I thought the teacher would say a magic word and it would happen, I'd read. Imagine my frustration when we began to go over the alphabet and the sounds each letter signified. "When are we going to learn to read?" I asked the teacher as the school day dragged on. Sr. Karen Francis told me that this was learning to read, this is how you started. Oh, it was going to take time and effort to learn to read. That was a huge disappointment.

The child is parent of the adult, I guess. I recently bought a program that is supposed to help me learn to speak Italian. I downloaded it onto my computer and assumed I'd know how to speak Italian just like that (snap my fingers). I waited one day, two, a week, but nothing happened. Soon I realized I would have to open the program and start practicing. It is very frustrating to repeat words and phrases and not have the computer accept my pronunciation. Oh yeah, this is going to take more effort than I ever imagined.

I know that there are child prodigies, like Mozart and Tiger Woods. But I was not born a genius. I've had to work and struggle for everything that is of value in my life. The Gospel tells us that Jesus "grew and became strong," and I do not believe it happened by magic for him either. It was a process his parents guided him through. He had to learn to read. He had to learn the local rural Aramaic, the common Greek spoken in the city and the Hebrew of the synagogue. His parents were there to teach him. And even when he thought he knew more than the Rabbi, his parents still made him go to the synagogue. They built his character and they built his faith.

The Holy Family didn't have our advantages. There was no Sr. Karen Francis or computer language program. But the basics remain: it took work and struggle. Even prodigies have to practice. In my experience to "grow strong" and "filled with wisdom" means resistance exercises. The heavier the weight the stronger we become and the tougher the experience the more wisdom we gain from it. Jesus experienced parents who put everything in their lives on the line for their son. I think that's why he believed in the power of love. I think that's why no storm, no threatening Pharisee, no Roman legionary ever scared him. He was never afraid. None of that happened without sacrifice; none of that happened by just sitting around; it took commitment, dedication, hard work, struggle and especially faith. We learn most of what we learn through our families. When I look around this church today I see families. I see parents knocking themselves out for their children; I see kids of all ages growing strong and filling with wisdom. When we work at it, it works for us; isn't that good news!