

On this Sunday after Christmas, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We often have a tranquil picture of the Holy Family: Kneeling in awe before the Child Jesus or at work in the carpenter shop in Nazareth. Still, the Gospels describe frightening events: refugees fleeing from a murderous despot and, today, the anguish of searching for a missing child.

It happened this way: Mary and Joseph travelled for a day, supposing that everything was fine. When they discovered Jesus' absence they were a good distance from Jerusalem. Perhaps they searched at different spots outside of Jerusalem, but - whatever happened - it took three days to finally locate their son. Mary speaks to Jesus about how they had been looking for him "with great anxiety."

We can be confident that the boy Jesus was not acting on whim. The suffering that Mary and Joseph underwent would bring about some greater good. We can only speculate on how it served that holy couple. What we can be sure of is that Jesus wants us to gain something good from this event.

Joseph and Mary experienced that "great anxiety." Now, for them it did turn into immense joy when they found Jesus on the "third day." While I would not offer parents facile platitudes ("everything is going to be all right" or "your child is in a better place") I would invite them to join the Blessed Virgin in standing at the foot the cross. She knows your anguish.

The Finding of the Boy Jesus in the Temple is a mystery that we meditate upon. Like Mary, we should try to "keep all these things in the heart." They bear repeated reflection, as happens when we pray the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary.

In your meditation on this mystery, I would like to call your attention to a small detail. When Mary addresses Jesus, she says, "Your father and I have been looking for you..." She could have spoken about a mother's anguish, how Jesus' disappearance had torn her heart in two - and, certainly, no one would have blamed her. But she did not speak from a personal perspective. She spoke from the perspective of matrimony: That husband and wife strive for unity, a common vision.

Unity, working for a common perspective, requires daily effort and great humility. Mary and Joseph had done that work. Therefore, with perfect naturalness, Mary could say, "Your father and I."

The Holy Family has much to teach us. For that reason we have a feast in their honor each year - and throughout the year, commemorations that focus on different aspects of that blessed family. Today we have seen two lessons: How they passed through an experience of terrible anguish and how, even with such stress, Mary and Joseph maintained the unity of perspective, proper to marriage. Thus Mary, could say, "Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."

This Sunday we ask Mary and Joseph to walk with parents undergoing great anxiety - and to inspire married couples to work for unity of vision. And may Jesus, Mary and Joseph help us all in facing life's trials and in living our vocations.