



The End of the Liturgical Year

And the Feast of Christ the King

CATHRYN TORGERSON

NOVEMBER 4, 2018

Thirty-First Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Mark 12:28b-34

REFLECTION: Today Jesus is asked about the law. Judaism is known for having 613 laws. Approximately 245 come from Leviticus, the Old Testament book that outlines rituals for worship. These include a variety of sacrifices, some of which were burnt offerings. Those offerings were made at the Temple every morning and evening to maintain relationship with God.

Before this extensive ritual law was given, God gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. The Commandments are laws about relationships, easily summarized as “love of God and love of neighbor.”

When Jesus is asked what the most important commandment is, he states this summary of the relational law; he calls us to love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength. These are common words, but what would they have meant to Jesus’ first-century audience? Let us look at each one.

God does not desire just ritual from us; he wants a loving relationship with us.

■ **Heart:** In the biblical world, the heart is the place of making choices. The heart is where we choose whether or not to love God and then align our decisions with that choice (see CCC, 368, 2563).

■ **Soul:** While today we think of the soul as a different entity from the body, the word used here is also translated in the Bible as “life.” It has the sense of an animating spirit, or that which gives us life and energy.

■ **Mind:** This is the place of thinking and understanding. It is where we intellectually dwell on who God is and our relationship with him.

■ **Strength:** The Greek word suggests “ability” or “forcefulness.”

These four words are not meant to indicate different components of our being. Rather, collectively they reveal how we should love God to the best of our abilities in all that we choose, are, and think.

This relational law is important because it is easy to focus only on the action of ritual law. As the Gospel points out, relational love is more important than “all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” God does not desire just ritual from us; he wants a loving relationship with us.

FOR ADULTS: When we look at the volume of demands brought to us in addition to our own needs, the



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MONTH SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 4

Thirty-First Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Mark 12:28b-34

Unpacking the meaning of the greatest commandment.

NOVEMBER 11

Thirty-Second Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Mark 12:38-44

Jesus teaches that what is in our hearts matters more than outward appearance.

NOVEMBER 18

Thirty-Third Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Mark 13:24-32

Jesus preaches on the tribulation of the end times.

NOVEMBER 25

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

John 18:33b-37

Learning about what it means that Jesus is our King.

idea of loving God with everything we are and do might seem impossible! We must remember that small steps start us on the lifelong journey of growth and love. Each day there is a small step we can take, a single choice we can make, to move forward on this journey.

FOR STUDENTS: This Gospel provides an opportunity to discuss the purpose of our Catholic rituals. Why do we kneel, use holy water, or make the Sign of the Cross? How do these rituals lead

us to God? This can also be a time to ask students for concrete ways they can show their love for God and for their neighbor.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, help me to avoid being focused too much on myself and instead find ways to love you and those you put in my path. Show me one thing I can do this week that will help my love to grow. Amen.

NOVEMBER 11

Thirty-Second Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Mark 12:38-44

REFLECTION: This week's Gospel paints two vivid images that are opposites. They are opposites in how the world sees them, which in turn is the opposite of how God sees them.

Jesus talks about scribes and widows. Scribes were male leaders within the Jewish community. Unlike the majority of the

population of the first century, scribes were literate. They were responsible for writing and copying official documents. They also interpreted Scripture.

Widows were their opposite in society, usually lower class and overlooked. Upon a man's death, his assets primarily were distributed to his sons. There was no social security for his widow, and women generally did not work outside the home. Widows remained dependent upon their families, a situation that could leave them in financially precarious positions.

Jesus explains how scribes are viewed by society: they attract attention and have places of honor. Jesus also makes it clear that this is not necessarily good. He begins his teaching on the scribes with the word *beware*. He reveals that scribes "devour the houses of widows." Devour comes from the words "eat down," a vivid description of how the scribes are consuming what little finances the





NOVEMBER 18

Thirty-Third Sunday
in Ordinary Time

Mark 13:24-32

REFLECTION: For the past two Sundays, we have heard Jesus teach about the importance of loving God. This week we are reminded why it matters: the Day of the Lord is coming.

“The Day of the Lord” is one of several phrases designating the time when God will act decisively to save the faithful and punish his enemies. In our first reading today (Daniel 12:1-3), God describes it as “that time,” and elsewhere in the Bible, it is referred to as “that day.” Regardless of the exact wording, the explanation of

widows have. To justify this, the scribes “recite lengthy prayers.”

Jesus makes it clear that what looks good on the outside — clothing, recognition, honor, long prayers — may really be disguising pride and greed.

Jesus then turns to the image of a destitute widow. He sees wealthy Jews pour money into the Temple offerings, followed by a widow who gives the equivalence of “a few cents.” We might want to applaud the rich, for they are the ones who keep the budget balanced and help finance major projects!

But Jesus again calls us to look beneath the surface. The rich were donating out of their excess, but the widow gave from her need. God knows who has made the real sacrifice.

This is not to suggest that wealth or positions of leadership are bad. But it does affirm the phrase, “all that glitters is not gold.” The Bible teaches that we need to be careful of how we achieve and use wealth and leadership. It also cautions us against judging others based on external appearances.

FOR ADULTS: Is there an area of life where you are doing what others expect but are not fully engaged? Is there a place in your life where you feel like a fake or, conversely, are proud? Have you been rejected, despite doing the best you could? Do you judge others? Take this situation to prayer this week and ask God to show you the truth and to provide healing if you need it.

FOR STUDENTS: You can talk with students about showing off versus being humble, judging others versus getting to know them (especially important for older youth fixated on social media), and true sacrifice versus doing what is easy. What is one thing they can do this week to put someone else first?

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for always reminding us that you see our hearts. You see where we are trying our best, even if others do not recognize it. Help us to know where our pride gets in the way. Give us the grace to mirror your humble service in the world. Amen.

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Jerusalem, Israel, January 6, 2015: Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is all that remains of the Temple after the Romans destroyed it in 70 A.D.

what will occur includes security for the faithful in the midst of epic tribulation.

In today's Gospel, the tribulation involves supernatural events: Creation unravels as the sun, moon, and stars cease to exist and the powers of heaven shake. While we may not know exactly what this prophecy means, the event clearly will be unmistakable!

Judgment will arrive with the tribulation. In the first reading we hear that the dead will awaken for an eternity of life or of horror. In the Gospel, judgment happens as angels gather "the elect," a phrase referencing those faithful to God.

The end of today's Gospel raises a perplexing issue: Jesus states, "This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." But many generations later, the sun still shines and angels have not appeared!

How do we understand this statement?

One characteristic of biblical prophecies is that they can be fulfilled multiple times before their final fulfillment. Just prior to today's reading in Mark's Gospel, Jesus listed a series of events that are signs that the end times are coming: earthquakes, famines, wars, persecution of the faithful, and the destruction of the Temple. In history, all of these events took place in the decades following Jesus' death. Thus the generation of Jesus' disciples did experience some points of the prophecy.

The prophecy's ultimate fulfillment, however, will happen at the final Day of the Lord. It will include a change to all creation. This is most clearly explained in the Book of Revelation, and it, too, references events of the past and present, as well as those of the ultimate end of time.

FOR ADULTS: Reading the signs of the times in which we live can help us see how God is at work. Where do you see challenges to the faithful? Where do you find natural or manmade disasters? Where is God working through others in the midst of distress? How can you cling to God during personal tribulation?

FOR STUDENTS: While prophecies in the Bible usually reference events impacting nations, we personally face our own times of distress. Rather than fall prey to anger or sadness, we need to remember that God promises help for the faithful. Is there a place where you need God's help right now? Pray to God and ask your guardian angel for help. What are some ways to remind yourself that God wants to help you?

PRAYER: Thank you, God, for reminding us that you are always there for us. We may experience disaster, but that does not mean you have abandoned us. Help us to cling to you and let you guide us through the storms of life. Amen.

NOVEMBER 25

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

John 18:33b-37

REFLECTION: Last week's Gospel spoke of the end times. This week we learn more about the one who will bring about the end times: Jesus, King of the Universe!

The first reading (Daniel 7:13-14) relates a vision in which "one like a Son of Man" came on clouds and received "dominion, glory, and kingship" over an eternal kingdom comprised of all people.

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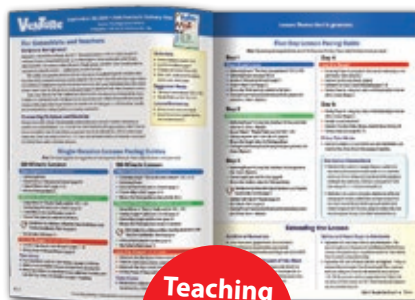
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Christians read this as a prophecy about Jesus and his rule over all the earth. The responsorial psalm (Psalm 93:1-2, 5) is a psalm to God as king. It can be interpreted as referencing Jesus.

The second reading is unusual for the Sunday liturgy because it comes from the Book of Revelation 1:5-8. It provides a summary of Jesus' role in salvation history. First it explains who Jesus is: faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, and ruler of kings. Second, it reminds us of what Jesus has already accomplished: He "freed us from our sins by his blood," and "made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father." Finally, it tells us what will happen: Jesus will come on the clouds (an image

recalling the first reading), and "every eye will see him, even those that pierced him."

These readings provide background imagery to the Gospel. Pilate asks Jesus if Jesus is the King of the Jews. John's Gospel develops this title for Jesus more in its Passion Narrative than the other Gospels do. Jesus does not talk about his kingship, but he does say his kingdom "is not here." This statement indicates that, although Pilate is asking about a material kingdom, Jesus is referencing a spiritual one.

Taken together, today's readings reveal that Jesus is King over all other kings. While in the United States we may not fully understand the role of a monarch, we need to understand that

because Jesus is King, we are answerable to him. Since Jesus is God, he is a good King, so he seeks the best for us. Our King even dies for us so that we might have eternal life in his kingdom.

When we were baptized, we were joined to this kingdom. Our citizenship in God's kingdom keeps us focused on Jesus, who — as both King and Savior — has first place in our lives over any human-made, political kingdom that will one day pass away.

FOR ADULTS: What does it mean to you that you have a heavenly citizenship? How do you reconcile being a citizen of heaven and being a citizen of an earthly nation? What does it mean to share in the common priesthood of all the baptized as members of that kingdom?

FOR STUDENTS: God uses many images to describe himself, such as shepherd, father, warrior, and king. What does "king" mean to you? How is "king" different from the other images?

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for being a king who lays down his life for his people. Help us to become better citizens of your kingdom and to invite others to join it. Let us be witnesses to the truths of your kingdom that will never pass away. Amen.

NOTE TO READERS: Look for more reflections for The Sunday Gospel for December 2018 at Catechist.com/SundayGospelDec2018. Reflections for both November and December will be available via downloadable PDF format.



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Advent and the Gospel of Luke

Discuss the Sunday Gospels for December

CATHRYN TORGERSON

DECEMBER 2, 2018

First Sunday of Advent

Luke 25:21-28, 34-36

REFLECTION: As we start Advent today, we have something familiar and something new. What is familiar is the topic of today's Gospel: the end times. In fact, we heard a very similar reading two weeks ago.

What is new is the Gospel from which the reading comes. For the past year we have been hearing primarily from the Gospel of Mark on Sunday. With the start of Advent, we enter the liturgical year known as Year C, and the Gospel of Luke will be proclaimed for many of the coming 52 Sundays.

While today's Gospel is similar to Mark's from two weeks ago,

it differs in details regarding the faithful. In Mark's Gospel, angels will gather the elect. Here Jesus explains that when the signs happen, redemption is at hand, but there are no angels on the scene. Instead Jesus is clear that even the faithful will be challenged: "That day will assault everyone" (Luke 21:35). Thus the faithful need to "be vigilant" and "pray" in order to have "strength to

MONTH SUMMARY

DECEMBER 2

First Sunday of Advent

Luke 25:21-28, 34-36

Jesus gives advice for being alert but not overwhelmed as we enter Advent.

DECEMBER 9

Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-6

God promises he can bring joy in times of hardship.

DECEMBER 16

Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:10-18

How should we live to prepare for Jesus' coming?

DECEMBER 23

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

Elizabeth teaches us about Mary's role in salvation history.

DECEMBER 30

Feast of the Holy Family

Luke 2:41-52

Insights from the life of the Holy Family help us in our relationships.



PHOTO: LORDRUNAR/ISTOCK

escape” the coming tribulations (Luke 21:36).

Jesus offers practical advice for how we can stay vigilant. He begins by warning against letting our hearts become drowsy. In the ancient world the heart was the place of choice. A drowsy heart cannot make good choices.

What leads to having a drowsy heart? Jesus provides two examples. The first is enjoying the good things of life too much. This does not mean we can never have fun, but relaxation should not become a way of life that prevents us from fulfilling our duties.

Jesus also looks at the other extreme of being overly anxious about daily life. We become so burdened that we take our eyes off him to focus on our worries and ourselves. Then we try to make choices without him even though he has made it clear he wants to help us with what weighs us down (see Matthew 11:29-30).

To find the balance between responsibility and enjoyment, Jesus tells us to “be vigilant and pray.” Vigilance keeps us aware of challenges that may be lurking, and prayer allows God to prioritize what we need to do each day. Together these practices allow us to be responsible yet enjoy the life God has provided as we stay in communion with him.

FOR ADULTS: Throughout the next few weeks, our calendars may become filled with good things to do for the holidays. This

To find the balance between responsibility and enjoyment, Jesus tells us to “be vigilant and pray.”

busier schedule, especially when paired with the expectations of the holidays, can lead to stress and anxiety. Daily prayer will help us keep Jesus at the forefront of our thoughts as we work toward the celebration of his Incarnation.

FOR STUDENTS : What do you like to do to have fun? How do you know when you’ve done or had too much? How can you keep Jesus in mind during Advent? How do you like to pray, and how can you find time to do that every day? What does it mean to have a “drowsy heart”?

PRAYER: Dear God, as we begin the season of Advent, help us to find you every day. Let us bring all our activities to you and rest with you between them so that we may be refreshed and positive at the celebration of Christmas. Amen.

DECEMBER 9, 2018

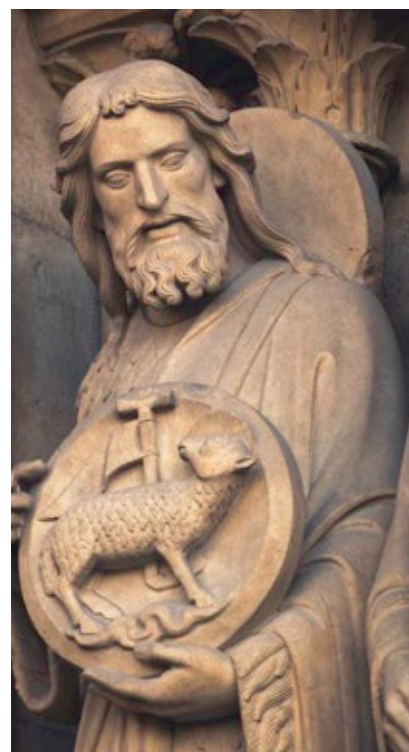
Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-6

REFLECTION: We continue our Advent journey with readings that offer two themes: wilderness and God’s actions that bring joy.

The wilderness is the setting for much of the Old Testament. Abraham was a nomad wandering the desert. Moses led the people on a forty-year march often called “the wilderness wanderings.” When the Jewish people were exiled from the Promised Land, they had to cross the wilderness to Babylon and then make another wilderness journey to return home. Even Jerusalem was surrounded by desert.

Our first reading, from Baruch 5:1-9, is written to Jerusalem.



The city has been destroyed by Babylon, and her people have been deported across the wilderness. Baruch tells her that God has a plan for restoration. He will bring her people back, making the journey easy by leveling the mountains and raising the valleys.

Psalms 126 is a hymn about this return. There may be times of sorrow, but God will turn this to joy when he acts on behalf of his people. Instead of desert emptiness, there are harvests of rejoicing.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is written from prison, yet Paul is filled with joy for he knows what Jesus has done for him. In today’s reading (1:4-6, 8-11), he reminds us that God works in us for our good.

The Gospel reading begins with Luke setting the stage for God’s next action in history. Luke lists the political and religious leadership, and then he takes

us to the desert where John the Baptist is preaching. Echoing the first reading, we hear that paths in the wilderness will be made smooth.

These readings have a physical reality to them: the wilderness was a fact of life for biblical people, and God clearly took action to lead, guide, and save them in the wilderness. His ultimate saving action was sending Jesus.

Jesus does not banish the physical wilderness, but he does come into the spiritual wilderness we may experience. Perhaps we feel exiled from God. We might experience hardship and see little fruit despite our labors. Our paths may seem stuck in dark valleys. We speak of being “in the desert” when our spiritual lives seem dry.

What God did in history, Jesus wants to do in our hearts. He wants to take what seems empty or hopeless and fill it with rejoicing. We are preparing to celebrate his coming into history, and that gives us an opportunity to invite him to come more deeply into our hearts, transforming what is arid or weary into joy.

FOR ADULTS: The saints tell us that times of spiritual dryness are when we grow closer to God. Our challenge is to not give up! Look back in your life and find times you know God was at work. What can you learn from these experiences?

FOR STUDENTS: These readings present an opportunity to discuss facing difficulty. Is there some place they feel frustrated, angry, lost, or left out? What would they

What God did in history, Jesus wants to do in our hearts.

like Jesus to do to help? If they do not have any current challenges, is there someone they can help?

PRAYER: Life is often challenging, so we thank you, God, for reminding us that you see us and are working for us. Give us the grace and faith to sustain us times of hardship. Amen.

DECEMBER 16, 2018

Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:10-18

REFLECTION: Today we light the rose-colored candle on Advent wreaths as we celebrate Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* is Latin for “re-joyce,” and the theme of joy resounds through the first two readings and responsorial psalm.

This joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is an emotion; theological joy is a fruit of the Spirit. As a fruit, it grows as we grow in right relationship with God. James even tells us to have joy when we face trials, for those negative circumstances can actually help us grow closer to God (see James 1:2)!

We get a sense of this reality in today’s Gospel. It does not mention joy directly, but it exhorts us to live the type of life that leads to joy. John the Baptist has been preaching repentance, and the reading opens as people respond by asking what they should do.

John gives them practical advice: share what you have, do not exploit others, do your job honestly, and don’t complain. This is a humble way to live and work. By addressing different groups of people, John reminds us that every type of life situation comes with its own temptations.

We need to live this well-ordered, moral life because Jesus is coming. John explains that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit and fire. Fire offers light and power, but it also burns to consume what is not of God.

John tells us Jesus has a winnowing fan. This fan was used at the harvest to toss wheat into the air. The wheat berries, the good fruit, fell to the ground to be gathered. The chaff, the rest of the wheat stock that was not valuable, was turned into kindling and burned.

If we want to have joy in our lives, if we want the good fruit, we need to let the Spirit burn away the chaff of our lives and lead us in proper living.

FOR ADULTS: Exploitation and complaints are issues for us today just as they



were in New Testament times. When are you tempted to share in these or other negative thoughts or actions? How can you do your work in a way that is humble and prepares you daily for Jesus' coming? Where do you need to ask God to infuse more joy into your life?

FOR STUDENTS: A catechetical approach is to ask about joy and the fruits of the Spirit. Older students may be able to discuss the difference between joy and happiness. A practical approach could ask: What can you thank God for? What brings you joy during the Advent season? Where do you face temptation? What do you most look forward to about Christmas, outside of presents?

PRAYER: Thank you, God, for commanding us to rejoice in the good you have done and are doing in our lives. May we always share that joy with others and not succumb to the dangers of negativity and disrespect. Please bless our Advent journey. Amen.

DECEMBER 23, 2018

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

REFLECTION: In this last weekend before Christmas, Luke's Gospel gives us a little theology lesson as Elizabeth teaches us through words inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth twice describes Mary as "blessed." This may

sound familiar, perhaps even common, from prayers to a response when someone sneezes. But for a Jewish woman of biblical times, this phrase would have special meaning based on Jewish history.

Within the epic narrative of the Old Testament, two women



are described as "blessed are you" or "blessed among women." The first is Jael. When a great enemy of the Jewish people took a nap in her tent, Jael killed him by driving a tent peg through his head. Her story is narrated and then sung in Judges chapters 4-5.

The second woman is Judith. During a time of war she made her way to the enemy's camp and into the commander's tent. As he slept, she cut off his head with his own sword. Her story is found in Judith chapters 8-13.

With the phrase "blessed are you," Elizabeth connects Mary

to these resourceful women who battled evil. We see this victorious image of Mary today when she is depicted crushing a serpent beneath her feet.

Elizabeth also describes Mary as "the mother of my Lord." The word *Lord* references a superior, and more specifically the king. Elizabeth is suggesting that Mary is the mother of the king, which in biblical times makes Mary the queen.

Today we think of a king's wife as the queen.

In ancient times, however, a king might have multiple wives, so his mother held this special position in his court. Mary, then, is the queen of Jesus' kingdom, and we celebrate her as Queen of Heaven on August 22nd.

For Jews, *Lord* can also be a reference to God. This means Mary, "mother of my lord," is not just mother of a human king, but the mother of God. In our liturgy, we celebrate Mary as the Mother of God on January 1st. Sometimes we hear this title for Mary in the Greek, *theotokos*, which means "God bearer."

From these few words of Elizabeth, we come to know more about the biblical foundations for our theology of Mary.

FOR ADULTS: What does it mean to you that Jesus is your Lord, your King? What does it mean that Mary is your queen? As an adopted child of God, you are now a part of their court. What does that mean for your life?

FOR STUDENTS: Some youth may not have a positive mother figure in their lives. You can encourage them to think about Mary as the mother who will never disappoint. This is also a good time to review Marian dogmas because she comes up repeatedly at this time of year: Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Christmas, and Mary, Mother of God.

PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, for giving Mary to us as our Mother and Queen. Help us to have the relationship with her that you desire. May we always be open to how she wants to lead us closer to you. Amen.

DECEMBER 30, 2018

Feast of the Holy Family

Luke 2:41-52

REFLECTION: While there are multiple choices for today's first two readings and psalm, the Gospel has only one option: the narrative of Jesus being found at



the Temple. It provides a unique peek at Jesus' young life and the life of his family.

The setting is the feast of Passover. This is one of three feasts that required all Jewish adult males to visit the Temple. A Jewish boy became an adult at age thirteen, and it was common for boys to start attending the mandatory feasts at eleven or twelve. This gave them the opportunity to learn their future adult responsibilities.

Jesus is twelve, so Joseph is likely preparing him for his duties the following year. We observe that Joseph is a faithful Jew because he goes to Jerusalem as required and hands on the faith to his son.

At the conclusion of Passover, Jesus remains behind, and his parents think he is lost. We might wonder how parents could lose their only child! But Jesus was at the age where he could be with the children or with the adults. We're told the family traveled with a caravan, so there may have been many places to search.

When they finally find him, we hear the anxiety they experienced when Mary asks Jesus why he had not told them his plans. How do you think they felt when Jesus replied, "I must be in my Father's house"? For twelve years Joseph has been Jesus' foster-father, and Mary just described Joseph as Jesus' father. But Jesus makes a transition in their relationship when he points to his true Father.

Jesus indicates he "must" be in his Father's house. Luke uses "must" or "it is necessary" at key points in Jesus' ministry. Here it is a time of transition out of Jesus' youth and into his adult responsibilities.

Despite this shift, Jesus does not completely break from his earthly parents. He remains with them as an obedient son, and he "advanced [in] wisdom." This phrase lets us know that there were things Jesus, as a human, needed to learn in human ways (see CCC, 472).

As we celebrate this feast, we get a peek into the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We see the role of faith, the challenge of parenthood, and Jesus' obedience to both his earthly parents and his heavenly Father.

FOR ADULTS: We are in the position of parental role models in our homes, at work, or as volunteers. What type of role model are you? What do you find difficult about mentoring someone? How can you meet those you mentor where they are in their lives right now rather than where you wish they were?

FOR STUDENTS: The holidays can bring heightened emotions, both positive and negative, around families. You can help your students think about transitioning out of the holidays and into the new year. Do they need more patience? Do they need to work on treating family members with respect? How can they help make their home a better place to be?

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, you were a part of a good and faithful family. Help us to be good family members and witnesses to the faith, whether in our biological families or in other relationships. Help us to be like you, with our eyes fixed on our Heavenly Father. Amen.



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