Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

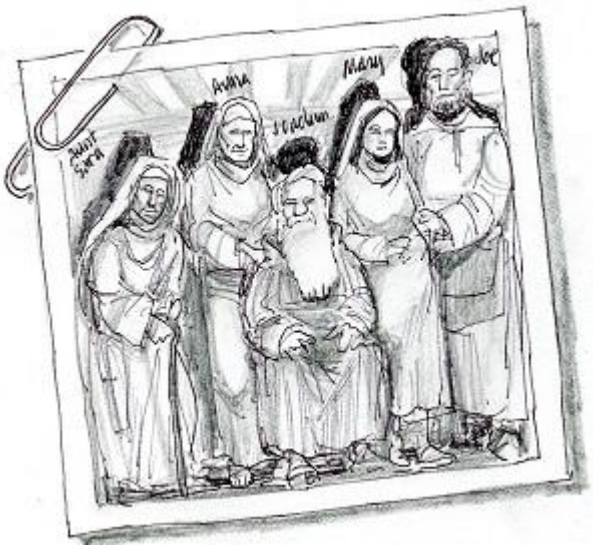
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December 25, 2021

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“He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them” (Luke 2:51).

Holy Family

Sir 3:2-6; 12-14; Ps 128; Col 3:12-21; Lk 2:41-52

After our celebration of Christmas, the liturgy fast forwards us immediately to Holy Family Sunday with the last story in Luke’s infancy narrative about the boy Jesus in the temple with the scholars. This text rotates in the Lectionary with Luke’s story of the presentation of the child witnessed by the two prophets, Simeon and Anna, and the dramatic account by Matthew of Joseph taking Mary and the Child to Egypt to escape Herod.

If anyone imagines that being the Holy Family was easy, all the stories in the infancy narratives of both Luke and Matthew mix the joy of Jesus’ birth with the stressful challenges to Joseph and Mary because it takes place in a hillside cave, followed by a flight to escape violence, or amid predictions of future suffering at his presentation in the temple and, years later, the anxious separation they endure when Jesus stays behind with the scholars, which is today’s Gospel selection.

Parents will quickly identify with the anxiety of any time when a child’s life is threatened by danger or illness or separation. We feel for Joseph as protector of the family through one crisis after another. Mary’s heart will be brought to the breaking point over and over again as Jesus fulfills his mission and accepts death on the cross. Every parent will understand the inevitable moment when a child must depart the family to find their own path and purpose.

It is these deeply human experiences that show us the meaning of being a holy family. Love risks everything to form a child for obedience to that inner call to complete his or her own destiny. For Joseph, it was the mystery of loving a woman he could not have and raising a child that was not his. Isn't this the challenge of every husband and father? For Mary, full of grace, it was emptying herself into her child, then letting go of him for God's purpose, even knowing it would mean enormous suffering. Isn't this the challenge of every wife and mother?

In between these times of heroic virtue, we meet the Holy Family each day in the ordinary tasks of living in community, working hard, listening and learning how to be patient and selfless, open to life's lessons, to the needs of those around us. Jesus lives anonymously in such a family for most of his life until God calls him to take up his public ministry. This life is hidden for a purpose. There is nothing extraordinary to see in this family just like our families. Grace is hidden in ordinary things but doing them makes us holy and prepares us for God's service, whatever that might be.

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