

THE HOLY FAMILY – 30th December 2018

....THEY FOUND HIM IN THE TEMPLE, SITTING AMONG THE TEACHERS Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

link video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spcrG7QFWpc>

Luke 2,41-52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man

When we read the gospel we must always distinguish what the evangelist wants to say to us, and this is the word of God that is valid forever, as he says it, using the theological and literary schemes of his culture and his time. This is even more so in the passage that the Church, the liturgy, presents to us for the feast of the Holy Family because, if we see this episode from a literal point of view, more than a holy family, it seems like a truly disordered family. A son that remains in Jerusalem without telling his parents, the parents that notice the absence only after one day and the son even scolds his parents. Let's see what the evangelist wants to convey to us, remembering how this gospel began.

When the angel announced to Zechariah the birth of his son John the Baptist he had said that he came to "bring the heart of the fathers to their children". It was a quote from the prophesy of the prophet Malachi that continued "and the heart of the sons towards the fathers" Well, Luke does not agree. It is not the new that must welcome the old, but the old that must strive to welcome the new, that which Jesus will do. Jesus does not follow the steps of the father, but it is the fathers that must welcome the novelty. The facts are well known, it is the feast of Easter, it is one of the three great annual feasts for which the Jews went to Jerusalem, they also took Jesus and Jesus remains in Jerusalem without telling his parents. His parents realize his absence after only one day of the return journey and here comes the incident.

"After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. " all are amazed, surprised by his intelligence and for his replies. And here is the central point of this episode, the incident, *"And his mother said to him,.."* the evangelist never

speaks of Mary. When the persons are not mentioned by name, it means that they are representative characters. Therefore in the figure of the mother the evangelist wants to portray the frustrated expectation of the people of Israel who do not recognize themselves in this Messiah that opens up to the new.

“said to him, “Son,” and the Greek word means my child, one that I own “..why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” Well Jesus instead of excusing himself passes to the counterattack and it is the first and only time in this gospel in which Jesus addresses his mother with harsh and severe words of reproach. “And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me?” he makes them look ignorant and in fact says “Did you not know... ? the word used by the evangelist indicates that it is expression of the divine will, “..that I must be in my Father's house?” His mother had said “..your father and I..” Jesus reminds her that his father is not Joseph, his father is another and he must be “..in my Father's house?”

The evangelist writes “And they did not understand..” the question is a too greater novelty “..the saying that he spoke to them.” here the figure of Jesus' mother begins to develop and grow to the point of becoming the disciple of the son, “.. his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.” meaning she thought about it all. It's a great novelty, it's something that baffles her, but the mother of Jesus is great because she does not reject the new, she thinks about it, and reflects, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.” Here the evangelist's reference is to one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history, the prophet Samuel, who also grew up before God and men with grace. So it is a great novelty that the evangelist presents to us and is an invitation to leave the past and open up to the new. Only he that opens himself to the new walks with Jesus and goes towards the Father.