

I EPIPHANY 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ST. LUKE 2.41

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Let me again share with you an episode from my childhood. When I was six years old, I fell in a mud pile in the schoolyard. Nothing I did could clean the mud off my pants. The older boys started teasing me and said because my pants were dirty God would send me to hell...or worse...I would have to go see the principal.

Neither option appealed to me...so I did what any scared kid might do and what made perfect sense to me at the time...I ran away from school without telling anyone and went home...certain Mother would make things better and square things with God and the principal.

The principal called later and scolded me for scaring the...daylights...out of her. She also reassured me God understood little boys very well and was not going to send me to hell for getting mud on my pants. I do think I had to write 100 times on a piece of paper, "I will not run away ever again!"

During the Epiphany Season we talk about God the Son...revealed to us as a human being in Jesus...made known to us in his several striking appearances. Today's Gospel introduces a poignant human element into the life of the Holy Family...the *striking disappearance*...of Jesus.

The Holy Family lived in Nazareth...a distance of about 70 miles from Jerusalem. They were close enough to Jerusalem and the Temple to travel there every year for the Passover. The trip would have taken about 7 days. It was not safe to travel alone, so Mary and Joseph would have traveled with a large group of friends and relatives. This also gave Jesus time to hang out with friends and relatives other than mom and dad.

On the way home after Passover...Mary and Joseph had traveled about a day...maybe 10 miles...when they realized Jesus was not anywhere in their group of friends and relatives. This was long before Amber Alerts...those signs we see on the freeway that tell us a child has gone missing...and give us pause to offer a silent prayer the child is found safe and unharmed.

Mary and Joseph spent a day returning to Jerusalem and another three days looking for Jesus. There were still thousands of people in Jerusalem after the Passover...making the search more difficult. We can only imagine what was going through their minds...where was their son...had he run away...had he been kidnapped...was he hurt...what?

We can understand the astonishment Mary and Joseph must have felt when they discovered their truant son in the Temple talking with the religion teachers...and their relief that he was safe and unharmed. Then Mary did the talking...she demanded an explanation from Jesus why he stayed behind and scared the...daylights...out of her and Joseph. Mary and Joseph were relieved and justifiably angry at the same time.

Jesus wasn't being a smart aleck kid when he told his parents they should not have been looking for him and should have known where he was. Jesus the adolescent boy was saying he knew who he was and that he was on a mission from his Father. He was where he needed to be at that moment. He tried to calm his parents down and told them not to worry about him and his work. They did not understand what he meant, at least not then.

When we begin to see Jesus the human boy we can begin to see him as God's son and the Second Person of the Trinity. We would like to know what he was up to between the time he was twelve years old and the time he began his public ministry when he was thirty years old.

The principal's scolding made an impression on me and I never again ran away from school or anywhere else. Jesus didn't make any more striking disappearances either...he went back to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and so far as we know he behaved himself for the next 18 years.

Next week we will talk about the baptism of Jesus by his cousin John the Baptist...God calls Jesus his Son...and to listen to what he says. Stay tuned for Jesus' next striking appearance when he is all grown up.

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