

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
December 30, 2018

“Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, . . .” (Luke 2:44-46)

A few days ago, we gathered together in our parish churches to celebrate the birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Today we hear the story of his going missing for three days. Each time we come to this celebration and hear this passage, my mind goes back to the year 1981. You may be wondering why this year? It was an event that occurred during that summer which would shatter, to a degree, the innocence of family life in America. It was on July 27, 1981 that Adam John Walsh was abducted from a Sears department store in Hollywood, Florida. If you remember the case, we were able, through television, to witness his distraught parents as they, along with police and volunteers, scoured the area desperately trying to find him. I still remember hearing the haunting news of the two fishermen who discovered his remains some weeks later. Although some good changes came about because of this grisly action, (Code Adam - a new missing child alert, and John Walsh's show America's Most Wanted - which would go on to help capture many of Law Enforcement's Most Wanted criminals) I still cannot begin to imagine the hurt, distress, pain, and sadness those days must have been for his parents. I believe that Joseph and Mary dealt with these same emotions as they frantically searched for their son. Although they differ in the end, those long hours these two families shared are times I hope never to experience or have any family in our parish experience.

I begin our reflection today with this story to remind all of us that no family, including the Holy Family, goes through life without times of great stress and sadness. Our families, today, may be dealing with different stressful events. We may be enduring the loss of a loved one, sickness, financial difficulties, or marital issues. There is one constant in these varying struggles: Every family will suffer heartbreak and loss. No family is immune to this reality.

With this reality firmly in our minds, we can also realize there is another constant also at work during these times: A good result can occur. I know it can be very difficult to see a good coming out of a loss, especially when that loss can be so very devastating, but a good can occur. Due to Adam's death criminals who had once roamed free were now being taken into custody and child protection laws were now being either implemented or strengthened. For the Holy Family, Saint Luke informs us that Jesus would become obedient to his parents and through that obedience would *“advance [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”* (Luke 2:52). For our families, the good result may involve a new job opportunity, a renewed love for family members, the forgiveness of someone who hurt us, or recovery from an addiction. Whatever the case maybe, a good can result if we allow it through our advancing in wisdom.

As this year of 2018 comes to a close, I encourage all of us to take some time and reflect upon what issues are occurring in our families or have occurred in our families this year. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you to a resolution. Forgive what needs forgiving, hold true to what is most dear, and, most importantly, pray together. It is when we prayerfully admit and face our problems or issues with courage given to us through God's Spirit that we can finally move beyond them and become a holy family ourselves. May God bless and keep you during these times and know that I, and many others, are daily praying for you.