

Family Fortunes

I'm sure there's nothing more terrifying for a parent than to turn round and discover that the child they thought was following them is nowhere to be seen. It must be every parent's nightmare and yet it must happen to every family, and, for some, quite often. Sudden heart-stopping panic sets in as an anxious ten or fifteen minutes is spent looking for the child and when they are found the temptation to scold is overwhelmed by the relief that floods in.

Any parent can sympathise, then with Mary and Joseph who have lost their little boy and have gone on a day's journey before they realise that he's not with his cousins and aunts and uncles and is nowhere to be seen. They have to go all the way back to Jerusalem to look for him and find him, without a care in the world, chatting with the doctors of the law in the Temple. We can imagine their emotions, especially when Jesus is far from apologetic and comes up with a smart-aleck quip that they should have known he would be busy here doing his Father's business, a reply likely to have wounded St Joseph especially.

It's comforting to know that no family, not even the Holy Family is perfect, and that even the child Jesus could be insensitive and annoying. Every family experiences pain and heartache, sickness and loss, misfortune and hard times as well as the many wonderful joys and compensations of family life and the privilege of bringing children into the world and watching them grow and succeed.

In sending His own Son to be born and grow up in a human family, God was affirming the value and importance of family life as the unique and precious context in which human life is nurtured, cherished and loved to grow in perfection according to God's plan. Let us spend a few moments consecrating our family and our loved ones to the Lord, giving thanks for family life in all its facets and with all its twists and turns and praying for the God's protection and blessing on our families during the coming year.