

Entry #92 (The Meaning of “Father”)

In Luke 2,41-52 the boy Jesus is portrayed as being “lost” and then “found” after a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover. The passage is unique to Luke’s gospel, and, like all Biblical texts, it is worth speculation regarding its suppositions. As background for this Entry it would be worthwhile re-reading Entry #28 and recalling how Joseph and Mary agreed to be parents of Jesus on the basis of relatively little information. Mary would agree to be the “birth mother” of Jesus, while Joseph would agree to be the legal father.. They agreed on the basis of the authority of an angel (Mary) or the appearance on a dream of an angel (Joseph).

The thing most worth speculating about is the underlying symbolism at play. The feast involved is Passover, and Jesus is found on the third day and He is found in the Temple. Now. The Old Testament Feast of the Passover is associated with the New Testament Feast of Easter, and Jesus Himself identified Himself as the Temple that would be destroyed and raised to life on the third day by Himself (see John 2,19-22).

With allusion to Easter and the Resurrection understood as the underlying supposition at play in the text it is easy to understand the allusion of Jesus when He asks Joseph and Mary rhetorically why they did not know that He must be “in the things” of the Father. The Temple was the House of God for the Jews and so Jesus tells Joseph and Mary that it was appropriate that He prolong His pilgrimage there. But “the things of God” are also the Father’s will for Jesus, and the death and resurrection of His Son are uniquely God’s “things” that He wills for Jesus. The transition from Joseph as legal father of Jesus (see Matthew 1,18-25) to God as ontological Father (see Luke 1,35) is made possible by the question posed by Mary to her ontological Son (see Luke 1,35). Thus the meaning of “Father” in its most profound (that is, ontological) sense is the central point of the explanation of what it means for Jesus and what it should mean for us believers.

In a real sense we Catholics each have two fathers: our earthly father and our heavenly Father. We may or may not be about what our earthly father wants for us once we have reached adulthood, but we should always be about what our heavenly Father wishes us to be about. To the extent that we are sinners we are not about what our heavenly Father wishes for us. And our daily recitation of the Our Father should constantly remind us of this and act as a call to improvement to be as perfect as well as we can. **(James Swetnam, S.J. March 29, 2022)**