

## Long Way Home

Enslaved to many masters, a friend of mine wound up in jail. He sobered up when he realized that his 'holding tank' was a facility that his incarcerated father had helped build. Courageously facing that he 'was imprisoned in his father's house' was a step for him in surrendering to Jesus who helped him find a new self and a new home in the Father's house.

Sunday's Gospel reading is about a different kind of family, a 'holy one' with whom we are now very familiar—Mary, Joseph, and Jesus (LK 2:41-52). The family roots of my friend in need of radical conversion are strikingly different from Jesus' remarkable parents. And yet the Gospel account of Jesus having to leave the confines of his home in Nazareth in order to take the next step to fulfilling His destiny are the same. It's hard to leave home and become who we are!

Like my friend, Jesus defied expectations (and scared the life out of his parents) by choosing to engage with His Heavenly Father in His house. That is the basis for Jesus', and our own, confirmation as adults. And it behooves every parent to release its child to this long journey of discovery.

I love the parental witness of Mary and Joseph in Scripture. Ever iconic, they beckon constantly to parents like us who seek to be clear masculine and feminine witnesses of the Father's love. To be sure, we always run the risk of deifying the holy pair. Then they become two-dimensional figures whose 'immaculate' goodness fails to engage our struggle to become holy. Every parent faces some shame and regret. By allowing God's icons to be fully human, we find help in becoming holy in the fruit and fault of our parenting.

No-one can fault Mary's devotion to Jesus. He was nearer to her heart than anyone, as is the case with many mothers and kids. And yet the Gospels reveal an ever-widening gap between who and where Jesus needed to be and Mary's normal expectations. The Father demanded an allegiance of the Son that pierced His mother's heart. Faith alone enabled her to transform the wounds of His progressive distancing from her to the wonders she could see in retrospect.

And Joseph. His witness is mostly silent and yet his actions on behalf of Mary and Jesus are among the finest displays of protective masculinity in Scripture. Perhaps his steadfast presence was the 'backbone' that quietly strengthened Mary as she faced the pain of Jesus' distancing Himself from her.

No amount of 'holy parenting' can prevent this distancing. Jesus had to leave His parents to engage with His Father. As a rule, sons and daughters have to say 'no' to parental expectations in order to clarify their 'yes' to what will define them as adults. Jesus and our children are not exceptions.

That is terrifying. Competing with the Father's house are temples to Dionysus and Diana, to

materialism and false power. Whose house will define our children?

What we can know is that each kid must be given the dignity to act in undignified ways en route to the Father's house. Flawed, faithful parents like us can take heart that our kids' long journey home is overseen by One whom we don't see. Mary and Joseph help us here. They help us to trust Him, certain that He will transform our kids' wounds (and ours) into wonders of His unfailing love.

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