

Luke 2: 33-35; 41-52

Mothering Sunday

Television ads used to present us with the impeccable nuclear family; that model has changed and a whole range of family models are shown. Nevertheless, one thing generally remains unchanged – the smiling, immaculate mother coping with whatever circumstances have been thrown at her. The unflustered mother. The perfect hostess. The beautiful home. Successful advertising does not sell anger, anxiety or frustration; it sells success, achievement and happiness. The mother is often portrayed as the omnicompetent professional who can juggle family, career and relationships without turning a hair. Not so the real world of parenting which is messy and unpredictable.

The reading noted above in Luke's Gospel is, I think, properly grounded in the vicissitudes of family life. Jesus disappears on the trip home. His parents frantically commence a search. After three days they find him in the Temple, calmly debating with the teachers. Can you imagine the fear? Searching for three days. You can hear the frustration and anxiety in Mary's voice when she addresses Jesus.

But, as well as being cross and concerned, Mary is astonished at her son's skill and understanding. He is becoming his own person. All children are their own person. They are on loan to us. We cannot control them or dictate how their lives should be. Parents are guides and the guide has to let go at the appropriate time, however hard that letting-go may be. Mary is confronted here, perhaps rather early, with the recognition of her son's growing independence. He is at

home, about his Father's business, exercising *his* vocation independently of Mary. With all the precociousness of a 12 year-old, Jesus shows surprise that his parents didn't guess his whereabouts; wasn't it obvious that he would be in the Temple where his Father dwells? This won't be the only time that Mary is both upset and astonished about Jesus.

Jesus is in his Father's House. This is a statement that tells us who Jesus is as much as where he is. In this phrase - 'My Father's House' - we are reminded of God's parenting - the parenting we all need and crave, sensing its steadfastness and graciousness. Jesus calls God, 'Abba, Father' - a bit like saying 'Dad.' God wants to hear from us, his children, whatever our concerns. We are made for this relationship with God. Sadly, we don't often come to God for parenting; instead we search among other people and can find ourselves let down as a result. No human parents are infallible. At best, we might bear a resemblance to God's parenting, but we are bound to let one another down sometimes. Like a caring and patient mother, God embraces all of us; healing the wounds, picking us up and placing us back on our feet.

There is no situation that cannot be redeemed by God's love and care. We don't have to pretend with God; we are fully known and loved for who we are not who we'd like to be. God understands our human nature; he knows that loving makes us vulnerable just as God himself chose to become vulnerable on the Cross.

To reflect: *Take time to give thanks to God for all the people who have taken the risk to be vulnerable and love us for who we really are.*