

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Our gospel text has several mysteries that simply put; challenges our understanding. Parents who lose a child (and have no knowledge of their loss for several days) is incomprehensible. Yes, there is always the context of the story, the community of people and the collective tending and caring for members of each other's families... but as I have shared (and will continue to share), there are no coincidences in Holy Scripture. Mary was separated from her son and her Lord for three days in Jerusalem when he was the age of twelve. Mary will again be separated from her son and Lord for three days again in Jerusalem at the time of His death.

The next few Sundays are about to reveal new life, meaning, and understanding to those who come and hear the Word of God because God is with us to offer new life, meaning, and understanding to our church family and each of us individually. Life is abundant and life is to be shared abundantly for the sake of spreading the Good News of what God has done. It's Christmas – the time we celebrate when the Word is made Flesh and when the Kingdom of God came to earth.

Less than a week ago we celebrated the Anniversary of our Lord's Birth and today we reflect upon an event when He was twelve years old. Yes, children do grow up quickly – so a message to all of you – new parents and grandparents: treasure every minute you have with your children and grandchildren because time does indeed, pass quickly.

Let's look closely at the gospel text and see the parallels in Jesus's message to His disciples and to us today. One of the first events to take place is that Mary and Joseph begin searching for Jesus. During His ministry, Jesus tells His disciples and all of us today; "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."¹ However, when Mary and Joseph begin to seek for Jesus, they do not immediately find Him. For Jesus the answer to His whereabouts should be perfectly clear and he questions his parent's concern. As humans, Mary and Joseph *are concerned* because they cannot find their child. They cannot find their Lord! A good and gracious God leads them 'by faith', to the location of Jesus: Jesus is in His Father's House.

And here, my dear friends, is where the story must be revealed in the context of the complete life of Jesus because you see there is much more here than meets the eye (or ear). When we seek, ask, and knock and do not receive immediate results, it is not because God has not heard us; it is because God is *indeed* leading us to what we need to 'find, receive, or open'. We might 'think' we know what is best for 'us' and might 'believe' we know what we need to solve our problems, but it is God alone and His wisdom, compassion, and complete love for each of us that truly provides. You see, it is His gifts and blessings that truly sustain us for life here and now for our health and the health of our neighbors, visitors, and the strangers we will meet.

Yes, God may lead us to a stranger when we pray for help because we may need something they have to offer, share, or express. God may lead us to a place of rest because we need to slow down, relax, or find renewal for the tasks He calls us to perform. God may lead us to a friend, a close companion, or even a trusted professional that He has given gifts that we need to receive, hear, or see. Wherever our Lord is leading us, the process begins with our understanding and accepting that we are missing something in our life.

¹ Luke 11:9 - NIV

Mary and Joseph were missing their son (their Lord!) and they begin the process of finding Him. When we begin seeking the Lord (or when we feel we have lost sight of the Lord), what will we do and where will we begin? Jesus tells His parents, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” If we were to apply this simple reply today would it simply mean to look for Jesus in a church, synagogue, or temple?

Again my friends, the answer to this must be revealed in the complete context of Jesus’s life and ministry. Jesus told the crowds that He would tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days. The temple that Jesus was located in (when His parents were searching for Him), was a physical place that was physically destroyed and never rebuilt again. However, we know that Jesus was speaking of the temple that was His body that would be resurrected three days after this crucifixion.

So my friends, if we are seeking the Lord Jesus Christ today, where will we find Him? The answer again lies in the truth and essence of our very Lord. The Word of God remains forever. To find Jesus Christ today, find a place that proclaims the Good News, a place that shares the Word of God that shall never pass away, and a place that reveals the truth in Holy Scripture. However, as the physical temple was physically destroyed and never rebuilt, we should not be looking for a physical location to contain Jesus, but a human vessel to contain Jesus.

Jesus was given to the world, to humankind, so that we would be redeemed and sanctified (made holy) to our Creator and Almighty God! God is no longer restricted in access to the confines of a temple, church, or any holy structure. Instead, we have been made holy so God may dwell within us to tend and care for a world that God alone has designed and given to us.

When we look for God today, we only need to look around us in the lives of our neighbors, friends, and yes – even strangers. God is here; granting us all the gift of a new experience, a new idea, a new story, and even new insights on old problems we are trying to solve. But God does indeed intend for His Holy Word to be found within the hearts and minds of those around us. God does indeed intend us to love one another as He commanded us. God does indeed intend for us to find Jesus in the lives of our friends, neighbors, and strangers.

If this is not the case, we need to ask, knock, seek, and allow God to lead us ‘by faith’ to the answer, destination, and person we are looking for to indeed find Jesus Christ among us. Christ came to live among us on the first Christmas and never intended ‘nor desired’ to ever leave us again. Christ remains among us today – here and now - as sure as God sent His only Son as the fulfillment of prophecy at the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The final words of our gospel text reveal that Mary treasured all these things in her heart. If the mother of Jesus can ponder and treasure the events and actions she encountered with Christ; then the opportunity for us too exists to ponder and treasure our experiences with Christ. The hostile, nasty, unwelcoming, and mean experiences of the world will pass away soon, but ours is the peace that passes all understanding that keeps our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord; Amen!