

Feast of the Holy Family, C

“Son, why have you done this to us?”

Sound familiar? Do you know those words? Do they take you back to another time, another place? Think back to your childhood. Do you remember hearing those words or words like them? Think about your children and your parenting of them. Did you ever say anything like that?

Mary’s question to Jesus in today’s gospel is probably not unfamiliar to most of us. We have either heard it or asked it; maybe both. Most parents have probably asked Mary’s question either out loud or silently to themselves. Most children have probably been asked that question or at least known that was the unspoken question beneath the silence and tension that filled the room.

We tend to focus on the tension, conflict, and misunderstanding that surrounds the **“Son, why have you done this to us?”** times of our lives. But maybe there is something more going on. Maybe those are just the symptoms. Maybe, at a deeper level, that question and the associated feelings are about change and growing up.

I wonder if that is how Mary and Joseph felt when they found Jesus **“in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them question.”** I wonder if they looked at their twelve-year-old son and saw their baby **“wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”** I wonder if, as she searched for Jesus in great anxiety,

Mary heard echoes of old Simeon's prophecy about her child's destiny and the sword that would pierce her side. I wonder if she and Joseph were struggling with letting Jesus grow up. I wonder if we sometimes struggle with letting Jesus grow up. **“Son, why have you done this to us?”**

Children, it seems, are always calling their parents into new ways of seeing and relating. They challenge their parents' hopes, needs, dreams, and expectations. They trigger their fears, doubts, and insecurities. The child's growing up necessarily changes the parents' lives. I did it to my parents. You did it to yours. And in today's gospel, Jesus is doing that to Mary and Joseph.

Jesus is growing up. He is no longer a manger baby. He is in his Father's house and about his Father's business and that means things are changing for him, for Mary and Joseph, and us. We can hear that in his response to Mary, **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”**

“Did you not know...?” What does that mean? What do you hear in Jesus' words? They have the familiar ring of adolescent confidence, incredulity, and attitude. But I think there is more to them than that. I think Jesus is saying more than the words he is speaking. Here is a few things I wonder if he might be saying:

Did you not know that I must be my Father's house? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? Did you not know that

if you want to find me then you must look in the places where my Father's business is being conducted? If you want to see me then look where I am. If you want to know me then relate to who I am. If you want to be with me then participate in what I am about. Let me grow up.

Did you not know that the bands of cloth would be removed, and I would leave the manger? Don't let your emotions and sentimentality keep me there. Life neither goes backward nor remains in yesterday. I am more than your memories and past experiences of me. Your feelings about me are real but they are not me. Let me grow up.

Did you not know that I can be with you, but I do not belong to you? You can give me your love but not your thoughts or your ways. **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”** Don't try to make me like you. Instead, follow me. Let me grow up.

Did you not know that I came to do my Father's will, not yours? I was not born and did not come to meet your expectations and fulfill your desires of who you think I am, who you think I should be, or what you think I should be about and do. Your expectations and desires are not my concern. You, however, are my concern. Let me grow up.

The degree to which we do not know, do not want to know, or refuse to know is the degree to which we keep Jesus from growing up and the degree to which we have no relationship with him. We might have a relationship with our memories, images, and expectations of who we

think he is, who we want or need him to be, or what we think he should be doing but that is not a relationship with Jesus himself.

It's not that Jesus has cut us off. We have cut ourselves off. We have refused to let him grow up. We have kept him small and helpless. We have wrapped him in the bands of our sentimentality and emotional programs and laid him in the manger of our desires, needs, and expectations. We might be looking at the one the angel announced to be **“a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord,”** but chances are that's not who we are seeing. **“Did you not know...?”**

Jesus will not let himself be defined by Mary and Joseph's needs, concerns, or expectations. He refuses to become trapped in their feelings or emotions. He does not live by their standards or opinions. He is not guided by a need for their approval. That doesn't mean Jesus does not care. It means, rather, that he is free to care, free to love, free to be present, and free to be fully himself. If that's true for Mary and Joseph, then it is also true for us.

Those are the very things that would keep him from growing up and keep us from seeing and knowing who he is and what he is about. Perhaps they are also the very things you struggled against in your own growing up.

We cannot impose our needs, expectations, or emotional programs on who Jesus is or what he does. We must let those go – for his sake and

ours. We must let Jesus grow up. He is no longer a manger baby and that's good news for us. Somehow his growing up grows us up as well.

Images of sweetness, sentimentality, and sanitized manger scenes might make us feel good, but they don't do much to transform our lives.

They have no power to speak a new truth to the unsensitized parts of our lives and our world. We need one who will call us into the Father's house and teach us the Father's business. **“Did you not know...?”**

With those words, Jesus is telling us that he is growing up. It means our images and expectations of him must also grow up. So, what if we took a hard look at that and asked ourselves some questions?

What are our images and expectations of who Jesus is and what he is about? Have they changed over the last year? Are they growing or are they stuck in the past? Are we holding on to a sweet cuddly image from our childhood? How would our life be different if our image and understanding of Jesus changed? What would we have to change or do differently to let Jesus grow up? Are we willing to let a grown-up Jesus challenge and transform our lives, or do we simply want him to make us happy?

Do we not know...? Amen.