

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: O Heavenly Father, as You gladden our hearts again to celebrate the Birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, mercifully bestow on us the joy to receive Him as our Redeemer and so welcome Him when He comes again to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Luke 2:41-52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

The Sermon

The festival of the Passover was the most important of the three great Hebrew celebrations – which also included Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles – or Booths. Passover – of course –

commemorates the night the angel of death killed all the Egyptian firstborn – while passing over the homes of the Hebrews.

So – hundreds of thousands of pilgrims would be making their sojourn to Jerusalem in any given year to celebrate this festival. The backdrop then to this celebration of God's blessing included entrepreneurs and merchants – hawking food – souvenirs – clothing – and toys – as well as lodging. There would have been a great deal of hustle and bustle – with many things to see and do. The sights – sounds – smells – colors – and smells and tastes – would have filled those who were there – with an excitement – not normal – in daily – humdrum – hometown life.

There must have been a throng of young people present. And Jesus – a **very** human boy – no doubt would have been as outgoing as anyone there. He wanted to meet others his age – and then explore the surroundings with them. Perhaps checking in with mom and dad from time to time – He was allowed to venture away – as long as they knew His general whereabouts.

In Jesus' day – a twelve year old boy was considered almost an adult – and would not be expected to tag along everywhere with His parents. The next year – He would be presented as One ready to take His place in the religious community at His *Bar Mitzvah*. It was also customary for the women and younger people to travel in the front of a caravan – with the men bringing up the rear – for protection. So it would have been acceptable for the twelve year old Jesus to be in **either place** – in that caravan – on the way home.

It is quite understandable then – that His whereabouts were easily assumed – given the social norms of that age. It was in this delicate dance of freedom and security that Jesus – turned up – missing. Those who have been through this experience – of temporarily losing track of a child – in the grocery store or supermarket – at a football game or at some

other event with crowds of people – know the feeling that sits deep in the pit of your stomach when this happens.

It is a parent's worst nightmare to lose a child. The news reports of a missing child are heartbreaking – no matter whose child has been lost. They found Jesus – after the third day. Obviously – in that day before amber alerts – Mary and Joseph felt **distressed** – and **tormented**.

Now Mary and Joseph knew their Son was unique – that God had given Him to them – for a special purpose. That did **not** prevent them from fearing for His safety – because they didn't know **how** – or **when** – His unique mission – would actually begin and make itself known.

So where do you think they looked for Jesus? They probably checked the marketplace with its many alluring shops – and the homes of friends and acquaintances. After 72 agonizing hours had passed – they finally looked in the right place. They found Him – in the Temple! And they were amazed.

Questioning Him – no doubt both relieved **and** upset – they were even **more** amazed at Jesus' response to them. He reminded them of His life's mission. Jesus pointed to the Temple – as the **logical place** – He would be. St. Mary and St. Joseph looked in many places before trying the Temple. Jesus tells them – that should have been the **first place!**

Mary and Joseph had lost something precious to them. It was Jesus. When we lose something precious in our lives – be it love – romance – wealth – happiness – beauty – security – peace of mind – we too can be tempted – tempted to search for all these things – in all the wrong places! Many people even look for their **salvation** – in the wrong places.

Some look in the marketplace – in the world of **things** and **stuff** – in money and possessions. The market advertises itself as a place where you can buy and purchase that which will make you happy and perfect. It says: “Buy this toothpaste –

to get the perfect smile!” Or “buy these kewl and hot clothes – to attract the man or woman of your dreams.” Or “live **here** – for the **best** life.” Take your pick as a consumer: The Virgin Islands – the Bahamas – Hawaii – sunny Florida or sunny Arizona. And Virginia **is** for lovers – right?

People pay expensive fees for cosmetic surgeries – looking for salvation in youthful appearance. Dick Clark – Phyllis Diller – Bo Derek (the perfect 10) – never age. Mary and Joseph looked in **homes** – to find what they were looking for. Well, we too look in others’ homes – thinking that – if only we had – what they have – our lives would be better and happier.

Some even go so far – as to covet – another man’s wife – or another woman’s husband – thinking **that** to be the solution to make up for the lack they are experiencing in their own marriage. Jesus’ response to His parents – is also His response to all those who are looking today.

He says that **He – is not – difficult – to find.** Christ is close by. He’s right **there** – in the consecrated waters of Holy Baptism. He’s right **there** in the Absolution. He’s right **there** – personally and intimately – in His Holy Supper. He’s **right here** – now – **in my voice** – as a pastor.

That outside world beyond those doors can take away your peace – it can take away your joy – it can take away your sense of stability. And you can respond without first looking in the right place – for sustenance and spiritual renewal. When life tosses you around – as it inevitably will – and you lose sight of your happiness and joy – remember that Jesus +says: “You will find Me – **in My Church – in My Means of Grace – in My Word and Sacraments.** Nowhere else. Not hunting and fishing. Not partying. Not at the bar. Not in drugs and alcohol. **In My Church. That’s** where you will find Me. **In the House of God.”**

The New Year dawns – with challenges and doubts and fears – for every one of us. As we leave one year of grace and enter

another – know that Christ is in His the Temple! He is always – here – never lost – and always ready – to give you wisdom – unconditional love – grace – mercy – peace – joy – and power for life. You want a good New Year’s resolution? Try this: **I will go to church.**

For those of you listening out there – who haven’t been here in long – long – time – this may be the most important moment of your life. Christ is calling **you – today – right now** – telling you: Come back – come back – and I will always welcome you! Come home –and find Me – where I always am – **in My Church.**” Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!