

## Homily, The Holy Family – Year C 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018

---

With a few exceptions we humans are a communal species, that is we live in communities. Fundamentally humans are built for relationships. One of the most extraordinary facts about our need for relationships is that the best indicator of our ability to survive and recover from surgery is the number of quality of friendships we have. Oxford, Psychologist Professor Robin Dunbar writes that number of quality friendships you have is the single most important factor that best predicts your health and your well-being. We need each other we need relationships.

Christianity is unique in that it is the only world religion that teaches that the God we worship became human and lived as a human, lived in relationships. Our God, the creator of the universe chose in the person of Jesus Christ to enter into a flesh and blood relationship with us, His creation. The great feast of Christmas which we celebrated last week is a joyful celebration of God joining us in the struggles of our lives. Christmas is a celebration of joy and great hope born out of the knowledge that Jesus a perfect being entered our

imperfect world. Jesus shares and understands the messiness of our lives. The most important thing to understand about the life of Jesus is that it was normal. Jesus was not some deity cruising through life knowing all along He was God. As I was fond of telling my catechist class Jesus, did not have a God card in His back pocket; when things got tough Jesus did not pull out His God card and say “This can’t happen I’m God”. No, Jesus humbled Himself to become fully human even excepting, as St Paul points out, death on a cross. Jesus’ life ended executed as a common criminal outside the city walls. It is difficult for us to accept the fact that Jesus did not arrive on earth “the complete package”. No, like all of us Jesus had to learn life’s lessons. Jesus had to learn the Jewish faith he was born into, he had to learn how to live in his family, he had to learn how to live in his community. Today we celebrate the cradle of that learning, the Holy Family. Like most of us Jesus’ most important teachers were the members of His family Mary and Joseph. Robyn Dunbar whom I mentioned earlier refers to our family and our immediate community we interact with as the ‘Sand Pit of Life’. It’s a place where we learn how to be community. Now a young Jesus would have witnessed

the great commandment of loving God and our neighbour in the action and lives of Mary and Joseph, they would have been the first teachers of His Jewish faith. The extraordinary quality Mary and Joseph were able to nurture in Jesus was the love of the Father who sent Him. Jesus' life was love. The one thing we can say about Jesus with absolute certainty He was always motivated out of love, love of God and His neighbour. Unlike us Jesus was not encumbered by "original sin" the sin of humanity that voice of our ego that says it's all about me. No matter how hard I try that ego will always attempt to influence my behaviour be it in traffic or at the shops. If I'm not careful I will find myself pushing to the front of the queue because that's the place I'm entitled to. Jesus' life was dominated not by a love of self but by a love of the other; a love of the Father and a love of his neighbour.

When I was a kid in school today's Gospel was interpreted as a twelve year old Jesus, the divine being, demonstrating His superior knowledge to the Temple elite. But is that really what's going on? If I read this passage as a parent I'm mystified why Mary and Joseph took a day to realise Jesus was missing and another three days to find him. When I read this passage as a

twelve year old George, I remember getting separated from my parents at the Royal Easter Show and being found talking to an engineer at an electrical engineering exhibit. I thought it was great fun but my parents were less than impressed. Dad had seen me talking to and exhibitor and expected me to catch up when I was finished not wander off talking to other people. My Dad was trying to give me some space to explore which is exactly what Mary and Joseph were probably trying to do. But there is a massive difference; I was George a normal twelve year old boy; Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. My Dad had a fair idea who his George was but all Mary and Joseph knew was Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, the son of God: But what did that mean for them as a family?

Like me, Mary and Joseph were struggling in their relationship with Jesus. Now that Jesus has become of age what does that mean for them? Luke tells us that Jesus was twelve at the time of this story. Now twelve is a significant age it's about the time when under Jewish ritual law a child becomes accountable for their own actions prior to that age the parents were held responsible for the child. In modern Jewish practice this is the age of a boy's 'bar mitzvah' which literally means

"son of commandment". The bar mitzvah is not mentioned in the Mosaic Law and was only codified some 100 to 200 years after Jesus death but a similar practice was probably part of the Jewish tradition around the time of Luke's Gospel.

I know Jesus understands my life its messiness, my failings, my inherent humanity, my sinfulness. But my ego screams at me; Jesus only understands saints He could not possibly understand a twenty first century man in his late sixties. How do I approach my relationship with Jesus? Well Luke sums it up beautifully in the conclusion of today's Gospel: "*He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.*" Even when He was of age, Jesus did not impose His will on His parents no He humbly submitted to them. How do I allow Jesus into my life? Humbly!

Robin Dunbar writes; it takes an average 25 years for us to learn the social skills live to in a community. I think it takes a lifetime to learn the humility to truly let Jesus into our lives.