

Feast of the Holy Family

December 29, 2024

Reading

Luke 2:41-52

St. Thomas of Villanova, O.S.A.
Archbishop of Valencia, Spain
1488-1555

When the Lord Jesus Christ was twelve years old (as a human being, since as God he is before all times and apart from time), he stayed behind in the Temple when Mary and Joseph left, and went on engaging his elders in discussion, and winning their admiration at his teaching. They were returning from Jerusalem, and looked for him among those they were traveling with. When they didn't find him they went back, very worried, to Jerusalem, and found him discussing things in the Temple with the old men, when he was, as I said, twelve years old. But why be surprised? The Word of God is never silent, though he is not always heard. So he is found in the Temple, and his mother says to him, *Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you. And he said, Did you not know that I have to be about my Father's business?* He said this because he was the Son of God in the Temple of God. That Temple, after all, wasn't Joseph's but God's.

“So there you are,” somebody says; “he didn’t agree that he was Joseph’s son.” Now just a little more patience, please, brothers, because we haven’t much time and we want it to last the sermon. When Mary said *Your father and I have been very worried looking for you*, he answered, *Did you not know that I have to be about my Father’s business?* because he was not willing to be their son in such a way that they didn’t realize he was the Son of God. The Son of God is always the Son of God, the one who created them, after all. But as son of man, born in time of the virgin

without seed of her husband, he still had each of them as a parent. How do we prove this? Mary has already said, *Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you.*

In the first place, brothers, we should not pass over in silence such saintly modesty as Mary's, especially for the lesson it offers for the ladies, our sisters. She had given birth to Christ, the angel had come to her and told her, *Behold, you shall conceive in the womb, and you shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High* (Lk 1:31-32). She had been found worthy to bear the Son of the Most High, and she was so humble. She didn't put herself before her husband even in the order she mentioned them in, and say "I and your father," but *Your father and I* is what she said. She took no notice of the dignity of her womb, but she paid attention to the right order of marriage. The humble Christ, after all, would never have taught his mother to be proud. *Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you.* "Your father," she says, "and I"; because the head of the woman is the man. How much less reason, then, for other women to be proud!

Mary, too, you see, was called "a woman," not suggesting any loss of virginity, but simply using the word proper to her sex. The apostle says of the Lord Jesus Christ, *Made of a woman*; but for all that, he did not cancel the article of our faith in which we confess that he was born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary. For it was as a virgin that she conceived, as a virgin that she gave birth, and a virgin that she remained. But they called all females "women," according to the usage of the Hebrew language. Here is the clearest example. The first female, whom God made of the rib taken from the man's side, was already called "woman" even before she slept with the man, which happened, we are told, after they had departed from paradise; scripture says, *He fashioned it into a woman* (Gn 2:22).

So when the Lord Jesus Christ answers, *I had to be about my Father's business*, while he is indicating that God is his Father, he is not thereby denying that Joseph is his father, too. How can we prove this? By the scripture, which puts it like this: *And he said to them, Did you not know that I had to be about my Father's business? But they did not understand what it was he said to them. And when he had gone down with them, he came to Nazareth and was subject to them* (Lk 2:49-51). It doesn't say, "He was subject to his mother," or "He was subject to her," but it says, "He was subject to them." Who was he subject to? To his parents, surely. They were both his parents, and he was subject to them, seeing fit to be so just as he saw fit to be the son of man. Just now it was the ladies receiving instructions; now it's the children's turn, to accept the example of respecting their parents and being subject to them. The whole world is subject to Christ; Christ is subject to his parents.

So you see, brothers, when he said, *I have to be about my Father's business*, he did not mean us to take him as saying "You are not my parents." They, though, are his parents in time, that Father is so eternally. They are the parents of the son of man. He is the Father of the Word and of his Wisdom, the Father of his power, through which he formed everything. If everything is formed through that which reaches mightily from end to end and disposes all things sweetly, then they too were formed through the Son of God, they to whom he himself would later on be subject as son of man.