

Section 33

“In the Light of the Word”

Part 2: Jesus knows the complexity of family life from his own experience

St. Luke tells us how at twelve years of age, as a Jewish young adult, Jesus took the well-considered decision to prepare himself for his future mission, not by staying in the Temple of Jerusalem among the teachers of the law, but by sharing the life of his family in the small village of Nazareth (Luke 2:51-52; AL 18).

Pope Francis underlines the fact that *“Jesus’ own family did not appear unusual or different from other families. That is why people found it hard to acknowledge Jesus’ wisdom: “Where did this man get all this? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (Mk 6:2-3).... These questions make it clear that theirs was an ordinary family, close to others. Jesus readily interacted with the wider family, the relatives of his parents and their friends.”* (AL 182).

Nevertheless, the Pope urges us *“to peer into those thirty long years when Jesus earned his keep by the work of his hands, reciting the traditional prayers and expressions of his people’s faith and coming to know that ancestral faith”* (AL 65). Moreover, *“its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod’s relentless violence”* (AL 30). Jesus had made the choice to experience everyday human life for better and worse.

So, even if the Gospels do not openly speak about it, these years in Nazareth deliver an important message regarding family life. They show us the deepest meaning of the mystery that *“changed the history of the world,”* the mystery of *“the incarnation of the Word”* (AL 65): ‘God-with-us’, is not the God we meet outside, but inside this often chaotic world of ours. God meets us and we meet God first of all inside the complexity of our daily life and inside the family in which we grew up and may still live.

As the Pope wrote in his Encyclical “Laudato Si’”: *“In the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Lord does not come from above, but from within, he comes, so that we might find him in this world of ours”* (Laudato Si 236).

A Reflective Moment

Pope Francis highlights the fact that at the time of his ministry
Jesus often visited families afflicted by illness or grief,
while several of his parables also show that Jesus was fully aware
of the joys and sorrows met by ordinary families.

*“Jesus himself was born into a modest family
that soon had to flee to a foreign land.*

*He visits the home of Peter, whose mother-in-law is ill (cf. Mk 1:30-31)
and shows sympathy upon hearing of deaths
in the homes of Jairus and Lazarus (cf. Mk 5:22-24, 35-43; Jn 11:1-44).*

*He hears the desperate wailing of the widow of Nain
for her dead son (cf. Lk 7:11-15)
and heeds the plea of the father of an epileptic child
in a small country town (cf. Mk 9:17-27).*

*He goes to the homes of tax collectors
like Matthew and Zacchaeus (cf. Mt 9:9-13; Lk 19:1-10),
and speaks to sinners
like the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (cf. Lk 7:36-50).*

*Jesus knows the anxieties and tensions experienced by families
and he weaves them into his parables:
children who leave home to seek adventure (cf. Lk 15:11-32),
or who prove troublesome (Mt 21:28-31)
or fall prey to violence (Mk 12:1-9).*

*He is also sensitive to the embarrassment
caused by the lack of wine at a wedding feast (Jn 2:1-10),
the failure of guests to come to a banquet (Mt 22:1-10),
and the anxiety of a poor family over the loss of a coin (Lk 15:8-10).”*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 21)