

Feast of the Holy Family (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
December 26, 27, 2015

There are really great ‘one-liners’ in today’s Scripture readings:

“Whoever honors his father atones for sins and preserves himself from them. Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother.”

“Brothers and sisters, put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you so must you also do.”

Yes, these are great lines. These words are even sometimes achieved by us. But to achieve these words takes work, and we get tired putting out that degree of energy. Sometimes family members even give up. We give up especially when tested as Joseph and Mary are in today’s gospel: *“Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.”* They were worried about him as any parent would be about a young boy.

I came across a story, the ending of which has a great lesson for us – for anyone in a family.

Once upon a time there was a man who sought wisdom and studied with the wise ones of many countries and faiths. And one day a wise child was brought to him, with the explanation that this child was profound in his understandings and ability to speak. When the man asked whom the child had studied with, he was informed that the child was naturally wise, that his spirit was pure and untainted, and that no one had taught him. And so the man questioned him. The child answered in utterly simple and direct responses. The man was stunned and overcome with emotion. What child was this? The man was full of questions that he had carried all his life. He poured them out in a stream of never-ending proportions, one building upon the next.

But the child grew restless and decided he wanted to play a game, a game of hide and seek. He told the man, “You hide and I’ll find you.”

But the man insisted, “No, you hide and I’ll find you. After all, I have great knowledge, and I can find anything and you are just a child.”

But the child refused. “No, you go first. Hide and let me find you.”

So the man snapped his fingers and disappeared. The child was delighted and searched for the man. But soon the child was disappointed and almost in tears, because he realized the man had disappeared into another world.

Out loud, he said, "That's not fair. You're not supposed to hide in another world. This is a game for here."

The man came back, marveling at the boy's insight and perceptions. And, in that instance, the boy disappeared. It was a game of hide and seek, and now it was his turn. The man looked everywhere, but couldn't find the child. The child had leapt into the man's heart, a place the man rarely ventured, alone or with anyone else. Finally, desperate to continue questioning the child, he pleaded, "Where are you?"

The boy answered, "Right here."

The man listened, but the sound, though near, so close, was also far away, indistinct, barely discernible. "Where?" he called again.

The child laughed, "In your heart, of course."

But the man was lost. He did not know how to get into his heart. The child reappeared before him, stern and sad, and looked at him for a long time. And then he spoke, "You know, if you do not look in your own heart you will never know what wisdom and truth are or their power to reveal and transform. Deep, deep down there are rooms and caves that are full of riches and treasures, memories and hopes." After a while, he spoke again, "And if you don't look into others' hearts you will never find faith or love."

With that the boy turned to leave and the man grabbed for him. "No," the child said, "I have to go. There are many people I want to ply my game with. But someday I will come back to play with you again. I hope you've practiced a lot and explored a lot more by then. Goodbye, until we meet again." And the child vanished.

As we celebrate today's Feast of the Holy Family, and as we soon go into a new year, think about how well you listen to your heart, and share from your heart?

how well you encourage others to share and listen from their hearts? I caught just parts of the "Coat of Many Colors" movie, the Dolly Parton family story. It had some real 'from the heart' conversations. (When Dolly 'yells at God for being up there and not down here where she needed him; many from the father.)

Listen to what your heart tells you . . . in it lies secrets for life, secrets nestled there by the grace of God. In Ecclesiastes, a common funeral reading, there are lines like "a time for laughing, a time for crying, a time for rejoicing and a time for mourning" And then it says, "And God put all these times into the depths of our hearts without us even knowing it." Yes, there are secrets and treasures deep without our hearts. Good and healthy families are those that recognize the opportunities to look into each others hearts – and good and healthy families do not let those opportunities pass unfulfilled.