

## **The Feast of the Holy Family: December 27, 2020**

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

### A Reflection on Jesus Lost in the Temple

Have you ever lost a child - when those minutes, until they were found, seemed like years: as your heart raced and your hands were too sweaty to hold the phone to your ear as you called the police? And you promised God anything and everything, even that child who escaped your scrutinizing eye. You offered your most best self to God, hoping to avoid that most painful ritual, your child's funeral. *I have lost two children, as in "went missing." One daughter went searching for Santa as she escaped the bathroom stall as I tried to manage a twin stroller and very anxious 4-year-old.*

We were not part of a secluded neighborhood as Jesus was, traveling in a caravan to the Temple and back home. Mary and Joseph probably thought that He was either with the children and women or the men, now that He was considered a man. It was Passover, and the first time that Jesus was allowed to mingle with the other men and to listen to the Rabbis and to offer his own exegesis on the sacred readings. They went home and He was lost to them. He was not lost to Himself, He was finding out who He was on the Journey to His Father's house. It was Jesus's first act of public ministry.

I wonder if Mary and Joseph felt sick with worry, sad, confused, and hurt about the curiosity of what Jesus meant by being in His Father's house, what was His business? He was on the cusp of adolescence, as He sat with the elders in the Temple, as they marveled at His precocity, His intelligence. I think of our priest, our scholar, Dick Lawrence, our shepherd: fitting into this intimate and heady circle.

We are told in Luke's narrative that He went home honoring Joseph and Mary, growing in wisdom, age and grace. When I feel that I have lost God, I try to discern those gifts of grace and wisdom.

The newly built White Marsh Mall was a vast temple of commercialism and over the top wall to wall parents and children vying for a coveted look at the real Santa and a pull at his beard. Our three-year-old was just tired of waiting to see Santa: she decided to search him out on her own. She dashed, unnoticed, by Jim near Burger King. We alerted the guards and she was found 30 agonizing minutes later in Santa's dressing room; her mouth was stuffed with cookie

chunks. That Santa looked like Fr. Dick's *Abba*. He told us that even a 3-year-old has a mind of her own.

When I lost our quiet, intense 3-year-old grandson, he was no longer amused by the aerial dolphin tricks and slipped down the cascading bleacher steps at the Aquarium into the deep hallway. We fanned out. We were sick. It is a compounded worry and fear when it's your grandson who has been entrusted to your care. He was such a good obedient toddler. When a child is lost in a public family-oriented facility the doors are locked. We found him at the front door too many minutes later, telling us he was bored. They just didn't jump high enough, he said about the dolphins. I cried and angrily shouted at him to never leave our sight. Lost yet found.

I sometimes feel that God has left me, alone and oh so weary. I feel separated with an ache that knows no stop.

I pray, I scream and I call out for God's gentle grace. I read The Word in hopes of rekindling an attachment. I try to make human connections. I write someone a note, or I make a phone call. Oh, the Joy in finding someone who was lost and found again. We are able to be that found person when we are the loving arms of a real Church. We are the Holy Family. Jesus and Dick are surely smiling as we gather around the Table of the Lord.

*Elizabeth Hergenroeder Pepple*