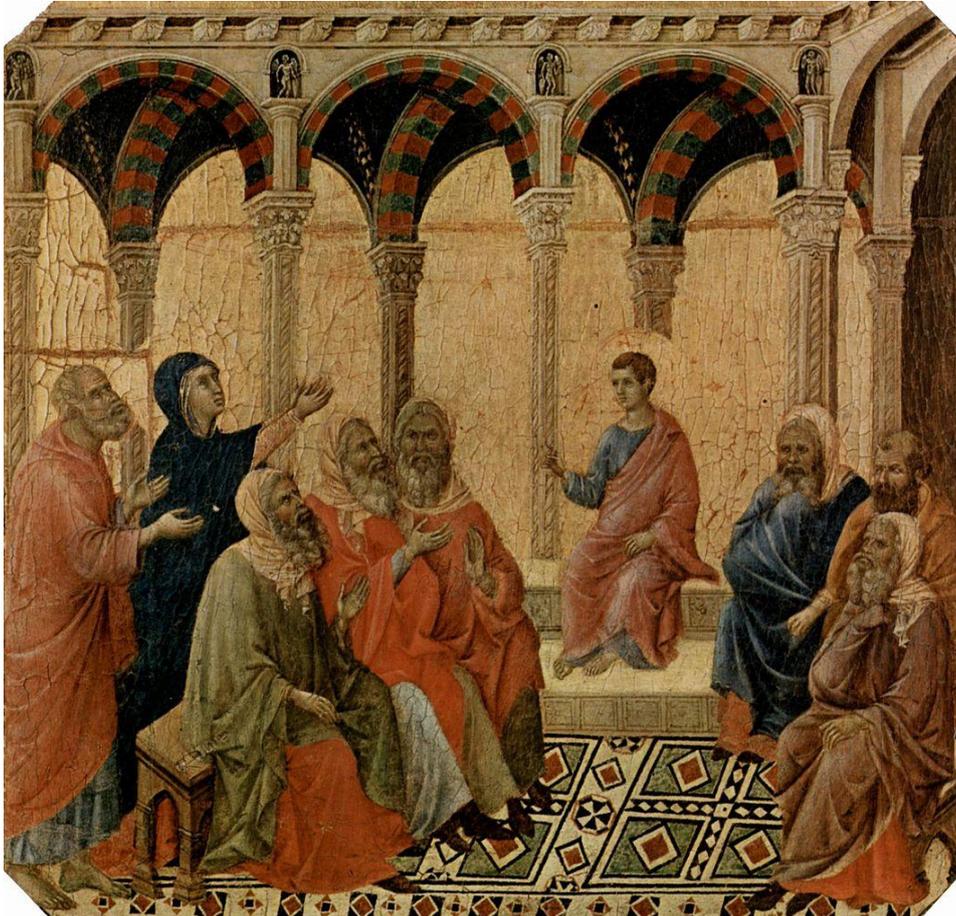


**Some words for our Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour  
Week 4 - The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple**

*'He was by his dear mother sought, who felt herself forlorn!  
She sought him, but she found him not, which caused her to mourn.'*<sup>1</sup>



**Reading:**

*Luke 2:41-50*

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's & St Charles,

Our reading today gives us our one, solitary glimpse into the hidden years of the life of the Holy Family. Jesus, still a boy, was on the cusp of adulthood. He is twelve years old and his next birthday will see his *Bar mitzvoah*, ('a son subject to the law'), the moment when he would be able to publically take his place in community life and be held responsible for his actions.

Jewish adult males were called on to attend the pilgrimage festival of Passover, ideally every year, in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> As a child, Jesus was not required to observe the ritual of travelling to Jerusalem and, as a woman, neither was Mary, his mother. However, such was the piety and devotion of the family to the Law of Moses, we are

told that *'every year,'*<sup>3</sup> Joseph and Mary went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the week-long feast. When we consider that it was at least a three-day journey to get there then we realise it would have represented a considerable investment of time and money for the family. It is quite possible that Jesus had remained with his grandparents when he was younger and not travelled. Perhaps it was only as his time of adulthood and maturity grew near – the two do not always go together – that he accompanied Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem? We simply do not know. What we do know is that Jesus was already *'filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.'*<sup>4</sup>

This journey of course foreshadows what Jesus would do as an adult, for when *'the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely took the road for Jerusalem.'*<sup>5</sup> He would teach in the Temple, observe the Passover and offer his life as the lamb of sacrifice. It is estimated that the population of the city during Passover would swell from about 25,000 to around 100,000. Like most pilgrimages, people tended to travel in large groups and within that group there was a distinct division, the women and children were in one group and the men in the other. Inevitably, there would be quite a bit of back and forth taking place between the groups but it still might be evening before a whole family were reunited. When they arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem this division continued and the children went with their mothers to the Court of the Women. We should not be so surprised then to realise how easy it would have been for Jesus to be missed by both Mary and Joseph for a day.

Let us reckon that it was the end of the first day of the return journey when the absence of Jesus was discovered. It would have taken another day for the distraught couple to retrace their steps to Jerusalem and only on the following day would they have been able to begin their search for him. We can see how it took three days to find him.

We can only imagine the torrent of emotion threatening to overwhelm Mary and Joseph when they found Jesus was not with their group. How time must have dragged as they anxiously made their way back to Jerusalem; hope always rising in the heart and fear inexorably gnawing away at the mind. It is probably a good thing that children do not realise just how terrible love is in such circumstances. Watched over by our parents, we take our first unthinking steps and soon try this and dare to do that; restlessly we push on, all the while testing our abilities, growing and learning. Vulnerable when we are young, we chafe at the necessary boundaries that keep us safe and secure so that we too may one day, our parents hope, safely come to maturity and understand the depth and breadth of love and perhaps the joys of parenthood also. I have helped search for a missing child, sat with a parent or

parents whose child is missing and there are parents I know whose child has been missing for many years. Like grief, those parents found the uncontrollable judgement of the heart almost overwhelmed them; *'They were overcome when they saw him.'*<sup>6</sup>

Mature and wise, but still a child, Jesus evidently did not understand what his staying behind in Jerusalem would mean for Mary and Joseph; *'See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.'*<sup>7</sup> How many children, especially during adolescence, have found the strength of parental emotions confusing and seemingly something of an overreaction? *Why didn't you tell us you were going to ...!?* After all, what was there to worry about? *'I didn't think; I was with ... it was only a few hours!'* Looking at it now, we might understand how the young Jesus had naturally gravitated towards the space reserved for men – he must have looked old enough – and entered the Court of the Israelites to get on with his *'Father's affairs';*<sup>8</sup> Mary and Joseph did not .

Yes, it is true that the three days of the search also prefigure the Lord's three days in the tomb and that, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Mary and Joseph *'did not understand what he meant,'*<sup>9</sup> but it is the human drama that catches our attention. Did Jesus originally just lose track of time or did he deliberately stay behind in the temple? Sensing, in his humanity, that his relationship with God was perhaps unique, was he doing what boys often do and simply flexing his new-found strength or was he in a world of his own, like many a child caught-up in reading a book or playing a game? We do know that he will go on to tell us that our faith will dislocate even our family ties, *'And everyone who has left houses ... father, mother ... for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times, and also inherit eternal life.'*<sup>10</sup>

When Jesus was found he was sat, the traditional position of one in authority, and seemingly perfectly at ease with the learned men of the Temple, the doctors and teachers. This was the Jesus that Mary and Joseph knew well, responsible and already wise beyond his years. They had only lost sight of him originally because they must have trusted him. Relieved, Mary makes it clear to Jesus that she and Joseph were not just worried or anxious when looking for him, they were literally *'in pain.'* Jesus in return tells her that he was compelled; it was a *'must,'* that he come to his Father's house and he seems surprised that this much, at least, is not clear. Does the question, *'Did you not know?'*<sup>11</sup> hint at a previous family conversation, one that has touched on the child's uniqueness? *'Why were you looking for me?'*<sup>12</sup> are the first words St Luke records Jesus speaking and they are to be later matched by the angel who asks the same question of those looking for Jesus among the dead.<sup>13</sup> With great

sensitivity, the young Jesus contrasts Mary's use of "your father" by speaking of "my father" and thereby he gives the name of Father to God. Close now to becoming an adult and beginning to discern his mission he seemingly asks, where else would you have expected to find me? The answer will be at home.

It turned out that the public path was not to be - for now at least - and that the Servant King would still have much to learn in the bosom of the family, especially from his mother, who treasured and 'stored up'<sup>14</sup> the things concerning her son in her heart. Docile, subjecting himself to their authority, 'Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.'<sup>15</sup>

*'Of Jesus' thirty-three years,  
thirty were spent in silence and obscurity, submission and work.'*<sup>16</sup>

Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, *pray for us.*

St Joseph, *pray for us.*

St Charles Borromeo, *pray for us.*

With my prayers,

Rev. Mark McManus

Parish Priest

19 May 2020

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The picture is of *The Disputation with the Doctors*, by Duccio di Buoninsegna, from the *Maesta* altarpiece, Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption, Siena, 1308–1311.

1. *When Jesus in the temple stay'd*, verse 2, Church Hymn Book, XXXIII, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

2. *Exodus 23:17 & Deuteronomy 16:16*

3. *Luke 2:41*

4. *Luke 2:40*

5. *Luke 9:51*

6. *Luke 2:48*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Luke 2:49*

9. *Luke 2:50*

10. *Matthew 19:29*

11. *Luke 2:49*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Luke 24:5*

14. *Luke 2:51*

15. *Luke 2:52*

16., Furrow, §485, St Josemaria Escrivá Sceptre, New York, 1987