

*“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* By his words Jesus reveals to us a fundamental truth of our existence, we are – each of us – members of two families, one human, one divine. We sometimes forget that the Holy family was a real family too they were real human beings who lived in a real world with real problems, just like us. That Mary and Jesus were without sin and that Joseph was a righteous man in the eyes of God does not change the fact that they were a real family. When Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was missing, they were filled with great anxiety, just as any parents are today when their children are missing. The anguish in Mary’s heart is known to every mother and father who have even for a moment lost their child. As a father I can assure you, this anguish does not go away when our children grow up and leave home. We still ache for them when they are wounded and battered by the world, we still rejoice when we see them again and we still agonize over them when they stray from the path of righteousness. I hear this anguish over and over in the confessional from parents whose children have chosen to live separated from God and his mercy. The parents cry out to God in their pain and their anguish. This is how our heavenly Father feels when we stray from him, when we lose our way, when we won’t listen to him. His love for us is greater than any human love could ever be and his anguish when we stray is greater than any human parent’s could ever be. This shared anguish over a lost child is part of our membership in the household of God.

By virtue of our baptism we dwell in two families one natural, one supernatural. Keeping this reality in mind helps us to stay on course in the midst of life’s turbulence. Mary would again experience the anguish of the loss of her child at the foot of the cross, when her son gave his life as the price of our salvation. She would again experience that agony of loss during

another three days as she awaited his resurrection. God allows the sufferings of this life to prepare us to meet our Risen Lord, to draw us closer to his own suffering heart. I think we are never closer to God than when we suffer for our children. Jesus reminded Mary of this when he said *‘did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’* Mary did not then fully understand, just as we do not, and she could not understand until she experienced the sweet joy of the resurrection. But Mary did as we must do; she put Jesus’ words into her heart where the Holy Spirit could reveal him to her.

*“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* are the very first words of Jesus recorded in scripture, and I suggest that they are not so much directed at Mary as they are at us. How often have we wandered from God’s house to look for fulfillment somewhere else, in the mountains or in the desert, on a river or across an ocean, in a philosophy or an ideology, in a job or a relationship, everywhere, except the one place where our happiness may truly be found: in our Father’s house. Christ is present in a certain way in all of creation, as a painter is present in his painting or the workman in his work, but if we really want to meet him where he is, then we must go to our Father’s house, just as Mary did that day in the temple. And if our children become lost, we too must go to our Father’s house as Mary did, in order to find them again for they are his children too.

May the Holy Family help each of our families to grow in understanding and love and may Mary, the mother of love personified and Joseph the guardian of the redeemer help each mother and father to live out their precious parenthood in the service of their children, even at the price of their anguish for their children, trusting always in our heavenly Father’s love for each and everyone of us.