

Fr. Joe Bambenek
Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
St. Joseph's Church, Jackson, MI
June 12, 2010

(The following roughly reflects the partially spontaneous homily that I preached, although text in blue font was omitted from what I preached)

1 Kings 19:19-21 Psalm 16:1b-2a, 5, 7-8, 9-10 Luke 2:41-51

This morning we gather in the Church of St. Joseph to celebrate what was perhaps St. Joseph's greatest Earthly love: the Immaculate Heart of his spouse Mary. Her heart is a heart unlike any other that has ever been known: a heart fully human yet without sin. A heart filled with so much love that while it was devoted to her husband and son when they lived with her, it is a heart that is still today also devoted to each one of us with the greatest of maternal affection.

When I first checked out today's gospel reading I was, well, a bit perplexed. Why would this reading, of Jesus being lost in the Temple, have been chosen for today's feast day? Yet when I came to reflect upon the gospel reading more, I came to recognize that it brings to light, it elucidates, many important qualities of Mary's heart. With that in mind, let's look at the story in a bit more detail.

Once they realized that Jesus was lost, Mary, along with Joseph, sacrificed her own plans to meet the needs of her child. There were undoubtedly things that needed to be done in Nazareth when they returned after having been away for some time on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but when they discovered that Jesus was lost, Mary and Joseph abandoned their plans and spent all of their energies on finding their lost son.

In fact, Mary and Joseph not only abandoned their plans, they also took the dangerous step of leaving the caravan to travel back to Jerusalem. In those days in that part of the world, travelling in a group was not just a matter of social enjoyment, but of safety in numbers. Hence, Mary and Joseph not only experience an inconvenience, they placed themselves in danger in order to seek out their child.

Mary deeply loved her child. That is what motivates all her actions.

Mary diligently sought after her lost child: they kept looking for Jesus until they found him, even though it took 3 days.

When they finally found Jesus, Mary gently rebuked her child. Now, I must admit that if I had been searching for my child for a couple days after he sneaked off, I might have been tempted to do a bit of yelling when I eventually found him. But how did Mary respond? She responded in love. She let Jesus know that He should not have wandered off on them, and that because they loved Him, He had caused them great anxiety. This both let Jesus know that He was loved, yet also sent a strong message to Him. A parent needs to let his or her child know when they have done something wrong. But Mary did so with love, not with uncontrolled anger.

Mary was proud of her child – when she came to realize what Jesus had been up to, she was delighted by how Jesus was using his gifts.

And finally, we hear that Mary remembered with great fondness the stories of her son. We can think about how much it means to us when someone who loves us, and who we love, remembers the stories of our life.

In all of these ways, we get a better glimpse of Mary's heart. And how she responded to the situation gives us, and especially the parents here, an example of what it looks like for our hearts to be conformed to hers.

While we celebrate the heart of Mary today, we also celebrate what her example can mean for us. [And there are several dimensions to this.](#)

[In Mary, women can find an example of what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a mother. As we grow up and into our vocations, we all need role models. Mary can serve as such a role model to women more generally and to mothers in particular. Since the earliest of ages, women have passed down to their daughters, from generation to generation, what it means to be a woman; what it means to be a wife; what it means to be a mother. However, it seems that in the past few decades there has been a break, a falling between the cracks of this intergenerational female nurturing. Instead, too often today girls and young women learn what motherhood means from TV shows that present warped depictions of families and what it means to be a woman from magazines like *Cosmo* which greatly distort the essence of femininity. The result, I would assert, is that at no time in recorded human history has there been so much confusion, and such a break-down between generations, on what it means to be a mother, and for that matter, a woman, as there is today.](#)

Second, for all of us, we can turn to Mary for what is missing in our own lives, perhaps even in our relationships with our own mothers. While all of us have natural mothers, some of them are or were better role models than others. I should add that I am personally blessed to have a great and loving mom who passed along a great heritage of faith and example of love to me. Yet no matter how good, or bad, any of our moms might have been, no human mother is perfect. As a result, for all of us there is at least something that was missing from how our mother nurtured us. When we turn to Mary, our spiritual mother, in the face of those maternal imperfections, we can receive the maternal nurturing that we lacked, however small or large that void might have been. Furthermore, it is likely that many here this morning have lost their mother. Mary can be, in a special way, our spiritual mother to those whose natural mothers are no longer among us on Earth. Thus, on this day when we celebrate the Immaculate Heart of Mary, our spiritual mother, let us take a moment to be very grateful for God giving us such a great gift.

Speaking of gratitude, today I return to St. Joseph's in a spirit of gratitude, 2 weeks after having been ordained a priest. Between 1997 and 2003, when my residence was in Jackson, which was also my primary time of discernment, I was spiritually fed here at St. Joseph's as I would attend this Saturday morning Mass on those weekends when I was in town and sometimes during the week. When I first arrived in Jackson, Fr. Lesniak's homilies and counsel in the confessional had a way of touching my heart just as it needed to be touched. So I am grateful to him, for his ministry, and the example of priesthood that he set. And over the years I have been inspired by the witness of the devout people here at St. Joseph's. I am also grateful for the several people here have been praying for me over the years since I left Jackson, and I am grateful for the number of you who have gotten up early on a Saturday morning to come today to celebrate with me. Finally, I am also grateful to Fr. Shaver and to Fr. Bob for allowing me to celebrate Mass here this morning... I should add that today is Fr. Bob's own priesthood anniversary. So as I thank the Lord, and Our Blessed Mother, for the great gift of priesthood, I am very grateful to be able to celebrate Mass here with you this morning.

As we go forth on this Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, let us be resolved to mold our lives in the likeness of Mary; most especially those of us who have paternal responsibilities for others. Let us turn to Mary as an example for how to live our lives, as well as someone to whom we can turn to experience healing, maternal love.