

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
(SUNDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF THE EPIPHANY)
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

(Lk 2:42-52) (Audio Year C Track 005)

(Poem Vol. 1, p. 208-12, 216-21; Gospel Vol. 1, pp. 252-6, 261-7;

Notebooks 1943, pp. 541-2; Poem Vol. 1, pp. 747, 611-3; Gospel Vol. 2, pp. 409, 244-6)

(Jesus is twelve years of age, and the time has come for Mary and Joseph to take Him to the Temple in Jerusalem for a very important ceremony...)

It is a feast day in the Temple... The group of Jesus' family go in, singing psalms in low voices, and while all the men are in front, the women come behind. Other people have joined them: perhaps from Nazareth, perhaps their friends in Jerusalem. I don't know...

Joseph... with his Son... enters a vast room which looks like a synagogue. He speaks to a Levite, who disappears behind a striped curtain, then comes back with some elder priests. I think they are priests, they are certainly masters in the knowledge of the Law, and they are therefore appointed to examine the believers.

Joseph introduces Jesus. First of all, they both bow down deeply to the ten doctors, who have sat down with dignity on low wooden stools. "Here " he says, "this in my Son. Three months and twelve days ago He reached the age which the Law prescribes to become of age. And I want Him to comply with the prescriptions of Israel... I ask you to examine Him kindly and fairly, to judge that what I here, His father, have stated, is the truth. I have prepared Him for this hour, and for this dignity of son of the Law. He knows the precepts, the traditions, the decisions, the customs of the fringes, and the phylacteries... From now on He must be subject to the precepts, and He must pay, Himself, the penalty for His failures towards them. Examine Him. "

"We Will" is the reply. "Come forward, Child. What is Your name?"

"Jesus of Joseph, from Nazareth. "

"A Nazarene... can You therefore read?"

"Yes, rabbi, I can read the words which are written, and those which are construed in the words themselves."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I also understand the meaning of the allegory, or of the symbol which is hidden under the appearance, as a pearl does not appear but it is inside an ugly closed shell."

“A clever answer and a very wise one. We seldom hear that on the lips of adults; in a child, and a Nazarene in addition!...”

The attention of the ten has been awakened. Their eyes do not lose for an instant the beautiful blond Child, Who is looking at them - sure of Himself, without boldness, but also without fear.

“You honour Your master “ Jesus is told, “who certainly was deeply read.”

“The Wisdom of God was gathered in his just heart” replies Jesus.

“But listen to that! You are a happy man, father of such a Son!...”

(During further questioning, the listeners are astounded at the Child’s wisdom and understanding. Then one of the doctors says:)

“The Child is perfect. Not even the trap of the tricky question has upset Him in His reply. Let us take Him to the real synagogue”

They go into a larger and more splendid room. The first thing they do there is to shorten His hair. His big curls are picked up by Joseph. They tighten His red tunic with a long band turned several times round His waist. And they tie some little fringes to His forehead, arm and mantle - fixing them with studs. They then sing psalms, and Joseph praises the Lord with a long prayer, invoking all blessings on his Son.

The ceremony is over, and Jesus goes out with Joseph. They join their male relatives, buy and offer a lamb, and then - with the slaughtered victim - they reach the women.

Mary kisses Her Jesus. It seems She has not seen Him for years. She looks at Him - now that He is more manly in His clothes and in the style of His hair - and She pats Him...

(Time passes, and the group leaves Jerusalem to return home. Unbeknown to Mary and Joseph - who think He is with relatives - Jesus has stayed on in Jerusalem. In the next scene, Jesus is back again with the doctors, sitting on a high stool, and reading from a scroll He has been given...)

Jesus reads in His clear voice: “Be consoled, my people. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her that her time of service is ended... A voice cries in the wilderness: ‘Prepare a way for the Lord... then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed...’ ”

Shammai (one of the Pharisees) says: “See that, Nazarene. It refers here to an end of slavery, but never before have we been slaves as we are now. And there is the mention of a precursor. Where is he? You are talking nonsense.”...

Jesus replies: "I tell you that the admonition of the Precursor should be addressed to you, more than to anyone else. To you and those like you. Otherwise you will not see the glory of the Lord, neither will you understand the word of God. Because meanness, pride and falsehood will prevent you from seeing and hearing."

"How dare You speak to a master like that " says Shammai.

And Jesus says: "I speak thus. And thus I shall speak - even to My death. Because above Me there are the interests of the Lord, and the love for Truth, of which I am the Son. And I add, rabbi, that the slavery of which the Prophet speaks - and of which I am speaking - is not the one you think. Neither is the royalty the one you consider. On the contrary, by the merits of the Messiah, man will be made free from the slavery of Evil, which separates him from God. And the sign of Christ will be on the spirits, freed from every yoke, and made subjects of the eternal kingdom. All the nations will bend their heads - o household of David - before the Shoot which is born of you, and which will grow into a tree that covers the whole world and rises up to Heaven. And in Heaven - and on the earth - every mouth will praise His Name and bend its knee: before the Anointed of God, the Prince of Peace, the Leader, before Him Who - by giving Himself - will fill with joy and nourishment every disheartened and famishing soul..."

(Hillel, the old and kindly doctor, exclaims:)

"This child is a Prophet of God. Stay with me, Child. My old age will transfuse what I know into Your knowledge, and You will be Master of the people of God."

Jesus replies: "I solemnly tell you that if there were many like you, salvation would come to Israel. But My hour has not come. Voices from Heaven speak to Me, and in solitude I must gather them until My hour comes. Then, with My lips and My blood, I will speak to Jerusalem, and the destiny of Prophets - stoned and killed by her - will also be My destiny.

But above My life there is the Lord God, to Whom I submit Myself as a faithful servant - to make of Myself a stool for His glory, waiting for Him to make the world a stool at the feet of Christ. Wait for Me in My hour. These stones shall hear My voice again, and vibrate, hearing My last word. Blessed are those who in that voice will have heard God and will have believed in Him because of it...

And therefore I say: 'Here is Your servant, Lord, Who has come do to Your will. Let it be consummated, because I am eager to fulfill it'."

And here, the vision ends with Jesus' face burning with spiritual ardour and raised to Heaven, His arms stretched out, standing upright in the midst of the astonished doctors...

(A drama of a different kind is taking place on the road back to Nazareth. Jesus describes to Maria Valtorta His Mother's distress...)

She realised, after the groups of men and women had gathered together, that I was not with Joseph...

The pain that appears on Mary's face pierces Joseph's heart more than any bitter reproach. Mary does not give vent to dramatic outbursts, but Her repressed sorrow is so obvious: She starts trembling, Her face turns pale, Her eyes are wide open...

She goes back. It is night, it is dark, it does not matter. Every step takes Her back to Jerusalem. She stops the caravans and pilgrims and questions them. Joseph follows and helps Her. A long day's walk back to Jerusalem, and then the feverish search in town.

Where, where can Her Jesus be? By God's provision, for many hours, She will not know where to look for Me. To look for a child in the Temple does not make sense. What could a child be doing in the Temple? At most - if he had got lost in town, and his little steps had brought him back there - he would have cried for his mother, and would have attracted the attention of people, and of the priests, who would have taken the necessary steps to find the parents by means of announcements left at the gates. But there was no announcement. No one in town knew anything of this Child. Beautiful? Blond? Strong? There are so many like that!

Then, after three days - the symbol of three other days of future anguish - Mary, exhausted, enters the Temple. She walks along the yards and the halls. Nothing...

All of a sudden, from beyond the barrier of a large group of people, She hears His voice saying: "These stones will vibrate..." She endeavours to make Her way through the crowd, and succeeds after much effort. There is Her Son, standing in the midst of the doctors with His arms stretched out.

Mary is the Prudent Virgin. But this time anxiety overcomes prudence. It is a hurricane that demolishes everything. She runs to Her Son, embraces Him, lifts Him off the stool, and puts Him down on the ground. And She exclaims: "Oh! Why have You done this to us? For three days we have been looking for You. Your Mummy is dying with pain, Son. Your father is exhausted with fatigue. Why, Jesus?"

You do not ask "why" of Him Who knows. "Why" He behaved in a certain way. You do not ask those with a vocation "why" they leave everything to follow the voice of God... His interests are above ours, His affections are superior to everything else. And I tell My Mother.

I finish teaching the doctors with the lesson to Mary, the Queen of doctors. And She has never forgotten it. The sun began to shine again in Her heart, now that She had Me, humble and obedient, beside Her. But My words are deeply rooted in Her mind... Never again will She ask: "My Son, why have You done this to us?"

(Mary explains to Maria Valtorta how Her understanding of these events differed from that of Joseph...)

"...The secrets of the Most High were as if deposited in a closed ark in the Holy of Holies. Only I, the supreme Priestess, knew them, and the Glory of the Lord concealed them from the eyes of men with his unbearable splendor. They were abysses of splendor, and only the virginal eye - kissed by the Spirit of God - could look fixedly at them. That is why both Joseph and I felt wonder. In different ways, but equally in awe...

"I understood. I knew even before. And if the Father permitted my anguish as a mother, He did not conceal, from me, the sublime meaning of the words of my Son. But I remained silent so as not to mortify Joseph, to whom the fullness of grace was not granted.

"I was the Mother of God, but that did not exempt me from being a respectful wife towards the Good Man who was my loving companion and vigilant brother..."

(Late in the first year of His public life, Jesus is reminiscing to His disciples about His childhood. He says:)

"...God watched, God tested, God provided, God perfected. To have God implies restraints, not only joy. My [earthly] father... and My Mother... both suffered from restraints. They were forbidden what is lawful, so that mystery might envelop the Child Messiah with a shadow. And that should clarify to many people - who do not understand - the twofold reason for the worry, when I was lost for three days. The love of a Mother and the love of a father - for the lost Child; and fear of the guardians for the Messiah Who might be revealed before His time... That is the reason for the unusual cry: "Son, why have You done this to us? See how Your father and I have been worried, looking for You!"... A veil was cast over the splendour of the Divine Incarnate. And the reassuring reply: "Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be busy with My Father's affairs?" A reply which the Full of Grace accepted and understood for what it means... And that is what I have done until a year ago.

The time has now come. The veils are being lifted. And the Son of Joseph is showing Himself in His true nature: the Messiah of the Good News, the Saviour, the Redeemer, and the King of the future century. "

(A little earlier, Jesus meets with the rabbi Gamaliel - a witness of the 12-year-old Boy in the Temple, who isn't sure if this is the same Jesus. Gamaliel says:)

“Do not be upset, Jesus, if I am tenacious with my ideas... Once, when the great wise Hillel was still alive, we both believed that the Messiah was in Israel. There was a great brightness of a divine sunshine, on that cold day in a bitter winter! It was Passover... Men were worried about the frozen crops... After I heard those words, I said: "Israel has been saved! As from today there will be abundance in the fields, and blessings in our hearts! The Expected One has revealed Himself in His first glorious shining". And I was not wrong... ”

And Jesus asks; “Which words did you hear? Who spoke them? ”

“[He was]... little more than a child... But God was shining on His innocent gentle face... I have been thinking of it, and remembering it, for the last nineteen years... and I try to hear that voice again... that spoke words of wisdom... In which part of the world does He now live? I ponder... He was God. In the appearance of a little boy, in order not to frighten men. And like lightning that dashes across the sky (and flashes northwards, southwards, eastwards and westwards), He, the Divine Being, in His appearance of merciful beauty - with the face and voice of a child, and a divine mind - wanders on the earth to say to men: "I am". So I think... When will He come back to Israel?... When? And I think: He will come when Israel will become the altar for His feet. And my heart moans, seeing the degradation of Israel: never. Oh! What a harsh reply! But true! Can the Holiness descend into Its Messiah as long as there is abomination amongst us? ”

“It can and does descend, because it is Mercy ” replies Jesus.

Gamaliel looks at Him pensively, and then asks: “What is Your true Name? ”

And Jesus stands up, stately, and says: “I am Who I am. The Thought and the Word of the Father. I am the Messiah of the Lord. ”

“You?... I cannot believe it. Great is Your Holiness. But that Child - in Whom I do believe - said: "I will give a sign... These stones will vibrate when My hour comes". I am awaiting that hour to believe. Can you give it to me, to convince me that You are the Expected One? ”

They are now both standing, tall, stately, one in his wide white linen robe, the other in his plain dark red woollen tunic. One elderly, the other young. Both with deep dominating eyes, staring at each other...

Jesus then exclaims: “You want that sign? You will have it! I repeat the far-off words: "The stones of the Temple of the Lord will vibrate, hearing My last words". Wait for that sign - doctor of Israel, a just man - and then believe, if you wish to be forgiven and saved. You would be blessed before time, if you could believe before! But you cannot. Centuries of wrong beliefs - on a just promise - and heaps of pride, are your bulwark against Truth and Faith. ”

“You are right. I will wait for that sign. Goodbye. The Lord be with You. ”

“Goodbye, Gamaliel. May the Eternal Spirit enlighten and guide you. ”

They all greet Gamaliel who goes away with Nicodemus [and some others]... Jesus stays with Joseph of Arimathea, who says: “He will not bend!... I would like him to be one of Your disciples. He would be of conclusive weight in Your favour... “

“Don’t worry” says Jesus. “No weight can save Me from the storm which is already approaching. But Gamaliel - if he doesn’t bend in My favour, won’t bend against Christ either. He is one who is waiting... ”