

God Growing Up

In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ: Today's Gospel, the story of the boy Jesus in the temple, is the only biblical account of we have of the Savior's life between the time of his infancy and his first public appearance at his baptism when he was in the neighborhood of thirty years old. It's a frustratingly short story: just the briefest glimpse of our Lord as an adolescent. There's so much more we'd like to know. I mean, what was it like for Mary and Joseph to raise a sinless child? I'll bet a lot of parents would like to know firsthand what that would be like speaking of their own children. Sorry. You don't get to find out. Or what was it like for Mary and Joseph's other children to have Jesus as a big brother? You can just hear the parents saying, "James, stop that! Why can't you be more like Jesus?" Small wonder that his siblings resented him, and did not believe in him until after his resurrection. So yes, there's more we'd like to know. And to feed this desire to know, over the years people have come up with any number of apocryphal stories supposedly about Jesus in his youth. They are works of fiction, though, that tell us more about the people who thought them up than they do about Jesus.

No, when seeking out divine truths, we are confined to one source: God's Holy Word. And we have to recognize that the Bible doesn't tell us everything we'd *like* to know. It tells us what we *need* to know. Still, from what the Bible does say in this and other accounts we can coax out truths about the mystery of the incarnation in order to understand at least to some degree what it was like for Jesus to be God growing up.

God growing up. That sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it? How can God grow up? He's eternal. He's always existed. And he's unchanging – the same yesterday, today, and forever. But growing up is all about having a definite beginning and then changing as one grows older. So, how can God grow up? The answer is that in Jesus he can and did, because Jesus is both true God and true man. He is at the same time the eternal Son of God begotten of the Father before all worlds, and true man conceived of the Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He has two entirely different natures: one divine (God) and one human (man). And yet he is just one person. So, whatever is true about one of his natures is true of the whole person.

By way of analogy, *you* also have two natures. You were born with a sinful nature. According to that nature you are 100% sinful in every thought, word, and action. And yet, when God gave you the gift of saving faith in Christ, by the power of his Holy Spirit he gave you a new nature, a perfect, sinless, holy nature. The two coexist within you. So you are simultaneously sinner and saint. So, if I ask which are you, sinner or saint? The answer is yes, 100% of both. Now, the analogy isn't perfect because in your case we're talking about two distinctly human natures, one sinful the other not, and in Jesus we're dealing with two different *kinds* of natures, one human the other divine. But still it can help us to understand how one person can be two entirely different things at the same time.

So, in today's text the boy Jesus is twelve years old. And at the same time he is eternal, without beginning and without end. Both are true of the one person, Jesus. Yes, I know: it's hard to wrap your head around; but what can I say? We have an awesome God who came up with an awesome plan to save us.

Okay, there's something else we need to understand about the person of Jesus. It's this: that while he is simultaneously divine and human, during the period that began at his

conception in his virgin mother and that ended at his resurrection – what we call the time of his state of humiliation – he did not fully utilize or take advantage of his divine powers and attributes. No indeed, to be our substitute in his sacrifice on the cross, he had to first live a perfect life as a human with all of our human limitations except without sin. So, for example, imagine the 8 year old Jesus is hungry and would like a snack. He can't just whip a Snickers bar out of thin air. But wait a minute: he's all powerful God. So why can't he? The answer is that you can't, nor can any other human. And he has to live his perfect life with the same limitations as any other human.

Now, it's true that later during his public ministry, Jesus does perform a number of miracles using his divine power. These serve two purposes: they reveal that he is in fact God in human flesh for no mere man could do such powerful things, and they always illustrate or point to or in some other way highlight a teaching that Jesus is trying to get across. For example, when Jesus cleanses someone with the dread disease of leprosy it shows that he's God, sure, but it also it points to how he is here to cleanse all people of the even more dread disease of sin. And about his miracles two things need to be said. First, that Jesus never works them for his own benefit. He only uses them in the service of others. And second, that he doesn't perform *any* of them until *after* he begins his teaching ministry. The Bible clearly states that the first of his miracles was turning water to wine at the wedding of Cana. From this we can be certain that in his youth, when he was God growing up, he never exercised his divine power.

Nor did he exercise his divine knowledge; and this is the main issue I want to deal with today. One of the attributes of God is that he knows everything. He has perfect knowledge of every fact of science and history past, present, and future. He even knows all the thoughts of every human mind. There is nothing that God doesn't know. But Jesus in his state of humiliation "turned it off" if you will. The fancy theological term for this is kenosis, which is derived from the Greek word that means "to empty". The idea is this: while Jesus was fully God in human flesh he emptied himself of his divine knowledge and wisdom so that he didn't know everything. He had to learn what he came to know, just like you or me. As with any very young child he had to be taught how to walk and how to speak and how to tie his sandals and so on.

As he grew older his father, Joseph, would have taught him a trade. He was a builder – it's usually translated as carpenter, but it's more than that. He would have worked with stone and other materials also. Anyway, Joseph had to teach Jesus how to measure things, how to hold and operate his tools, and how to make and repair them. It's fascinating when you think about it: here's the one who made all things including the whole of mankind learning how to make things from a mere man.

But of course Jesus was not ultimately destined to follow his father's trade making homes of timber and stone. He came to build his Church, a spiritual structure made of living stones: the people he came to redeem. And for that he needed a different kind of wisdom and knowledge, which (at long last) brings us today's text.

We read that the boy Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And that last phrase should better be translated "he was being filled with wisdom". That is to say, what had been empty was being filled with wisdom passively by someone else. We're talking about divine wisdom here, the knowledge and application of the truths of God. You can think of it this way: just as Joseph was teaching Jesus his trade, Jesus was learning from his heavenly Father the things of his trade. And this wasn't by means of direct communication: the Father whispering things in Jesus' ear from time to time. No, as was stated before, God's Holy Word is

the sole source of divine truth. Jesus obtained divine wisdom and knowledge from hearing, reading, discussing, and meditating upon the sacred Scriptures.

And that's why this particular trip to Jerusalem was something special for Jesus. We read that the holy family regularly made the journey from Nazareth in Galilee to attend the annual Passover celebration. Recall that Passover commemorated how the Lord delivered his people from slavery in Egypt by the last and most terrible of the 10 plagues, the death of firstborn, and how his own people were protected from the angel of death by the blood of lambs smeared on their doorposts. The Lord commanded his people to reenact this, the greatest of the Old Testament salvation events, every year by sacrificing a lamb at the temple and retelling the story in the course of a festive ritual meal.

Up until this time, the boy Jesus would have been required to stay with his mother Mary and his younger siblings on the temple's court of Jewish women while Joseph alone, acting as priest for his family, went on to the court of Jewish men, there to offer the sacrificial lamb that would later become their supper. But now, at 12 years old and considered no longer a boy but a young man, Jesus could accompany Joseph onto the court of Jewish men. There he would have seen the first time for himself the lamb being sacrificed before the Lord and its blood poured out on the blazing altar. And not just the one lamb, but thousands of them; blood everywhere ... a scene of carnage ... and Jesus coming to the realization that all this is a picture of me, of the mission that I've been sent on, to be the Firstborn of God who dies so that his people can go free, to be the Lamb of God whose blood rescues them from death, and to be sacrifice whose flesh feeds them in a sacred meal. That had to be a lot for a twelve year old – even one who happens to be God – to take in.

But I also think it explains to a large degree why it was that when the Passover celebration came to its end a few days later, that Jesus was drawn back to the temple. During the holiday all the religious scholars who taught in the temple would have been on break, observing the feast with their families. But now they were back in business. And for the first time Jesus could sit among them with the rest of Jewish men. It's like he's been in Sunday school. Now he can go to seminary. It's too much to resist.

It's often assumed or stated that Jesus was doing the teaching while he was there. Certainly the artist who drew the picture on the bulletin jacket thought so. But that isn't what the text says. Instead it says he was listening to them and asking them questions. He was learning from them. He was being filled with wisdom. And they were astonished at his understanding and the responses he gave. Well they should have marveled, for Jesus had a mind like no other. Every other human mind is clouded and corrupted by sin. Divine wisdom does not come to us naturally. We doubt. We resist. We rebel. We misunderstand. Not Jesus. If the Word of God is the seed, then Jesus is the field of perfectly fertile soil. When he hears, he understands, he believes without doubt, he hopes and trusts perfectly, and he acts as the child of God he is.

While Jesus is like a kid in a candy store with \$1000 to spend, unaware to him Joseph and Mary have packed up the family and traveled with their group of extended family and Nazarene neighbors a day's journey back toward home. They have assumed that Jesus is in their company, likely hanging out with the other boys his age. That night when they set up camp they can't find him. Panic ensues. In the morning they retrace their steps to Jerusalem. That takes another day. Upon arrival, they spend another full day searching for him. Where in a city as large as Jerusalem and with all its cosmopolitan attractions do you even begin to look for a 12 year old boy?

It turns out the last place they think to look is where they should have known he'd be. Jesus tells them as much. "Why were you *looking* for me? Did you not *know* that I *must* be in my Father's house?" The sense of it is if you didn't know where I was, there's only one place on the planet I could have been. Right here. Yes, I'm your son. But don't forget that I am also God growing up. I must be in my Father's house.

And he still is. That's where we find him. But he's no longer learning. Now he is doing the teaching. And as we hear him he fills us with his wisdom. He fills us with his Spirit. He fills us with his mind and his life. And he causes us to act as the children of God that he has made us by his passion, death, and resurrection, his saving work on our behalf. In Jesus God and man grew up to full maturity. May he also cause us to grow up to full maturity in him. In Jesus' name.

Soli Deo Gloria!