

### **December 27, 2015 Giving Back to God Homily:**

Several years ago, a now retired Catholic priest and member of a religious order, told me of a pope's extraordinary gesture on the day of his ordination in Rome. The then reigning Pontiff was Pope Paul VI, who presided at the magnificent ceremony admitting men to the Catholic priesthood. The recently widowed mother of the young man to be ordained traveled to Rome for the special event. At the time, she could ill afford the price of a plane ticket. She was poor. Immediately following the unforgettable event, the pope spotted the newly ordained priest and his young widowed mother standing alone apart from the crowd. He approached the widow, took her by the hand and offered her words of praise. He said, "Thank you for giving us your son". The priest smiled; the mother was deeply humbled. Indeed, surrendering a beloved child to the Lord is richly deserving of a blessing! We recall the gracious words of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in our first reading: "I prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request... Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Lord" (1 Sam1:27)

The setting of today's gospel is a family pilgrimage (Lk. 2:41-52). Pilgrimages often generated a mood of happiness. They were a sort of vacation for the poor. The Holy family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, traveled in a caravan to the Holy City of Jerusalem for the solemn feast of Passover. Once they arrived they all looked forward to seeing great things. On leaving Jerusalem, where they kept Passover, Mary and Joseph discover that their twelve year old child, Jesus, is missing. After three frantic days, they find him in the Temple. When his mother asks, "Why have you done this to us"? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety, Jesus gently reproves her; "I must be in my Father's house". Mary realizes that although Jesus returns with them to Nazareth, he is no longer hers. The sacrifice required of Mary and Hannah is asked of every parent to give the children God gives us back to God.

In view of the Christmas feast we just celebrated, let us ask ourselves a few questions: What gift have I given the Lord? Do I consider myself in the Lord's service? Do I spend enough time in the House of God? And, on this feast of the Holy Family, do I appreciate the members of my family? What does this feast mean for me?

Amen!