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Christmas II
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When you are a student teacher in a classroom, anything might happen. The kids know you are inexperienced and will pull things on you. And while you are observed and coached by a master teacher, you feel all of the in-between struggles of being a teacher and a student at the same time.

We had a class just for student teachers that met during the semester we were “in the field”, teaching at local schools. We needed that time to talk about what works and doesn’t work and what we had learned about the students and ourselves in those situations. One of the elementary school trainees came in with this story.

She was teaching a first grade class and it was nap time in the classroom. Each child had a cubby for their personal things during the day, including a small nap rug that would be spread out on a certain spot on the floor. Then the blinds were partially closed and soothing music was played on the record player. Yes, a record player because this was 1972. The student teacher said everything was going according to plan, everyone was laying on the floor quietly as she scanned the room from her chair in the back. All were laying down but one, who was sitting cross-legged on his little rug with his face screwed up into a look of intensity, with his eyes scrunched shut and tight and his hands clasped in his lap.

What goes through your mind when you see this picture in your own imagination? She wondered, at lightning speed, if he was ill, or upset or some other awful thing. She walked up to him, knelt on one knee and set a hand on his shoulder. Moving close to his ear she whispered, “Are you

okay?” He slowly opened his eyes and looked into her eyes and said, very seriously, “Yes, ma’am, I’m just thinking really hard.” “Fine,” she said, “continue what you were doing.”

When my colleague told the story, we howled. She said it took everything she had to keep from chuckling into his very serious face. He meant what he said and she honored his response. Precocious, perhaps, but he is precious beyond belief. I wonder now what he does for a living, where he lives in the world and if, when he thinks, he still screws up his face and scrunches his eyes closed. I would imagine we may have had a child prodigy of thinking on our hands.

We have a great story today about mixed communications, intensity and the relationship between parents and children with today’s Gospel lesson. The whole lesson is filled with foreshadowing and dozens of little pointers to the narrative that will follow. They go to Jerusalem for Passover and Jesus will return to a most momentous final Passover several years later. They can’t find him for three days...hmmm, wonder where that one is going?

Then we have the normal parental lecture. All right, where have you been? Don’t you know your father and I have been worried sick about you. The least you could have done was stick with the group. You KNEW when we were leaving Jerusalem to go home!” You can feel the very human anxiety at play here. Any of us have lost things and people in our days, and the frantic hunt for a missing child is very real, painful and intense. Jesus, however, is calm and collected and tells his parents and us that he needs to be about his Father’s business. And so he is in God’s house, the Temple, to do that very thing. And the story says his parents just don’t get what he is saying. But he had learned a lesson and went home with his

parents. The story concludes with the neat little phrase that tells us he grew up and got smarter, finding favor with his human parents and with his divine Parent.

This Jesus, in this story, is just the balance of Jesus that I want. I want him to be a little precocious. I want him to try things at an early age and I think it is cool he is sitting among the Torah scholars in the Temple, conducting an intense tutorial, giving and receiving questions and answers. I want a child prodigy in Jesus. This is a good thing for me.

Let's go back to my thinking child. I hope he turned out to be a great thinker. Child prodigies have amazing talents that start developing at an early age. They pick up things faster in certain realms of learning. We listen to child musicians on National Public Radio in a show called "From the Top" and marvel that a ten year old can play classical music that most of us can't even read. There are math prodigies that manage to figure out quadrilateral equations when most of us struggle to spell quadrilateral, let alone figure it out.

So I want Jesus to be a prodigy about religious and faith things. I am pleased if he is enthusiastic. The root of enthusiasm means "possessed by God".

I want him to be steeped in Torah and have a knack about talking to/about God. I want him to be a God-prodigy to the very marrow of his bones. I want him to exhibit the passion, intensity and energy, the obvious delight, absorption and the ability to lose track of time because of his God-connection. Why do I want him to be like this? Because I want to follow him, this Word made flesh.

I can never be as passionate, intense or energetic as he is about being Savior of the world. But I want to be as passionate, intense and

energetic about being a believer and being a priest in the Church. I want everyone to find that niche, that prodigy-like spirit for things in your life and in your faith life, too.

That's why the epistles talk about the many gifts we have. No one has them all. All of us have them all, the ones we need today, next year, in the next decade. Hooray for Jesus in the Temple and for acknowledging the importance of his responsibilities to his parents and to his God.

Let us pray that we are filled with enthusiasm, prodigies for the love of God. Intense about the gathering of this community and faithful in our efforts to do good works.