

STRENNA 2010

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THE GOSPEL TO THE YOUNG

IN THE FAMILY

THE EDUCATION OF JESUS

The family is the great school founded by God for the education of the human race (Gotthold E. Lessing).

One of the elements which helps us best to understand ourselves as human beings and which modern thinking has underlined especially in the twentieth century is the *historical* nature of human life. Not only *are we living in* history, but we are also **progressively constructing ourselves** through it in a process which ends only with death. This would seem to be so obvious that we often take it for granted. One consequence, among others, is the way we take life as formation and, therefore, as an *ongoing* process; we can never say we are satisfied (“fully made”), nor remain immobile like stones. Taking seriously the fact that the Son of God wanted to share our life means, then, believing that he too lived this period of **historical existence** throughout the course of his whole human life.

▣ **Basically, this is what** the Word of God tells us when it states: “*the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him*” (Luke 2:40). When we forget this we run the risk of considering his real life on earth as only apparently so. We struggle to believe that God loved us so much as to want to become **one of us**. One of the reasons why the Church from the first centuries refused to accept the so-called “apocryphal gospels” as inspired by God is that basically they do not support the truth of the incarnation.

This allows us to speak about the “education of the Son of God” in a way similar to that of any other human beings who need suitable surroundings in order to fulfill all their potential. For Jesus such surroundings were provided above all by Mary and Joseph her husband. Paul VI very well says that “***the extraordinary human equilibrium of Jesus is a sign of the presence of his parents.***”

▣ **St. Joseph**, we know, is not the “father” of Jesus in the physical sense; but his collaboration in God’s plan and in the human development of Jesus is much more relevant than biological fatherhood in the household of Nazareth.

Basing ourselves on the same theological criterion that allows us to speak about the Virgin as the “Mother of God,” we can also speak about her and St. Joseph as “**educators of God**,” a title which ought to be very dear to us as members of the Salesian Family. In fact, we too are called

in our educational and pastoral work to foster gradually in the boys and girls their conformity to Christ, *“in order that he may be the first-born among many brothers and sisters”* (Rom 8:29).

We often hear it said of a baby boy or girl, *“She has her mother’s eyes”* or *“He has his father’s face,”* awakening in the parents in this way a legitimate sense of pride. Would we dare to say the same about Jesus? I think so. Joseph, at a decisive moment in his life, faced with a situation he could not understand, *“being a just man,”* decided to act, not according to the Law but on the basis of a higher law, that of **love**, and chose to separate himself quietly from Mary, whom he loved, instead of embarrassing her publicly (cf. Matt 1:19). This was something Jesus learned perfectly, putting it into practice throughout his life. *“If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt 5:20 JB).

▣ **In Mary we discover** the model of dedication and of a generous service forgetful of self: when she went to her cousin Elizabeth to be of assistance to her during her pregnancy and giving birth, without bothering about her own condition; or when she was attentive to other peoples’ needs at Cana, even though it was not in any way her responsibility. She is the Mother of him of whom years later it will be said: *“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matt 20:28).

But, above all, when Mary and Joseph in different ways are invited to collaborate in the plan of salvation, we see that both of them, with their words and even more with their attitudes, respond unconditionally to the Lord: **their faith is translated into total obedience.** *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”* (Luke 1:38). *“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him”* (Matt 1:24; cf. 2:14). The Son learned this lesson perfectly, so that it became the central attitude of his life: *“obedient unto death, even death on a cross”* (Phil 2:8). ▣