

People of God, during this Christmas season you may have watched the movie Home Alone. In this movie the McCalister family is going on Christmas vacation. In the hustle and bustle of getting ready to leave the children fill the caravan and, in an oversight, the parents did not realize that they had left their son Kevin home alone. It is not until they are on the plane that the mother realizes this, and she quickly puts an end to the vacation as she does everything in her power to get back to her son. And the family eventually all meets back up together on the third day. The rest of the movie is filled with hilarity as Kevin puts a stop to the Wet Bandits who are trying to break into his house.

If you think about it, Home Alone could be seen as a modern retelling of the story of the boy Jesus being lost to his parents. But the story of Jesus being lost is really just a story demonstrating what the Gospel of Luke says before and after the story about Jesus - that he is growing in wisdom and strength, and in favor with God and man. These stories, the story of Jesus and of Kevin McAllister, are about a boy who is growing into maturity.

For example, in Home Alone Kevin teaches himself how to shave, and he orders pizza, and then he goes grocery shopping. He purchases a toothbrush on another occasion and wants to know if it is approved by the American Dental Association. He even goes to church and talks to Old Man Marley and gives some helpful advice. And then he protects his father's house from the Wet Bandits, and he even cleans up the mess afterward. Home Alone is a coming of age story about a boy who learns to grow up. It is a modern re-telling of our passage today in Luke 2.

Just like in Home Alone, when it was time for the caravan to leave, Mary and Joseph just assumed Jesus was with them in the group. But after a day of travelling back toward Nazareth, Mary and Joseph realize that Jesus is not with the family at all, and he is lost.

And so they travel another day back to Jerusalem in search of Jesus. And then it apparently took them a whole other day to find him, because Luke says they found him after three days. Interestingly 3 days is also how long Kevin McCalister was also left Home Alone.

Now the three days that Jesus is missing during Passover is a foreshadowing of the three days Jesus will be lost to the world after he dies on the cross, during another Passover celebration in Jerusalem, 21 years later.

After three days Mary and Joseph found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers of the law, listening to them and answering their questions, such that they were all amazed at his understanding and answers. And his parents were likewise astonished. Jesus wasn't in trouble, he wasn't in danger, he wasn't hurt or hungry and cold, he wasn't taken by a pack of bandits. Jesus was being faithful in his Father's house at 12 years old.

But Mary didn't see it like that at first. She said to him, "*Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching in great distress.*"

Indicating they were looking everywhere for him, throughout all of Jerusalem. But notice again the subtle foreshadowing to Simeon's words to Mary when he told her that because of this child a sword would be pierced through her own soul also. Here she expresses the grief and anguish of losing her Son for three days. But this event looks beyond itself to when Jesus would die on the cross and be lost to her for another three days.

Well, Mary is rightly upset, and she is looking for an apology. But Jesus reminds her of who He is, and what His mission is.

Mary says, "*Your father and I have been searching for you,*" But Jesus responds saying, "*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in MY Father's house?*" "I must be about the things of My Father?" Which of

course brings back to her remembrance what the angel told her, that Jesus is the Son of God, He is the Savior, He is Christ the Lord.

Now Jesus saying this is no slight against Joseph. But it was a reaffirmation of who exactly Mary's son was, and what he had been destined to do. He was not Joseph's son biologically. He was the Son of God, and in no way was he disobedient to His parents if he was obedient to His Heavenly Father, and was found being faithful in his house attending to his Father's things.

I think that we can even see how this event foreshadows Jesus' words in Luke 13:33, where he said, *"Nevertheless, I must go on my way today, and tomorrow, and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."*

And now Jesus has a self-consciousness of his mission and person as the Messiah and he is getting ready for that. Here is he is at 12 years old, practicing what He will do 21 years from now. He will come to Jerusalem during Passover, He will go missing from the world for three days, a sword will pierce his mother's soul because of his loss, but He will be resurrected and found alive after three days. And when he does he is now the Fully Mature and Glorified Man that we all are being built up into.

But nobody understood all this. The other Mary's did not understand the meaning of the empty tomb when Jesus was once again not found where they thought he was supposed to be. But the words of the angel made things clear as they remembered the words Jesus spoke to them about how he was to be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead.

Neither did the two other disciples understand when Jesus talked to them on the road to Emmaus, saying, *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the*

prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

This was the fulfillment Jesus’ words when he said He must be about the things of His Father. He must do all that is necessary, as the Messiah, as the Christ, to bring salvation to God’s people. He must go to Jerusalem, die, be lost to the world for three days, and rise from the dead and be glorified in order to accomplish the will of His Father for all of His people.

What are we to learn from this, people of God? And how shall we then live? Again, let us look at the verses that come right before our story and at the very end of our story, for they help us to understand what this story is all about.

Vs. 40 says, *“And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”*

And then v. 52 – *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”*

Jesus had to grow and increase in wisdom and strength and stature, and in his favor with God and man. From his birth and dedication to the Lord at the temple, till his initial understanding of his mission as the Christ at 12 years old; and then he had to grow and mature even more, in wisdom and strength and stature, and increasing his favor with God and man, to the point of fulfilling that divine mission as the Christ at 33 years old, when he would lay down his life and die and rise again and be glorified, becoming the True Image of God in Man.

Now what we can learn from this, is how we, as members of His Body, can likewise grow into full maturity in Christ our head. Because the whole point of the Christian Life, People of God, is to grow in maturity in Christ. As St. Paul says in Ephesians 4, that Christ when he ascended on

High He gave gifts to the Church in order to *“equip the saints in the work of ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ.”*

And what we see in Luke’s statement is that Jesus matured in 4 specific areas of his life – the Mental, the Physical, the Spiritual, and the Social – and by being self-conscious about growing in these specific areas, I believe we too can make progress in our growth and maturity into the fullness of Christ.

MENTAL

The first place to grow is in wisdom. What is wisdom? Wisdom is essentially skillfulness in living. Now I don’t think we can hear the word wisdom without thinking of King Solomon. It is therefore appropriate that our OT lectionary reading today be tied to Solomon’s prayer for wisdom and understanding. In that prayer he described himself as “a little child” who needed *“an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil.”*

Solomon, knowing his immaturity, requested a knowledge of good and evil. The Knowledge of good and evil is therefore necessary to help man mature to point where he can rule under God as King. This gives us a better understanding of the role of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, and why Adam and Eve were temporarily forbidden to eat of it.

The tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil can be understood as the tree of maturity. And God wanted us to grow in maturity by learning to obey the word of God.

You see God wanted man to grow into the fullness of God's image through obedience to the Word of God. By learning to obey we learn that blessings come from obedience, and curses come from disobedience. But God wanted man to learn about good and evil from the position of the experiencing the blessings of obedience. And he wanted us to learn about the evils of disobedience, not by experiencing them first hand, but through experiencing the blessings of God in obedience.

Likewise, we want our children to learn the importance and blessings of looking both ways before crossing the street. But we do not want them to learn that lesson by crossing the street without looking both ways and getting hit by a car.

We want our children to learn that touching a hot stove will burn them. But we want them to learn that, not by them touching a hot stove, but by them believing our words.

These principles are the same thing that God wanted for Adam and Eve. He wanted them to mature and grow in the knowledge of good and evil from the position of believing his word and obeying, and thus experiencing peace and blessings. Not from the position of disobedience and curses and death.

Proverbs tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. And what then is the beginning of foolishness? What is the beginning of immaturity? Not fearing the Lord. Not obeying the Lord.

We need to understand this - Sin keeps us in a state of perpetual immaturity and foolishness. But meditating upon the word of God and seeking to apply it to our own lives, and trying to be obedient and faithful to God brings us into greater maturity and wisdom.

PHYSICAL

So Wisdom is believing the word of God and knowing how to apply it in one's life. But once we know what to do, we must then do it, through an act of the will. It takes mental and spiritual and physical strength and exertion to choose to obey God. And Jesus had to learn how to do this. And as Christ's Body, we need to learn how to do this too.

This brings us to our second point, that Jesus increased in strength. I think this refers to more than just growing in physical strength and stature. I believe it is talking about Jesus growing in his ability to withstand greater and greater temptations and to bring his whole body into full conformity to the will of God.

Consider what Hebrews 5:8 says – *“Although he was a son, (referring to Jesus) he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, (that is, being made mature) he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”*

Do you see? Christ becomes the source of eternal salvation for those who learn to suffer and obey him. Salvation is being set free from the bondage of the law of sin, by the Law of the Spirit, so you now can love God with all your strength and use our sanctified wills to obey God and resist the temptations of sin.

Now, as you all know, this is a struggle. Resisting sin within you is a struggle. But the more you train yourself for godliness by choosing the hard task of obeying, the more you will increase in the strength of the Lord.

For Jesus, suffering in his flesh and resisting temptation and choosing to desire and obey the commands of God, learned the blessings of obedience and grew to full maturity. This is the process of maturation and growth that he underwent for us, and thus being made perfect, or mature,

through this suffering, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Each of us therefore must learn how to suffer in the flesh with Jesus, by putting to death the deeds of the flesh, and by submitting to the Spirit and the word of God, instead of giving in to the temptations of sin. And in this way we grow into greater maturity and wisdom in Christ, and we experience salvation.

Salvation, people of God, is not just going to heaven when you die. Salvation is learning to suffer in obedience in our flesh for the sake of Christ. For this is why we have been given the Spirit, to let us know that we are heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified in Him.

SPIRITUAL

The third aspect of our maturity in Christ involves growing in favor with God. Now like when the Angel greeted Mary and said she was favored, what we are talking about is the grace of God.

I submit that one way we can grow in the grace of God is by embracing certain spiritual disciplines, that keep the word of God and prayer before our heart and mind. I like using the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, and the Lectio Divina. I have spoke in the past about these spiritual practices. So allow me again to do so again very briefly.

Some of us need help praying. I know I do. And there are a number of helpful resources which we can use to do so. If you are already a prayer warrior and are going strong, then I don't want to pull you away from what you are doing. If it aint broke don't try to fix it.

But if it is broke, then here is a tool you can use to help fix it. The service for Morning and Evening prayer in the Book of Common Prayer is very helpful for organizing your prayer life. It begins with confession of sin, and absolution. It moves through selected readings for the day from the Psalms and an OT lesson and a NT lesson. And from there it goes into specific prayer requests.

If you find it difficult to organize your prayer life, this is a wonderful tool. It is meant to help you to pray. I find that sometimes I go through the service and think that because I have went through it that I have done what God requires of me. But we all know that you can say your prayers and not really pray. Just saying the words can be a good practice though. But you can do it in a way that will do nothing for you.

And so the Daily Office is a tool to help engage your heart and mind and body and lift you up toward God. It will not do the work for you. Just because you have a hammer and nails does not mean the tools will build a house for you automatically. You must use them. Thus the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer is a good tool, that you must use with attention and sincerity, and heart felt devotion toward God. But if you use them incorrectly, not giving your whole soul to God, then it is just another worthless tool that sits on your work bench collecting dust.

Along with the Daily Office, I recommend the Lectio Divina. The Divine Reading. This is a way to read your Bible so that you are actually hearing God talk to you in your life and situation. Here is the method I use, I call it the SWORD Method.

At first I read a passage of Scripture. It is usually laid out for me in the reading of my Daily Office. I pick a passage, it can be a psalm, or a NT or the OT lesson. It can be a verse, or a word or a phrase. As long as it jumps out to you and gets your attention. That is the most important thing.

Find that passage or phrase or word, and write it down. And read over and over again and pray over it while you are reading it, asking to God to show you something. So this is the S and W part. Scripture, and Wait. Wait for God to bring to your mind something. And once God has brought to you something, write it down.

Then Observe. Observe how this thing that God just showed you applies to your life. And while you are Observing, you are of course praying too. You are asking God to apply the word of God to you.

Then R – Request of God that he help you do the thing that he just showed you. Make your request known to God, and write it down.

And then finally, D, dedicate yourself to doing something that will help you to apply those things to yourself. And write all this down, so you can come back to it again and again and see how the grace of God in your life is growing. I find this to be a helpful tool to help me grow in the grace in the God and keep my heart and mind focused on the Lord.

SOCIAL

And then my last point – Jesus grew in favor with Man – I recommend finding yourself a band of brothers or sisters. Find yourself some friends that you can grow in your spiritual walk in Christ with. I think that we all tend to have our own friends or groups of people that we associate with more than others in the Church. That is not bad. That is fine. It is natural. Find the people or person that you can talk to about your spiritual life. Come together and discuss your Bible readings together. And your Lectio Divina. Talk about what God is revealing to you. And then Pray with and for one another. Confess your sins to one another. Encourage one another. Build each other up in the Lord. And in this way, you will grow in the grace of God with your fellow man. And people will see your growth, and praise God.

So, in closing, Our salvation in Christ is the process of maturity and growth. Jesus grew in 4 areas – He grew in wisdom and strength and in his favor with God and Man - Mental, Physical, Spiritual, and Social. By learning what the word of God teaches you is your duty and responsibility, that is your Wisdom.

By exerting the physical effort of the will, and by suffering in the flesh in order to obey the will of God, that is how you develop spiritual strength.

By giving yourself over to a spiritual discipline like Morning and Evening Prayer and Lectio Divina, you can grow in the grace of God.

And by joining a band of brothers, or sisters, to talk about you're your walk with God and your growth in Christ, that will help you to grow in favor with men.

May God help us to *grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Amen.*