

GUIDED MEDITATION OF
THE HOLY FAMILY'S RETURN TO NAZARETH
– LUKE 2:46-52 –

Begin in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer and then read through the passage slowly (on page 3 of this booklet).

What are you bringing with you on this journey? Hopes? Gratitude? Fear? A specific need? Be where you are. The Savior is inviting you to follow in freedom. When you are ready, begin your journey forward.

Feel your feet moving you forward. Are your steps heavy today? Are you carrying any pain? Is there a lightness to your step today? Are you feeling rushed? Offer your physical and emotional reality to your Savior. Look up: there he is coming into clearer view.

You are still a little way off, but before you get closer, pause. From a distance this view of the Holy Family has something to say to you. Notice how the young Jesus is flanked by his parents, your spiritual parents, Mary and Joseph. Jesus did not come into this world alone. He did not carry out his saving ministry alone. He needed their support and care throughout his life and in this moment, too. Notice how, from this angle, it looks as if Joseph's hand is resting on his young son's shoulder. Feel that same reassuring touch from your Heavenly Father now. He is with you always. See how Jesus's small fingers are reaching towards his Mother. Mary has never hesitated to reach back. Her nurturing and warm embrace is always ready to receive her Son, and you.

Jesus was not alone in this world and you are not alone either. Think of those God has placed in your life to love and support you. Think of your spiritual family, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Mother and her most chaste spouse Saint Joseph, the angels and all the saints, people you have loved that have gone before you. You are not alone in this journey.

When you are ready, walk on. Jesus is waiting hand-outstretched towards you. He has an invitation for you today. Hear him call you by name as he says, "come, follow me." In what way is Jesus asking you to follow him today? Is he trying to take you down a new path in your life? Is he asking you to continue a little further down a path that has been difficult for you? Is he asking you to stop and rest awhile? Whatever the path remember that it is part of a larger path that is leading to your heavenly Home. Just as the Holy Family journeys on this desert path back to their simple and quiet home in Nazareth they stay ever aware that it is part of a larger journey to their true home in heaven.

The journey is not without worry or uncertainty. Look to Mary now, walk towards her. Notice her expression as she looks upon her son, found after three anxious days. Her motherly heart will never forget those three days without Him, and this distance between them now, as he has fallen behind on the path to wait for us, is difficult to bear. She doesn't know what his strange words meant in the temple and she continues to contemplate them even now. What is to come in her child's ministry? What other trials and sufferings will her family have to endure? As she contemplates all this, she holds the pain in perfect tension with her trust in God. Notice in her face that this quiet contemplation is also filled with peace and trust. Even in her pain she takes the posture of adoration as she beholds her son doing what he has been sent to do. She renews her *fiat*.

With your eyes, follow Mary's gesture as she reaches for Joseph. He reaches back. They need each other's strength and partnership in this moment, and are not afraid to reach out in vulnerability towards one another. Linger here for a moment. Where might you find some relief by opening up in vulnerability to those who can support you on your journey? Do you feel God's hand reaching towards you in this moment? Will you reach back?

From Joseph's outstretched hand, travel your gaze upward to rest on his face now. He carries similar questions and burdens as Mary's from the previous three days. As he processes what he has been through he must also press forward and stay present to this moment in order to get his family home safely. Joseph knows His strength is the Lord and he lifts his gaze to heaven, uttering a prayer, unafraid to dialogue with the One who knows his heart and never fails to provide what he needs. Lift your own prayer up to God now. Where do you most need God to fill you with strength? What responsibilities are weighing heavily on you now, tempting you to stop pressing forward on your own journey? Ask Joseph for his intercession now and look to his example of humility and perseverance.

When you are ready, turn and walk towards the river. Once you are under the shelter of the prayer awning, turn back and take in the Holy Family from this viewpoint. Look at their unity. Though they are all at separate points on the path, each having their unique and individual experience on this journey, they are one. Like them, we are each on our own unique journey, but are one with Christ and His Body, the Church. Each one of us brings our own gifts, perspectives, wounds, experiences, weaknesses, sins, hopes, and personalities, and yet none of those things disqualifies us from following Christ's call into communion.

Next, rest your eyes on their hands: from this perspective, they seem to be coming together to touch, to unite. Three different persons, three different hands, three different parts of the same whole. Think of all the parts of you that make you, you. The parts you show people and the parts you don't. The parts you are proud of and the parts filled with shame. The parts of your past and the parts of your present. The parts that doubt and the parts that trust. Ask God to begin an integration of all these parts within you today; to reunite you to yourself, to heal your brokenness, to deepen your integrity. He has willed from the moment he first thought of you, that you would be whole, so that you may be integrated into the Body of Christ, whole and perfect as he is perfect. Maybe you have already allowed him entrance in this way, but today renew your desire for integration within yourself. Let that desire build up until it overflows. Your desire might become a prayer for unity in the Church, and for the whole world to be united as one in Christ.

Entrust yourself – your journey, your desires, your prayers - to the Holy Family. Turn back to the river to take in the view of God's creation all around you.

Breathe deeply, and as you exhale, let go in total faith and trust in God. This can be a moment of holy surrender and abandonment to God's will in your life. Renew your trust in Him. Trust him to lead you from here as you linger on the memories of your journey up to this point and how far he has already brought you.

Before you go, receive deeply the beauty that surrounds you, receive the gift of this moment. Let your heart cry out in praise and thanksgiving for all that God has given to you in this time of prayer. Thank him and give him your love. It is enough.

