

Homily for July 26th
 Tuesday of the 17th Week of Ordinary Time
 (Saints Anne and Joachim)

Today is the Memorial of Saints Anne and Joachim, the parents of our Blessed Lady. By tradition Joachim and Anne are considered to be the names of the parents of Mary, the Mother of God. We have no historical evidence, however, of any elements of their lives, including their names. Any stories about Mary's father and mother come to us through legend and tradition. We get the oldest story from a document called the Gospel of James, though in no way should this document be trusted to be factual, historical, or the Word of God. The legend told in this document says that after years of childlessness, an angel appeared to tell Anne and Joachim that they would have a child. Anne promised to dedicate this child to God (much the way that Samuel was dedicated by his mother Hannah in I Kings).

For those who wonder what we can learn from people we know nothing about and how we can honor them, we must focus on why they are honored by the church. Whatever their names or the facts of their lives, the truth is that it was the parents of Mary who nurtured Mary, taught her, brought her up to be a worthy Mother of God. It was their teaching that led her to respond to God's request with faith, "Let it be done to me as you will." It was their example of parenting that Mary must have followed as she brought up her own son, Jesus. It was their faith that laid the foundation of courage and strength that allowed her to stand by the cross as her son was crucified and still believe. Such parents can be examples and models for all parents.¹

That the Church chose a passage from the book of Sirach to be read at this Mass commemorating our Blessed Mother's parents is important for two reasons.

Firstly it is important because they are godly examples in the Faith.

Secondly we can emulate their examples

Our reading is a compilation of verses from Sirach 44. Let me read one of the verses not included in this reading from chapter 44:

*Some of them have left behind a name,
 so that others declare their praise.*

(This verse is part of our reading. The next verse is not)

⁹ *But of others there is no memory;
 they have perished as though they had never existed;
 they have become as though they had never been born,*

¹ See Father Rosica's article at <http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/saints-and-blesseds/feast-of-sts-joachim-and-anne-parents-of-mary>

*they and their children after them.*²

When we think of our Lady Mary she falls into the former category. We know not only her name but we have historical data that is scriptural and tied to the Great Tradition of Catholic teaching. With Anne and Jeochim they fall into the latter category - from a biblical perspective they have perished as though they never existed and the evidence from the Great Catholic Tradition is scanty at best. And yet the Church has deemed it important to honour their memory. Why is this? That while from an earthly perspective they may have been forgotten, this is not so from the perspective of heaven.

*But these also were godly men, (that is the one's of whom we have not memory)
whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;
11 their wealth will remain with their descendants,
and their inheritance with their children's children.*³

What was the basis of their wealth?

*Their descendants stand by the covenants;
their children also, for their sake.
13 Their offspring will continue forever,
and their glory will never be blotted out.*

These were people who are remembered in heaven because while they lived on earth they continually remembered the covenants of God's grace-filled relationship with his people and they passed on the story of these covenants to their children. Covenants of promise, covenants of relationships, covenants that find their fulfillment in Jesus.

Saints Anne and Joachim represent for us all those who, while they lived in this world, stood by the covenants but whose death resulted in their lives eventually being forgotten by the generations that followed.

This will be so for most of us. Two hundred years from now, five hundred years from now it will be as if we had never existed. The world will have forgotten us. But when we understand that our lives are intricately tied to the Covenantal promises and workings of God we can be inspired to emulate the examples of Anne and Joachim. Then we can remember that your life and mine our part of that great company of Saints referred to at the end of today's reading:

*14 Their bodies are buried in peace,
but their name lives on generation after generation.*

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Sir 44:8–9). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Sir 44:10–11). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

¹⁵ *The assembly declares their wisdom,
and the congregation proclaims their praise.*⁴

⁴ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Sir 44:12–15). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.