



**Fr. J. Patrick Foley**

**Itinerant Papist Preacher**

**Retreat Ministry • Parish Missions**

"Come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile!..." Mark 6:31  
Are you ready to accept the invitation?

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## **Jesus' Life: The "Hidden Years"**

Jesus certainly grows up in a hurry! We celebrate feasts around his birth, then his baptism as an adult, and he's off and running! But what do we really know about what are sometimes called the "Hidden Years" in the life of Jesus (between approximately ages 12-30)?

From the Gospels, nothing. Not a word. But scripture scholars tell us that the very silence of the Gospels about these years tells us a great deal. And the main thing we can surmise is that his life during these years was very ordinary. Why can we surmise that? Because if anything extraordinary had happened, it would have been remembered and, years later, included in the Gospels. Of course over the centuries, some people (uncomfortable with the thought of Jesus living an ordinary human life) have made up all kinds of stories about what they are sure must have happened during these years – all of which come from their vivid imagination, and none of which comes from scripture. We can comfortably believe that during these years, Jesus was living the ordinary life of a boy growing into adulthood in that little village of Nazareth, a hamlet of perhaps one hundred people in the hill country of northern Galilee (and most of those would have been related to Jesus).

With that as a starting point, what can we say? He grew in age and strength, knowledge and awareness. He grew physically, emotionally, intellectually, and in every other way we humans grow. He experienced all the blessings, and burdens, of family life. He experienced puberty, and discovered his sexual identity. He was schooled in what it meant to be a Jew. He became skilled as a carpenter, learning from Joseph (how every boy would have grown up, learning a trade from his father). At some point, Joseph died, Jesus became the "man of the house," Mary became a widow, and she had to rely upon Jesus' skills as a carpenter for the income necessary to live (although, in their close-knit extended family life in Nazareth, other family members would have helped). In short, he gradually discovered what it meant to be a human, a Jew, a man, and an adult.

But at some point, around the age of thirty, all of that wasn't enough. Something was stirring in him, he felt that his life up to that point was not answering all the questions about who he was, and who he was called to become, and so he left the security of home and started searching. Perhaps he heard about this strange preacher from out of the desert, perhaps he just followed the crowd – but somehow he found his way to the Jordan River, probably not far from Jerusalem, and there listened to the preaching of the man we know as John the Baptist. Jesus had taken the first major step to discovering the fullness of his identity, who he really is. And so, in response to John's call to the crowds, Jesus came forward and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And in

that moment, he discovered his deepest identity: as the voice from heaven said, “You are my son, the beloved; my favor rests on you.”

Of course, God said the same thing about every one of us when we were baptized, whether or not anyone heard it: “You are my beloved one; my favor rests on you.” But then Jesus had to set out to learn what it meant to be God’s beloved one, just as all of us must do. Making that journey of discovery would take him through ups and downs, good days and bad, joy and sadness, popularity and rejection, temptation not to believe that he is God’s son, and ultimately betrayal, humiliation, suffering, dying. But through all of that, the Father was with him, and finally raised him up from the dead and brought him home. And our journeys, each of us, may well take us through all of that, as each of us discovers what it means to be God’s beloved one. And at each moment, the Spirit of Jesus is with you, and me, perhaps especially when we go through the repeated experiences of dying and rising that can mark our lives (the “Paschal Mystery,” as it is called). And in the end, we too will be raised up for all eternity. As Jesus tells us all, “Follow me – I’ll show you how to do it, and I’ll be right there with you, all the way through. So do not be afraid – of anything!”

What do you think of that?!

*Patrick Foley*