



Pastoral Letter to be read on Feast of the Holy Family, 28/29th December

A story of the Early Church describes a scene in Nazareth. St Joseph is teaching his young foster son, Jesus, some basic carpentry. This included the use of hammer and nails. In a childish mishap, Jesus cuts his hand and runs bleeding to his father who cries out, "Oh my Son you have been pierced with a nail." Mary and Joseph tenderly bind Jesus' wound.

Growing up in a family prepared Jesus in a very human way for the giving of Himself on the Cross. This is one of the reasons why the Pope has inaugurated a Jubilee Year titled "Pilgrims of Hope", which began on Christmas Eve when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St Peter's in Rome. In our new Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia, the Jubilee Year is launched by the Mass I celebrate in St David's Cathedral, in Cardiff, and the Mass also taking place in the Co-Cathedral of St Joseph in Swansea. All Catholic bishops across the world do the same in their Dioceses.

The Holy Father reminds us, "Hope is born of love and based on love springing from the heart of Jesus upon the cross" (*Spes non confundit* 3). Today's feast reminds us that Jesus preparation for offering himself on the Cross first began in the home at Nazareth. There the Son of God, knew the joy and sorrow of growing up in a human family. So often we idealise the Holy Family. We can assume that the experiences of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in their family, have little to say to our modern experience of family life. Yet we need only recall the events of the Lord's early years and we realise that it was far from a fairy-tale existence. It began with a controversial pregnancy which caused a degree of local scandal, and was followed by a birth in a borrowed stable. As an infant Jesus was hunted for his life, so that he and his parents were forced to migrate to Egypt and to stay there, probably for several years. We also know that whilst he was a boy his parents did not always understand the full meaning of his call.

These are the details we know from the Gospels. Tradition also teaches us that Joseph died before Jesus' public ministry, so Mary and Jesus knew a deep family bereavement, too. We know from other scenes in the Gospels that Jesus showed great sensitivity to widows, and that he wept over the death of His friend, Lazarus. We can imagine that he first encountered those realities in the home of Nazareth, as he comforted Mary, newly widowed, and himself knew the heartache of losing his human father. Knowing this of Jesus, gives us hope.

This time of year, we rightly give more time to be with family. This is a great gift. We learn again the tenderness of being able to be with those whom we love. But as well as being full of joy and great consolation, it can also be a time when we experience some of the tensions of family life. We see some of its vulnerabilities and frailties.

It is easy to think that God does not understand this, or is far from our human reality. The Feast of the Holy Family tells us something quite different. We believe in a God who is with us. In Jesus, our God walks with us, He came among us and knows our joys and sorrows from the inside. Jesus was the first pilgrim of hope, sent by the Father, to bring us all back to be with God the Father forever. There is no genuinely human experience which God does not know, or cannot transform, and this gives us hope always, no matter what we or our families experience.

There are various resources for the Jubilee Year available on the website. I hope that together with some of your family, you will make a pilgrimage to one of the Jubilee Churches or sites, and pray there for your own family and for our Diocesan family, too.

It is in the family that we first learn to love, to forgive, to say sorry, to begin to give of ourselves in service of others. In a family we learn to know the rhythm of hurt, of sorrow, of regret, and of healing. In the family we first learn *to be* pilgrims of hope.

Our reflection on family life must not, of course, forget those who are lonely this Christmas, or those who feel isolated or alienated either because of bereavement, or other circumstances. This is important in this Year of Jubilee for hope is offered to everyone. Good marriages and strong families are never closed in on themselves, but are always open to those who are most in need. This is why we all find a home within the family of the Church, whatever our situation. The gift of hope in this Jubilee Year is for all. We walk the road of life, and of faith together, and no-one need feel abandoned or left out.

I ask God's blessing on you and all those whom you love, especially your family members this Feast day. As we embark on this Jubilee together may we be more faithful pilgrims of hope - for one another, and for our world, so desperately in need of hope. Pray for me.

Yours devotedly,



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