



Pastoral Letter: On the Feast of the Holy Family

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's Gospel scene, we hear how the Holy Family journey to Jerusalem, the hearts of Mary and Joseph filled with the joy which comes from fulfilment of the Lord's will. The poverty of their sacrifice, 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons' is matched by the wealth of their faith and trust in the Lord. God speaks to us through families which are open to His love, and through our community of faith and hope. There in the Jerusalem Temple, we find two further figures who exemplify this revelation, Simeon and Anna. To the eyes of the world, there is a poverty about them too. They may be elderly and with a life already lived. At the same time, they have the energy and enthusiasm of the young at heart. There is real wisdom in their witness to the infant Christ. We are told that the Holy Spirit rests upon Simeon. He recognises the presence and action of God in a prophetic way. Anna is a contemplative woman. She allows her heart to be filled with praise when she sees what is happening before her eyes.

The past year has been challenging for all of us, and continues to be so still. There have been many weeks of lockdown and we were unable to gather together as a community of faith to celebrate Mass and the sacraments. This has caused considerable distress for many of us. During this time, we have also discovered the reality of what the early Church Fathers called the domestic church, the reality of Christ present in the midst of our families as we gathered together to pray and to intercede for our needs. Many families have witnessed to a new discovering of family life, family meals, time spent together during these days of lockdown. I want to thank you for your faithful prayer during this time of pandemic, and my hope that these newly discovered graces and blessings will continue when the virus is behind us. There are also wonderful stories of families reaching out with social action to the elderly, lonely and vulnerable in their neighbourhoods. Let us joyfully take hold of the treasures we have discovered together, gifts from the Lord.

There is a particular way in which we might receive the gift of family prayer together. This is to share the Word of God in the scriptures. It could be the Sunday Gospel reading, or maybe reading through a Gospel, a little each day. Reading the scriptures together and sharing our reflections is a

wonderful way to welcome Christ into our homes. I feel sure the Holy Spirit will bless us richly if we were able to do this in our family homes, especially as we continue with *The God Who Speaks* initiative, and celebrate God's revelation in the scriptures.

We have a wonderful example of grace-filled family life in the witness of the Holy Family. Blessed Pius IX named St Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church 150 years ago. Pope Francis announced recently that this anniversary prompted him to dedicate the coming year to St Joseph. Like so many care workers in our society today, St Joseph is largely unnoticed, quietly going about his business of looking after those entrusted to his care. We too have a responsibility to care for our faith in Jesus. There is much for us to reflect upon when we call to mind this great saint. As we prepare to face the challenges of the coming year, may this time dedicated to St Joseph encourage us to grow in trust in God's action in our world. The Patron of the Universal Church received reassurance and news of his own mission whilst he was asleep. This fills my own heart with joy. The Lord continues to work even when we are asleep!

May the Lord bless our families in these days, and may our Infant Saviour teach us how to trust in God in all things.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ *David*

Bishop of Northampton

Given at Northampton on the Feast of St John of the Cross, and appointed to be read in all churches and chapels of the Diocese on the Feast of the Holy Family, 27th January 2020.