

Holy Family (C)

- On this first Sunday after Christmas, the Church invites us to reflect on family - Some of you, like myself, do not have your own children.
- Some have entered into a relationship with the hope of having a family, but have found yourselves unable to do so, or the relationship did not continue and you have been left disappointed.
- Others have had children but suffer the hurt of having that family broken for reasons over which you have little or no control.
- Family can be the place where we experience our deepest joys and also our most profound and lasting hurts.
- But whatever our situation we all have connections that bind us to the human race through our mother or father, our brothers or sisters, our aunts, uncles or cousins.
- Family is something that affects us all and we are invited to reflect on our experience, with its joys and its pains, on this feast.
- There are many threats from within & without family.
- Families often fall apart because of tensions between members; families are put under stress from without by social pressures & changing norms in society that call into question the nature of family.
- But it is the basic building block of society, the quality of which is determined by the quality of family life.
- It is within this unit that we develop our identity, dignity, where we acquire the skills of loving & forgiving, where we learn how to live with one another, where we mature and develop our vocation in life.
- In the First Reading, Hannah consecrates her child Samuel to God.
- Most of us are reminded of what our parents did for us when they consecrated us as children through the sacrament of baptism.
- They wanted us to belong to a large family of faith in which we would have a sense of belonging, listen to God's word, be fed by the eucharist & find forgiveness & from this family gain the strength & vision to live out the values of the gospel & be instruments of God's love for people.
- Those of you who have children are reminded of the sacred obligation which you undertook in having them baptised.
- We might reflect also on the parish as a family, for we all have a special contribution to make in making this a welcoming place where people can find a home. For some it is their most significant family.
- I would like to reflect on two significant developments that affect our experience of family.
- The first is the very different role played by women in public life than was the case even fifty years ago.
- The social fabric of our society has been greatly enriched by women whose special nurturing qualities, which earlier were exercised largely in

the home and local community, are now enriching almost every sphere of public life.

- We have much to do in re-organising social structures to welcome women better into public life, while supporting their irreplaceable role in the family.
- Men & women must work together for our mutual enrichment & healing.
- Some of us would dearly like to see the Church embrace this movement more wholeheartedly, in the knowledge that organisational leadership is best when men and women share their gifts & work together.
- This brings me to my second reflection.
- Because of a mistaken notion of the biology of human generation, and because public discourse has, in the past, been largely a male creation, God is generally spoken of in male terms.
- Both men and women have suffered from this distortion, and our language needs to change if our spirituality is to be healthy.
- If, in the English language we can't find a pronoun for God that doesn't limit God to being male, then we certainly need to have a more expansive understanding of God that does not limit God's nature.
- Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth century English mystic constantly speaks of God as mother and father.
- She writes: 'In making us, God almighty is our loving Father, and God all wisdom, is our loving Mother, with the love and the goodness of the Holy Spirit, which is all one God, one Lord. As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother'.
- A greater expansiveness of who God is as Mother & Father, Creator & Nurturer, Powerful & Tender, Almighty & Wise would benefit how we also understand family in the ways we are called and strengthened to live the community of God who is trinity.
- On this feast of the Holy Family let us renew our commitment to our own family.
- This includes a searching of our hearts to see if, with God's help, we can move towards resolving any hurts that keep our family divided.
- Let us commit ourselves also to work for social and especially church structures that welcome men and women to enrich our human family and church family by sharing their special gifts.
- Let us reflect more deeply on the feminine as well as the masculine experience of love as we look to God, our Father-Mother.
- By baptism we are all brothers and sisters and we need everyone's gift, everyone's love, for we need each other to be sacraments of the fatherly and motherly love of God for the world.