

Homily at Mass The Holy Family Year C – 30 December 2018

With the patience of fishermen, let's drop a line into the Word of God and see what we catch.

The first bite on the line comes from St John's 1st letter: "Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us". Today's feast of the Holy Family gives us a moment or two to think, to reflect, to ponder all that we have celebrated during these Christmas days. Our thinking, on pondering, our reflection is made easy by the crib scene before the Altar: we find ourselves adoring the infant Jesus along with the shepherds, with the joy and wonder of Mary and Joseph. What thoughts come to our mind as we gaze on Jesus, sitting upright in the manger, his arms outstretched in welcome, his smile drawing us close to him? We are awestruck and amazed that this is the Son of God, born in our flesh, Emmanuel, God – with – us, God born to save us by the Cross. Let's think of the love that is the gift of the Father ... this love welcomed by Mary and Joseph, this love that moves our hearts, this love that is the new commandment: "love one another as I have loved you".

We throw our fishing line back into the water and wait ... we wait like Hannah, Samuel's mother waited until the day that surprise! surprise! She became pregnant and then gave birth to a long awaited son. She calls him Samuel – a name which means "God has granted"

Hannah is not the only woman in the Bible who prayed and prayed for the blessing of children. At Mass today there could be some parents who have gone through this trial themselves – there may even be some young couples who are likewise praying, hoping, trying for a baby. The New Testament also has its stories of families hoping for children – Zachariah and Elizabeth, the old barren couple, finally blessed with a son whom we call John the Baptist. And Mary, a young girl, a virgin consecrated to God, whom God chose to be the Mother of his Son, Jesus. For us marriage is a courageous choice, a journey that calls for buckets of love, faith, perseverance, patience, mercy, understanding and hope. Marriage is a commitment to love, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, until death. Already in the few months I've been here in Glen Huntly, I've met so many married couples who have made this commitment generously and faithfully. I've had the privilege to assist at funerals where husbands and wives have lived their marriage vows to the letter – in good times, and ups and downs, in sickness and old age, side by side. Christian marriage involves 3 people – the husband, the wife, and God. Christian marriage confers grace and the Holy Spirit on a husband and wife to live married life together, to navigate their journey together, to hold each other's hand always. Today, can I affirm all who live Christian marriage in our parish? Can I thank you for the light of hope and goodness that shines, from every home and family?

But wait, there's one big one that has bit the line, and it calls on our skill to bring it in. This bite – this word – comes from today's Gospel story. We gain an insight into the life and devotion of the Holy Family. From childhood, Jesus learnt from Mary and Joseph to make the temple in Jerusalem the centre of their religion. Jesus kept up his practice as we learn from St John's Gospel which describes 3 visits by Jesus to Jerusalem, the last of which included his crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Today's Gospel story introduces us to the mission of Jesus: "I must be busy with my Father's affairs". These words of the 12 year old Jesus alert us to all that we will learn afresh about him as the Gospel of St Luke is proclaimed in the Church each Sunday this year.

But the word that is tugging on the line is the word about Mary, a favourite expression of St Luke: "His mother stored up all these things in her heart". This is the quiet, reflective, contemplative Mary whom we see kneeling, wondering, gazing at her new born Son in the manger. She is the first among us "thinking of the love that the Father has lavished on us", on all who believe, on the whole world. The Lord has granted her a Son. The Lord has granted us a Saviour, a brother.

Of all the many Christmas carols, I wonder if this one is familiar? I believe it's a popular carol in Poland.

Infant holy,
Infant lowly,
For his bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing,
Little knowing
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging
Angels singing,
Nowells ringing,
Tidings bringing,
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.

Flocks were sleeping,
Shepherds keeping
Vigil till the morning new;
Saw the glory,
Heard the story,
Tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing,
Free from sorrow,
Praises voicing
Greet the morrow,
Christ the Babe was born for you!