

Feast of Holy Family

- 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 & 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 & also our most profound & 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.
- This feast of the Holy Family is so important because it speaks to a universal reality, to a reality that all people experience.
- It is the place we are first nourished physically, emotionally & spiritually, where we first learn how to live with others, learn about community; where we learn to love & forgive; where we acquire our first values & where we are brought into relationship with God – & all these with varying degrees of success.
- And because this is so, then it must necessarily be that family & family life is the ordinary place where God is to be found.
- Perhaps the difficulty in appreciating this fact is because family life is just so ordinary & so ordinary that people do not even think that **that** is really, & even primarily, where God is for them & in all the successes & in all the failures, in all the stress of trying to have deep, loving, understanding relationships; in all the struggles with finances, jobs, house keeping, illnesses, schooling, in children growing up & parents growing older, in all the adjustments required by the constant life changes of all the different members of the family.
- It is in family life, with its challenges & joys & sorrows, that most of the meaningful reality of life is actually lived.
- It is not in one's work or profession or business, not in social life, not in making money, nor getting ahead.
- In fact, all these things have real meaning only in relation to what they do for the family.
- Today's feast of the Holy Family is about faithful love that looks after the most important people in our lives.
- We all know that fights & bitterness can wreck families for generations.
- If today's feast means anything it is not about romanticising how difficult family life can be these days.

- It is about naming that forgiveness, compassion & kindness are the blocks upon which good family life is built.
- Without these virtues family life crumbles.
- The best way to honour today's feast is to do something about the faithful love it celebrates.
- I've often been with people on their deathbed when they speak about things they have left undone & would've liked to have achieved in their life.
- No one ever says that they wish they had spent more time at work; no one says they wish they had made more money or more possessions.
- But many people say that they wish they had told those that they love, that they loved them.
- We shouldn't assume that our families know about our love for them if we haven't said it. If we show it, we should be able to say it.
- So write a letter, make a call or go & see them, but pluck up the courage & tell our family members that we love them.
- It's too late once we're dead.
- There is one other reflection on family that I'd like to share with you today, & the global events of this make me think about something with regard to family that Jesus spoke about, & Paul reinforced.
- For Jesus, the family was far broader than his blood relatives – it was those who heard the Word & responded to it.
- I'm sure he wasn't limiting this to just Jews or even just his followers, but to everyone who by their consciences were responsive to who God calls them to be, striving for goodness & the upbuilding of the human family.
- Paul, some 25 years later would say that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman – we are all made one in the one who shows us how to live as one.
- These were both quite revolutionary because in that time, blood, clan, tribe & race were what bound people together.
- COVID has reinforced for us how closely we are connected by how the Pandemic has spread – we are indeed one family of humanity.
- The temptation & danger is that we cut ourselves off from others, blame others, protect our own, without adequate concern for the other, to return to behaviours & practices of a very limited view of those to whom we belong.
- Maybe a lesson we can learn from the Pandemic & from the revolutionary thinking of Jesus & Paul is how are the ways we can become more united as the family of humanity, especially expressing care for the forgotten & least members who are just as important.