



Pastoral Letter

to be read at all Masses
in the Archdiocese of Liverpool
on the Feast of the Holy Family
30/31 December 2023

Dear Friends,

The feast of the Holy Family is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of family in our lives. Many of us are enjoying the company of our families in this Christmas season, but for others the idea of belonging to a family is quite distant. Circumstances can leave us without immediate family and that can be a lonely experience. The wars and conflicts throughout the world lead to families breaking up and being separated from each other, some families do not always survive the pressures of modern life and there is much relationship breakdown around us.

Nowadays families come in different shapes and sizes but at their heart is a common desire to build a mutual relationship based on love and respect. Jesus' own family, in several ways, did not meet the expectations of what was considered to be a model family. Mary's pregnancy out of wedlock disturbed Joseph greatly and he offered to release Mary from her betrothal and Jesus was an only child which would have been rare in those days. But there was wider family at least on Mary's side. There was her cousin Elizabeth to whom she went for support during her pregnancy.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus knew what it was like to leave their own country and live as refugees in Egypt until another ruler was on the throne in Israel. But at the heart of Jesus' family was the love of God made visible for us in Jesus himself. The church celebrates this relatively modern feast (it is about 100 years old) to help modern Christians remain faithful to God and each other in unstable times.

Jesus gives us another way of being family beyond our natural family. Our Jewish forebears celebrate the weekly Sabbath and the annual Passover in their homes. The synagogue plays an important part in their lives, but the home possibly plays an even more important part. When Jesus celebrated the Passover the night before he died, he did so with his new family, the community of his disciples in a hired room. This new family, the family of the church is our family too – or more accurately Jesus' family and we are very much part of it.

Today's feast suggests to me two things we could do in the new year. We could try some traditional prayerful practices which are based in our homes like carols before the crib before we put it back in its box, grace before meals, the rosary or a birthday blessing. These prayers may be the glue which hold our families together. A second more challenging thing to do is to open our homes to others who do not have a family for a meal. Many of you have gone further than this and given your spare room to a refugee or a homeless person. That can be a big sacrifice but there are many other ways in which we can reach out and form new friendships and communities as a result of your reflection on the meaning of family to you.

Whatever we do or resolve to do let us give thanks to God for his goodness to us all.

May God bless you and your families with good health in the new year and for many years to come.

+ Malcolm M' Mahon OP

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