



Archdiocese of Southwark

Pastoral Letter for the Solemnity of the Holy Family

To be read at all Vigil and Sunday Masses over the weekend of 26/27 December 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ

After a celebration of Christmas Day in restricted circumstances, due to Covid 19, we come to this beautiful Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The home life of the Lord Jesus, of His mother, the Virgin Mary, and of His foster father, St Joseph, teaches us the importance of *'compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.'*¹ We want to love as they love, to sit in the classroom of the Gospel and learn from Christ, inspired by the fidelity of Mary and Joseph. These qualities are the sure coordinates to guide us forward.

The images we sometimes see of the Holy Family make everything look so perfect, as if there were never any problems, or moments of anxiety, and not that much joy and laughter either. How can any family flourish without joy? How can any family blossom without laughter? No, the Holy Family was a real family. *'Tears and smiles, like us,'* they knew, each in their own way. All our experiences of family, and of our relationships within them, form a school where our understanding of holiness can deepen, where, modelled on Christ, we are trained how to love evermore generously.

Of course, we know family life is not always easy. Every family needs help, especially when its members face difficulties and struggles. Above all, each of us, no matter what our age or circumstances, needs to know that we are loved and that we belong. This is why the Church matters, as a family for everyone, a place to find and know God's love, a place to discover our true home in Christ and with each other.

St Luke retells an important event in the life of the Holy Family. Forty days after His birth, the Christ Child was presented by His parents in the Temple in Jerusalem, in

¹ First Reading, Col 3:12

accordance with the Law of Moses. This humble couple accepted the precious vocation God gave them as parents. This call from God is alive today. Parents are to protect and nurture new life. They are *'the first teachers'* of their children *'in the ways of faith.'* They are also to be *'the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do.'*² This is both a gracious invitation and an awesome responsibility. As they prepare for the baptism of their child, every mother and father should be given a copy of the Gospel with the words: *'Receive the Gospel of Christ whose teacher you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.'*³ The family remains the primary place for living, teaching, and sharing the Gospel. Daily evangelisation is part of every home centred on Christ. The need for witness to our Catholic faith about, and within, the family is as great as it ever was.

I want to thank every Christian family in our parish and school communities for your faithfulness to Christ. Thank you to wives and husbands who encourage each other to live the Gospel, *'for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer.'* Thank you to mums and dads, to grandparents, aunts and uncles, for passing on the faith to your children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces. Thank you to older brothers and sisters for the good example of faith you give to your younger sisters and brothers. They look up to you and need you. Thank you to clergy and religious, and to parish catechists and school staff, who support families in handing the faith to new generations. Please make sure that our communities are welcoming and supportive to all families, not least those new to our country or area, those going through brokenness or separation, and those facing poverty and hardship.

The home of the Holy Family of Nazareth was a loving space where the Lord Jesus grew to maturity, filled with wisdom. May our families, and the family of the Church, enable the message of Christ, in all its richness, to dwell within us so that we always speak and act with love.

I assure each one of you, your families, and your loved ones, of my prayers as 2021 opens before us. Whatever this New Year brings, let us step out with *'compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,'* united as members of one body.⁴ May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts and in our world.

With every blessing
Yours devotedly in Christ
+ John Wilson
Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark

² Rite of Baptism, Blessing and Dismissal

³ Cf. Rite of Ordination of Deacons

⁴ First Reading, Col 3:12