

## **Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family**

(Please read and/or make available at all Masses during the weekend of the  
30/31st December 2017)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises. This is true from its very first page, with the appearance of Adam and Eve’s family with all its burden of violence... to its very last page where we behold the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb.” These are the words of Pope Francis in his great Exhortation *The Joy of Love: On Love in the Family (Amoris Laetitia)* which he wrote after the Synods of Bishops on the Family.

During Christmas the Christian people are given the great privilege of gazing in love at the Holy Family of Nazareth in the crib at Bethlehem. St Francis encouraged his followers to have a fervent and enduring devotion to the crib. He wrote prayers to use before the crib:-

“The most holy Child has been given to us  
And has been born for us and placed in a manger  
Because he did not have a place at the inn.  
Glory to the Lord in the highest  
And peace on earth to those of good will.”

This Christmas we should not be like the innkeeper who refused to accept Jesus into his home. Rather we need to become ever closer to our Saviour and his family. St Francis exhorted his sisters and brothers to become part of the family of Bethlehem and Nazareth:-

“We are spouses of Christ when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are sisters and brothers to him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven.

We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others”.

During my pastoral visits in this Christmas period I have learned much from my meetings with those of our diocese who struggle in life - the sick and elderly; the homeless and the hungry; those in prison. There are many peoples who desperately need to hear the Gospel and we can heed the message of St Francis to bring Jesus to birth in their lives by our generosity and prayers.

To encounter Jesus is to allow peace, joy and light into our lives -

“My eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel”.

Once again our crib offerings during this season will be forwarded to The Brentwood Catholic Children’s Society - please give generously. At the end of his Exhortation Pope Francis reminds us,

“No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed... Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us”.

With continued prayers for you all as we enter the New Year together,

Yours in Christ and Mary,

+Alan Williams, *sm*,  
Bishop of Brentwood

