

**Pastoral Letter of Bishop Alan Williams, sm**  
**The Feast of the Holy Family**

(Please read and/or make available at all Masses on the weekend of the 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

We gather together this weekend immediately after the great Feast of the Incarnation - the Birth of the Lord at Bethlehem. I know that many of you will today imitate the example of Saint Francis all those centuries ago and make a visit to the crib.

As we gaze at the scene from Bethlehem we can make some words of Saint Francis our own -

“We are mothers of Christ 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.”

In October of this year many bishops and others gathered in Rome for an extraordinary Synod on the Family- the theme was the Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the context of Evangelisation. At the end of that Synod Pope Francis spoke to the whole Church -

“We have one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment... with the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph.”

Next October there will be a further Synod on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World.

As we prepare for this next Synod the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales are inviting all of us to reflect on the Gift of Marriage and Family Life.

The short document The Call, the Journey and the Mission will be widely available on Catholic websites and, I hope, in Parishes.

In the document there are suggestions for scripture readings and statements of our Catholic beliefs about Marriage and Family Life. Our reflections should always take place in the context of prayer. Only then can we make the words of Saint Augustine our own -

“From now on live in the harmony of peace, adhere to unity, acquiesce in charity, yield to the truth.”

In the Gospel of today’s Mass Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and looks at Him. As he prayed Simeon spoke of the gifts received by those who are close to Jesus. May these gifts- peace, light, salvation and many others- be given to you in abundance during this Christmas Season.

Pray for me as I will pray for you,

In Christ and Mary, +Alan, sm