

Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family

Please read and/or make available during the weekend of 29/30 December 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During the coming year (Year C in our missals) our Sunday Gospel readings will usually be taken from the Gospel of Saint Luke. Luke was a companion of Saint Paul; he is the writer of the third Gospel – sometimes called the Gospel to the Gentiles – and he is also author of the first history of the Church: the Acts of the Apostles.

As we continue to celebrate the great Octave Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ we can be especially grateful to Saint Luke who presents to us the unique memories which Mary, the Mother of Jesus, stored in her heart.

In today's Gospel the child Jesus becomes separated from his parents in Jerusalem. After an anxious search Mary and Joseph find Jesus - "He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority... and Jesus increased in wisdom, stature and in favour with God and men".

This submission of Jesus to his parents is the only thing Luke tells us of the long years between his childhood and his public ministry which began when he was about thirty years old.

Elsewhere in the New Testament we are told, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth... he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5.7-8). Bethlehem and Calvary – the crib and the cross – are interconnected when the magi bring gifts of gold for a king, frankincense for God and myrrh for a suffering and crucified Christ.

In this year's Christmas Day address in Rome Pope Francis contemplated the meaning of the birth of the Son of God:

"What does that Child, born for us of the Virgin Mary, have to tell us? What is the universal message of Christmas? It is that God is a good Father and we are all brothers and sisters...For this reason, my wish for a happy Christmas is a wish for fraternity – fraternity among individuals of every nation and culture; fraternity among people with different ideas, yet capable of respecting and listening to one another."

The perfect self-giving love of Jesus throughout His life and on the cross encourages his disciples to be generous and loving to God and our fellow human beings.

The giving of gifts is a wonderful custom at Christmas – at Bethlehem, God gives his Son to the world, Mary and Joseph give Jesus their love, the shepherds give Jesus their homage. In that same spirit I pray that we will share with each other our greatest gift – faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word made Flesh who dwelt among us.

Wishing you a very happy Christmas and many blessings for your families and communities in the New Year,

Yours in Christ and Mary,

+Alan Williams, sm
Bishop of Brentwood