

Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family

(Please read out and/or make available on 26th December 2021)

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

As we continue to celebrate the great Feast of Christmas I wish you many blessings today, on this Feast of the Holy Family, and in the coming New Year.

The times of the continuing world pandemic have been unprecedented yet despite the suffering and tribulations of many it has also been a time of astonishing generosity, courage and goodness.

In today's gospel the Holy Family face the agony of a child that goes missing. Mary and Joseph, their family and acquaintances, go in search of Jesus but find him immersed in the affairs of God. Jesus is their son but also the Son of God; he is 'the son of the carpenter' but also the Saviour of the World.

'God so loved the world that he sent his only Son' (John 3.16). Jesus is the greatest revelation and gift of God, and his presence in our world transforms us. In the second reading, St Paul talks of the gifts of discipleship in Christ - we are clothed in sincere compassion, kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Our Lord's way can become our way - 'Bear with one another. Forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins'.

Christmas is rightly a time of forgiveness and reconciliation; a time of concern for the whole human family. Earlier this month Pope Francis demonstrated this when he visited a refugee/migrant centre in Greece.

"Rather than bickering over ideas," said the Pope, it would be better to "broaden our gaze to take in the problems of the majority of humanity, of all those peoples who are victims of humanitarian emergencies they did not create, yet have to endure as the latest chapter in a long history of exploitation".

The Holy Family began their life together as migrants in a strange land; Christ found himself in a sinful and unwelcoming world - 'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (John 1.10-11).

In Christ our world can be transformed - let the message of Christ, in all its richness find a home in us; never let us say or do anything, except in the name of the Lord Jesus.

With gratitude for the great generosity found in our parishes and schools throughout the diocese,

Yours in Christ and Mary,

+Alan Williams sm
Bishop of Brentwood