

Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family

(Please read out and/or make available on 29th December 2024)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During this Christmas time we look to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph portrayed in the Crib of Bethlehem. The world is gathered there - the shepherds, the Wise Men who have travelled from afar together with the angels and the animals. All of earth and heaven are called to be witnesses as God becomes man for our salvation.

In his latest Encyclical Letter ***Dilexit Nos*** (On the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ) Pope Francis talks of the Holy Family- Our Lady carefully pondered the things she had experienced; she ‘treasured them... in her heart’ (Luke 2.19, 51) and with Saint Joseph, she taught Jesus from his earliest years to be attentive in the same way.

The Holy Father talks about the loving gaze of Jesus. Time and again in the gospels we hear how Jesus fixes his gaze upon individuals and their lives are changed. No human being and no human situation escapes the loving attention of Jesus. In Luke Chapter 15 He is the Good Shepherd who takes great risks to find and save his people. He is the concerned housewife who leaves no part of the house unexamined in search of what is lost. And always when he finds a lost soul there is the grace of God in the midst of great rejoicing - “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”.

“God so loved the world that he sent his only Son”. What should our response be to this deepest mystery of Christmas?

In the words of Pope Francis, “Our best response to the love of Christ’s heart is to love our brothers and sisters. ...Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 John 4.20).

Following the example given by the Holy Father on Christmas Eve at Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome I will, on this Feast of the Holy Family, inaugurate the Jubilee Year in the diocese of Brentwood.

The theme of the Jubilee Year is **Pilgrims of Hope**. Just as Jesus fixes his loving gaze upon each one of us so we are asked to turn our gaze towards our brothers and sisters who are in need across the world.

All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. In our own country there are increasing threats to the sanctity and dignity of human life from its very beginning to its natural end. Let us pray that during this Holy Year we will learn to look with the eyes of Jesus, Mary and Joseph on our world and on one another. In the words of Pope Francis and together with the Holy Family may we “contemplate the beauty of creation and care for our common home”.

Wishing you many blessing for Christmas and the New Year,

Yours in Christ and Mary,

+Alan Williams, sm
Bishop of Brentwood