

Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family

As we are very well aware Care Homes have been very much in the News this past year, especially since COVID struck. We have seen pictures of elderly residents, many of whom have memory difficulties, looking forlornly through windows reaching out to sons and daughters unable to give them a hug or tell them face to face that they are loved.

At the other end of life we are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the first weeks, months and years in a child's life of experiencing love, protection and security from its parents, particularly the mother. Early separation can have lasting consequences.

I mention this because in the gospel passage for today we have on the one hand an 8 day old baby with two parents, and on the other two elderly characters who only appear in the gospel story on this one occasion. Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the Law when they took Jesus to be consecrated to the Lord and to offer two young pigeons, thus rooting them within God's people. They did this in the Temple, where Luke's gospel begins and ends, and it is in the Temple that we are introduced firstly to Simeon, an elderly man, who prompted by the Spirit took Jesus in his arms and praised God for God's faithfulness in providing for the whole of humankind a Light which would not only overcome all darkness, but would be the source of salvation for all people. After the praise comes a warning. The child will grow and despite being the sign of God's love for the whole of creation, will be rejected. Not only that, Mary's soul, the very essence of her being, will be pierced by a sword. What a warning at the very beginning of Jesus' life. Mary's 'yes' to God and indeed, Joseph's 'yes' to God come at a price they could never have imagined, and we think of those parents giving birth to their children born out of love, who suffer greatly as they see their own children suffer and die before their time.

The other elderly person is an unnamed 84 year old woman who had been widowed after only 7 years of marriage and who served God night and day. She could easily be overlooked, as many women are in the Church and in some societies, but Luke tells us that she praised God and 'spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem'. She is the first evangelist in the story of Christ, and we think of the huge number of mothers who have been the first to tell their children of Jesus.

This gospel chosen for the feast of the Holy Family contains joy and sorrow, hopes and fears and in so doing captures the experience of many families today. None of us know what tomorrow will bring, many of us have been blessed greatly but also have experienced the sadness of the breakdown of relationships, rejection, illness, even death. Many families are heroic in welcoming relatives with different challenging physical and mental conditions, into their homes. As we thank God for our own families we commend every family to the intercession of the Holy Family.

Bidding Prayers for the Feast of the Holy Family

Celebrant:

May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts; let the message of Christ find a home in you. With these words of St Paul in our minds and hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will encourage all families to be ‘clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience.’

Lord in your mercy

For those families who have had to flee from their homelands because of violence or unrest – that Governments will welcome them into their own countries, treat them with dignity and respect their human rights.

Lord in your mercy

For those families who suffer the loss of a child, either through death or estrangement – that they will know the presence of Christ and the love and support of friends.

Lord in your mercy

For those families who care for elderly parents and grandparents and for those suffering from dementia – that they will have the patience and strength they need in this wonderful example of love, and know the support of others.

Lord in your mercy

For those whose who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the pandemic, all members of our own families and for Lloyd Charters, Regina Cichowicz, Amy Powell, Pamela Daniels, Trevor Cave, Maureen Goldstraw and Jill Bickers, whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God our Father, in the Holy Family of Nazareth you have given us the true model of a Christian home. Grant that by following Jesus, Mary and Joseph in their love for each other and in the example of their family life we may come to your home of peace and joy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen