



# ONE MISSION, TWO PARISHES

Saint Timothy's & Saint Luke the Evangelist  
Catholic Parishes, Forest Hill & Blackburn South

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**WEEKLY BULLETIN: SUNDAY 31 DECEMBER 2023**

**THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH - YEAR B**

**REACH OUT IN LOVE AND MERCY: MARK 6: 32 - 34**



Readings this week: Gen 15:1 – 6, 21:1 – 3; Ps 104; Heb 11:8, 11 – 12, 17 – 19; Lk 2:22 – 40.

## Gospel Reflection ~ Greg Sunter

Look at any newspaper, magazine, television current affairs program or social commentary and you will be bombarded with the notion that the institution of family is under attack. Rather, what appears to be under attack is a particular view of what it means to be 'family'. Society in general and governments in particular are recognising the reality that 'family' is a much more fluid term than it used to be. Rather than an attack on family, it might be argued that there is in fact an embracing of the concept of family by making its definition much broader.

In this feast we celebrate the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The model of family that we have in this Holy Family is a model that would not be entirely out of place in the 21st Century. Mary was a very young woman; possibly no more than 13 or 14 years old. Joseph was an older man; possibly on his second marriage. There was a degree of scandal about the conception of their child and Joseph seriously contemplated whether or not he would go ahead with the marriage. They were forced to flee their homeland and seek protection as refugees in Egypt. We see from today's passage that the parents are doing their best to be faithful to their religious and cultural traditions whilst worrying about what the future holds for their son. It is a picture that is not too different from the situation in which many families today find themselves. So while we celebrate today the feast of the Holy Family, it is very much a celebration of every family.

**Historical Context – Ritual:** The ritual of purification referred to in today's passage would take place 40 days after childbirth. It was a ritual for the mother, not the child. Mary and Joseph took the opportunity of attending the Temple to bring Jesus into the presence of God who, according to tradition, dwelt in the Temple. The tradition associated with this purification of women after childbirth dictated that a lamb and a turtledove or pigeon be sacrificed. However, for the poor, an extra turtledove or pigeon could be substituted for the lamb. This fact gives us an indication of the status of Mary and Joseph.

**Scriptural context – Fulfilling prophecy:** The writer of the gospel of Luke uses this presentation event to announce or forecast the ministry of Jesus. The explicit identification of the poverty of Mary and Joseph is an indicator of the emphasis that Jesus will give to the poor throughout his ministry. The gospel writer also makes plain the link between the Temple (the Jewish tradition) and the ministry of Jesus. Tying these events into the prophecies of both Simeon and Anna reinforce the prophetic nature of this whole episode. Jesus is portrayed in this gospel as the fulfilment of the prophecies of scripture.

**Living the Gospel – Faithful:** A strong image that emerges from this passage is the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph. Their whole purpose in visiting the Temple is to fulfil the requirements of their faith. They are faithful to the Jewish tradition and it is into this tradition that they initiate Jesus. The faithfulness of Mary and Joseph is a hallmark of their life as a family. Their faithfulness is a significant element of what we celebrate in the feast of the Holy Family and their faithfulness to God and to one another is a model for all families and for all people.

## REACH OUT IN ...

Whitehorse Deanery  
Eastern Region  
Archdiocese of Melbourne

Rev Father Gerard

Parish Priest

Sonya O'Farrell

Part-time Parish Secretary

Wednesdays,

Thursdays & Fridays

10.00am – 2.00pm

SUNDAY MASS

ST: & SL: Saturday Vigil @ 6.00pm

Sunday ST: @ 10.30am *Australian*

5.00pm – *Vietnamese*

& SL: @ 8.30am

WEEKDAY MASS & SL: ROSARY

ST: Mon. @ 9.30am *Vietnamese*

Weds. & Thurs. @ 9.15am

Fri. @ 10.00am

1st Wednesday of the month

@ 10.00am Mass of Anointing.

SL: Mon. @ 9.30am

Wed., Thurs. & Fri. @ 9.30am

Sat. @ 9.00am

RECONCILIATION

SL: Saturday 9.30am – 10.00am &

5.30pm – 5.50pm

SL: EXPOSITION & BENEDICTION

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed

for Adoration Wednesday

Start: 7.00pm | End: 8.00pm

MACS Catholic Primary School

21 Stevens Road, Vermont, 3133 Vic

Tel: (03) 9878 4188

Ms. Anne Maree Jones Principal

Email: [principal@sttims.catholic.edu.au](mailto:principal@sttims.catholic.edu.au)

Website: <https://sttims.catholic.edu.au/>

MACS Catholic Primary School

46 Orchard Grove,

Blackburn South Vic 3130

Tel: (03) 9877 4023

Mrs. Clare Ryan: Principal

Email: [principal@slblackburnsth.catholic.edu.au](mailto:principal@slblackburnsth.catholic.edu.au)

Website: [slblackburnsth.catholic.edu.au](http://slblackburnsth.catholic.edu.au)

Prayer to Saint Timothy

O God, who adorned Saint Timothy with apostolic virtues, grant, through his intercession that, living justly and devoutly in this present age, we may merit to reach our heavenly homeland. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Patron Saint of stomach and intestinal disorders.

Prayer to Saint Luke the Evangelist

O St. Luke, you were chosen to reveal in preaching and writing God's love for the poor. Moved by the heavenly Spirit of Love, you detailed the life of Jesus, showing His divinity and His genuine compassion for all human beings. Help those who already glory in God's name to persevere in one heart and one mind and inspire all people that they may hear the Good News of Salvation. Amen

Patron Saint of artists, physicians, surgeons, students and butchers.

**WE REMEMBER IN PRAYER** this weekend all who are sick, especially Kit Bing Fan, Max Marino, Tony Keaney, Kathryn Holmes, Therese O'Donoghue, Stewart Davis, Trevor Stowe, Jerry Donoghue, Veronica and all those Parishioners unable to be among us this weekend. For all who have died recently, especially Andres Santos, for the casualties of war in Ukraine, Israel and Gaza and for those whose anniversaries occur about this time especially Marek Mazaraki, Hugh Deakin, Richard Rowlands, Maria Dinh Thi Nhu, Mary Rose Ryan, Mario Cardenti, Victoria Saverimuttu, Lester Hickman, William Flood, Cley Treyes, Shane Coney, Paul Borg, David Jenner, Rudy Beatty, Kay Hincks, Mary Smith, Noel Jones, Liam Hynan, Eileen McCoy & Gregory Rusc. May they rest in peace.

**LITURGICAL CALENDAR THIS WEEK:** **Christmas time ~ Monday:** Mary, the Holy Mother of God; **Tuesday:** St Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, bishops, doctors; **Wednesday:** The Most Holy name of Jesus; **Masses this weekend:** Preface of Nativity of the Lord III, Eucharistic Prayer III; Eucharistic Acc. No. III.

**NEW YEAR'S DAY MASSES: SL** @ 9.30am on Monday morning in Australian and **ST** @ 9.30am on Monday morning in Vietnamese.

**SL IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED** that to relieve the stress off having to find someone on the day, a roster for Ministers of the Word & Eucharist for January & first weekend of February might work again for us. We had them last year and they worked well. If you would like to volunteer, please leave your name and contact on the respective clip boards in the Church Narthex/Foyer as you leave this weekend.

**THANKYOU** to all **SL** & **ST** Parishioners who have contributed in any way to our Christmas celebrations this year in either or both Parishes that certainly have made a difference to our *One Mission Two Parish* annual Festival. May they prove to be blessings that lay the foundation for a sacred, holy, safe and happy New Year for all of us as 2024 begins! On a personal note, a further thankyou to all **ST** & **SL** Parishioners who kindly delivered many Christmas Cards and Gifts as well as generously providing their annual Christmas Offering; all very much appreciated and gratefully received, Fr Gerard P.P. A Blessed New Year to you.

**PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY (SEE FC.65-85):** "In this section, which addresses the many difficulties facing couples and families, two key themes emerge: COMPASSION and TRUTH. The beliefs held by the Church about marriage and family can be painful for many people. The wounds of hurt, failure and disillusionment run deep. Faced with such pain we can be tempted to stop speaking the truth; for instance, we might avoid saying things like 'marriage is forever'. But when we do this we only undermine our capacity to live the truth. We rob married people of encouragement, we rob our children of inspiration, and we fail to recognize the enormity of a divorced person's loss. Instead of diluting our Catholic beliefs, let us courageously SPEAK them with love and sensitivity; let us gently LISTEN to each other's experience of joy, loss, hope, loneliness and REACH OUT with healing hands." [Excerpt from Landmarks Issue No. 5](#)

**A VOCATION VIEW:** The voice of God is first heard in the voice of a mother and father. (Sir 3:2) Make a commitment to make your home a domestic church where the Lord's call can be heard and nourished. Col 3:16

**STEWARDSHIP CORNER:** "...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive." - *Colossians 3:13* Forgiving is one of the hardest things for people to do. We can't give what we don't have. We need to receive God's mercy and forgiveness first before we can give it to others. Go to the sacrament of Reconciliation and receive God's mercy and forgiveness. Then, share the gift of forgiveness with someone – a family member, a friend or a co-worker. Pick up the phone or text someone right now. (Includes Christmas Masses: **ST:** Weekly First Collection Presbytery Envelopes: \$391.10; Thanksgiving Stewardship Envelopes this week: \$254.05; Vietnamese Donation: \$424.95; **SL:** Last week's Church Stewardship Envelopes: \$379; Last week's Presbytery Stewardship Envelopes: \$381).

**WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS** who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

## WEEKEND PARISH MINISTRY ROSTER

### MINISTERS OF THE WORD

**SATURDAY** 6:00 PM SL  
6:00 PM ST  
**SUNDAY** 8:30 AM SL  
10:30 AM ST  
5.00PM ST

### 30 AND 31 DECEMBER

Joe Ferlazzo  
Rachel Grealy  
Peter McKeown  
Stefanie Chin & Eli Tutor  
Dung Luong & Thuy Nguyen

### 6 AND 7 JANUARY

Volunteer  
Volunteer  
Volunteer  
Volunteer  
Hieu Nguyen & Dieu Nguyen

### EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF THE EUCHARIST

**SATURDAY** 6:00 PM SL  
6:00 PM ST  
**SUNDAY** 8:30 AM SL  
10:30 AM ST  
5.00PM ST

### 30 AND 31 DECEMBER

Olive Hammill  
Mary Italiano  
Melina Barcellona  
Laura Cigana  
Hoang Nguyen

### 6 AND 7 JANUARY

Volunteer  
Volunteer  
Volunteer  
Volunteer  
Hung Dinh

### SLIDE OPERATORS

**SATURDAY** 6:00 PM SL  
6:00 PM ST  
**SUNDAY** 8:30 AM SL  
10:30 AM ST  
5.00PM ST

### 30 AND 31 DECEMBER

Volunteer  
Michelle Chen  
Megan McLean  
Lee Min Yee  
Toan Tran

### 6 AND 7 JANUARY

Volunteer  
Michelle Chen  
Volunteer  
Manny Gonzalez  
Toan Tran

### SL WELCOMERS 30/31 DEC

6:00 PM Edna Lee  
8:30 AM Marie Pekish  
10:30 AM Volunteer

### HOSPITALITY THE BASIC LITURGICAL MINISTRY

### SL WELCOMERS 6/7 JAN

6:00 PM Volunteer  
9:30 AM Volunteer  
10:30 AM Volunteer

### SL CHURCH CLEANING

30<sup>th</sup> Dec. – Roster in recess for  
Christmas & January

### ST CHURCH CLEANING

13<sup>th</sup> Jan. @ 2pm  
Toan Tran, Dao Dinh  
Hieu Nguyen & Dieu Nguyen

### SL CHURCH FLOWERS

Roster in recess

### ST CHURCH FLOWERS

January - Parishioners

### ST COUNTERS

This week Team 3:  
Peter Deayton & Kelvin Chen  
Next week Team 4:  
Mary Choy & Eileen Tam

**ON THE JOURNEY THIS WEEK:** Fr Mark De Battista says the Holy Family as a model for us and for all families. Mother Hilda says make God's day by calling him by name today. Fr Tony Percy calls us to the mysteries of love and life that's celebrated in this feast. Fr Chris Sarkis reflects upon the fundamental aspects of family life, and Fr John Corrigan says the feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. Plus, more great music!

**"OK. WE ALL ADMIT IT. FAMILY LIFE IS DIFFICULT.** What family does not know the tension of a personality clash, the heartache of a tragedy, the dull pain of daily irritations? Family life is a challenge because the stakes are so high. What other relationship can hold out so much promise: a lifelong sense of belonging, a rare depth of intimacy, the experience of creating life itself? Family life is indeed a risky adventure in love; a relational experience at the core of human existence with the power to make or break not only persons, but society itself. Small wonder that it came under the microscope of Church reflections at the [1980 Synod on the Family](#) where bishops around the world met with Pope John Paul II to feed back the issues and concerns of families in their dioceses. From that meeting emerged a papal document (technically described as a post-synodal apostolic exhortation) titled *Familiaris Consortio*: 'The Christian Family in the Modern World.' [Excerpt from Landmarks . Issue No. 5](#) What is family all about? In *Familiaris Consortio* John Paul II takes us right back to basics: God is love. How simple that sounds; and yet there is nothing more fundamental to human existence. Created in God's image, each person is called into being *through* love and *for* love. The role of the Christian family Put simply: the mission of the family is to BE what it IS, namely 'an intimate communion of life and love' (FC,17). How does it do this? *Familiaris Consortio* identifies four ways:

- 1. Families form community. (FC, 18-27)
- 2. Families serve life. (FC, 28-41)
- 3. Families participate in the development of society (FC, 43-44)
- 4. Families share in the life and mission of the Church."

**SAFETY STATEMENT:** We are committed to a safe and nurturing culture for all children and vulnerable persons in our Church. Saint Luke the Evangelist Parish Blackburn South holds the care, safety, wellbeing of children and vulnerable persons as central and fundamental responsibilities of the Church. This commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel.

*Love and Mercy: Mark 6: 32 - 34*

### Parish Groups & Contacts

Lectors, Registrars, Collectors,  
Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist,  
Slide Projector Operator & Rosters

ST: Corrie Quimbo 9412 8499  
SL: Margaret Gearon 0409 807 135

### Baptism Preparation

ST: Mary Italiano 9412 8499

### Vietnamese Community

Hoang Nguyen 0422 400 116  
Andy Tran 0422 382 109

### Vietnamese Youth

John Dinh 0448 977 037

### Parish Collection Preparers

ST: Barry Silvester &  
Michael Kawalevski

### Stewardship Counters

SL: Dale Dixon - 0433 885 087  
Steve Kilroe-Smith - 0404 864 232

### Parish Pastoral Council

*As we are one Mission now, it has been suggested that we require only one Chair?*

### Parishes Safeguarding Committee

Theresa Nguyen, Mary Italiano,  
Darren McLean - 0417 774 504  
Janette Clark - 9877 2292  
Fr Gerard - 9877 2292

### Parish History

SL: Margaret Gearon - 0409 807 135

### Whitehorse Deanery - Fr Gerard

### Finance Committee

Bernard Negline  
Parish Accountant

### SL: Hall Hire

Sonya O'Farrell @ the  
Parish Office - 9877 2292

### Church Sacristan

ST: Margaret King & Hoang Nguyen  
SL: Greg Grant - 0401 644 474

### Church Housekeeping

ST: Margaret King 9412 8499

### Church Cleaning & Flowers

SL: Megan McLean - 0419 347 693

### Church Linen

SL: Beryl Kanagalinggam

### Parish Garden Maintenance

ST: Des Connors, Leo Watson,  
Anico Yee & Vietnamese Community  
SL: Darren McLean - 0417 774 504

### Holy Communion to the housebound - Fr Gerard

### Parish Choirs

ST: Mary Italiano & Theresa Nguyen  
SL: Lina & Maria Mafi  
0411 136 043

### Parish & School Fete Committee

SL: Mrs. Clare Ryan - 9877 4023

### School Advisory Council

ST: Ms. Anne Maree Jones 9878 4188  
SL: Mrs. Clare Ryan - 9877 4023

### School Parents' Association

ST: Ms. Anne Maree Jones 9878 4188  
SL: Mrs. Clare Ryan - 9877 4023

### St Vincent de Paul Conference

For Assistance: 1800 305 330

*(Freecall: Monday to Friday 10am-3pm)*

### Parish Contacts:

ST: John McCoy  
SL: Tony Lobo &  
Steve Kilroe-Smith

**Raise your voices ... Entrance Antiphon:** The shepherds went in haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the Infant lying in a manger.

**Response to the Psalm:** The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

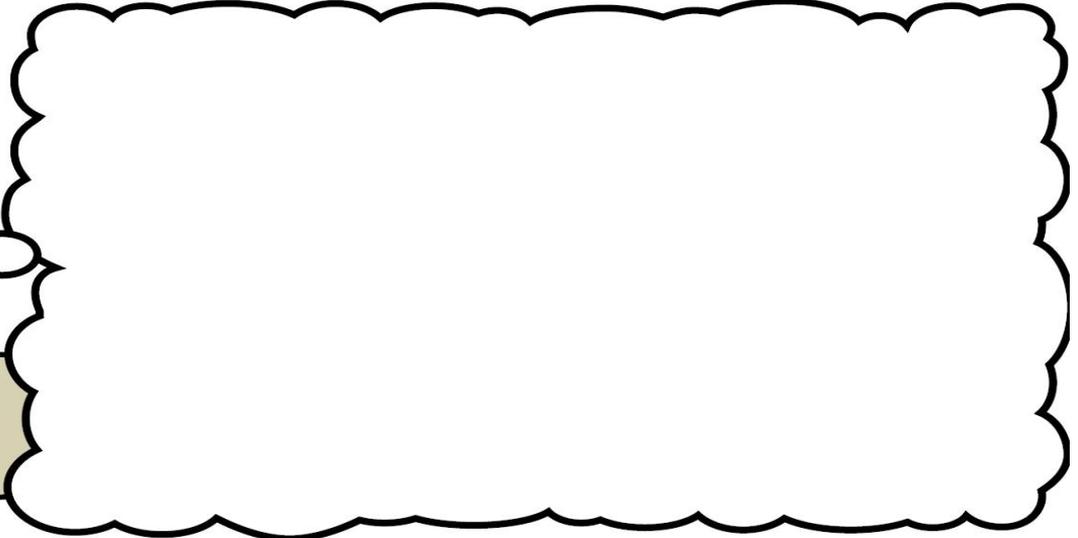
**Gospel Acclamation:** Alleluia, alleluia! In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets; now he speaks to us through his Son. Alleluia!

**Eucharistic Acclamation:** Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

**Communion Antiphon:** Our God has appeared on the earth, and lived among us.



An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Draw the angel speaking to Joseph in his dream.



Joseph listened to the angel's warning because he trusted in God. Write down some of the names of those who you trust.

## DECODE THE PROPHECY

Use the code below to decipher the prophet's message

|   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| A |  | G |  | L |  | Q |  | V |  |
| B |  | H |  | M |  | R |  | W |  |
| C |  | I |  | N |  | S |  | X |  |
| D |  | J |  | O |  | T |  | Y |  |
| E |  | K |  | P |  | U |  | Z |  |
| F |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |

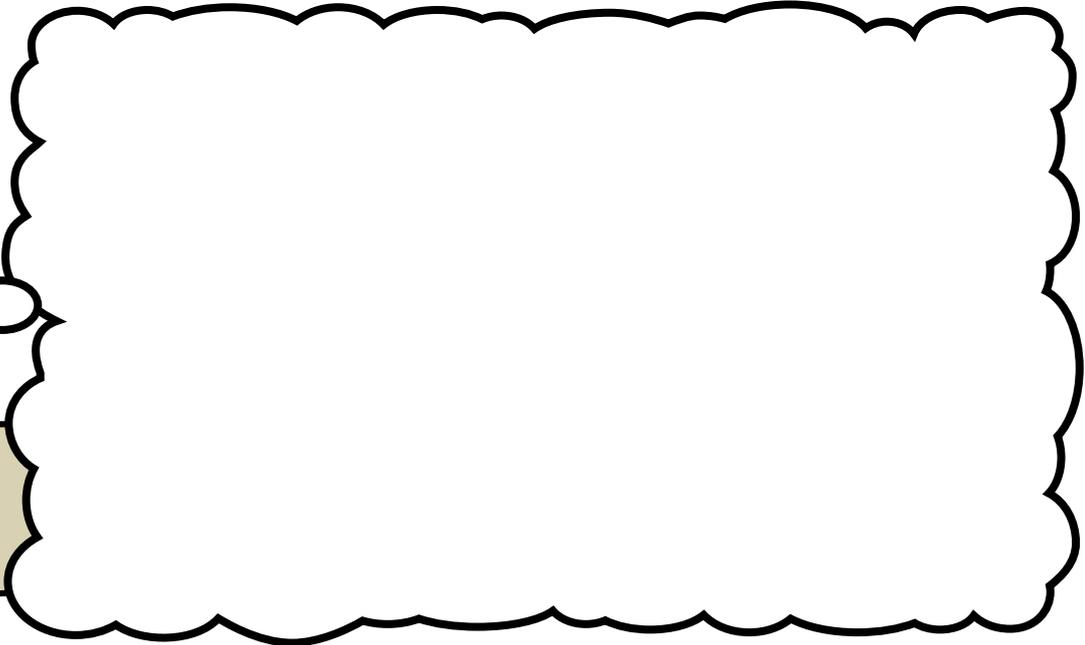
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# Escape into Egypt



The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Draw the angel speaking to Joseph in his dream.



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| B |  | H |  | M |  | R |  | W |  |
| C |  | I |  | N |  | S |  | X |  |
| D |  | J |  | O |  | T |  | Y |  |
| E |  | K |  | P |  | U |  | Z |  |

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# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

### The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Year B

31 December 2023



### Collect

O God, who were pleased to give us  
the shining example of the Holy Family,  
graciously grant that we may imitate them  
in practising the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity,  
and so, in the joy of your house,  
delight one day in eternal rewards.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### Readings and Commentaries

With many away for summer holidays or relaxing at home in holiday spirit, it's fair to say that the Feast of the Holy Family isn't high on their agenda. To add to that, in years when there's no Sunday between Christmas Day and New Year's Day, the observance is relegated to a weekday.

There are other reasons why the feast may not fire the Catholic imagination. A late arrival in the liturgical calendar, it was inserted not because of a groundswell of popular devotion but by papal decree. Alarmed at seeing Catholic family life under siege, Pope Leo XII responded by inaugurating the feast in 1893. Since then, the tide of change in all that concerns family life has only grown stronger.

The tension between ideal and reality is evident in Pope Francis' lengthy exhortation, *On Love in the Family*, published after the 2014-15 Synod on the Family. In #32 he writes, "Faithful to Christ's teaching we look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows."

A little earlier, in #30, he had noted that the Holy Family was not spared the human condition: "Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares." It may not be holiday reading, but there's much wisdom, love, inspiration and food for thought in Francis' pastoral rumination.

## A reading from the book of Genesis

15:1–6, 21:1–3

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in a vision, 'Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great'.

'My Lord,' Abram replied 'what do you intend to give me? I go childless.' Then Abram said, 'See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir'. And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, 'He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be of your own flesh and blood'. Then taking him outside he said, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants' he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified.

The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had said, and did what he had promised her. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time God had promised. Abraham named the son born to him Isaac, the son to whom Sarah had given birth.

## First Reading

It's not unusual for lectionary readings to be a hybrid of verses, for the sake of either brevity or intelligibility. What distinguishes today's text from Genesis is that its two parts are several chapters apart. The first, from chapter 15, recounts God's promise of a natural heir to Abram. The second, from chapter 21, reports the subsequent birth of Isaac to Sarah and the renamed Abraham.

Producing an heir was all-important in ancient times. The birth of a child assured the continuance of the family name, the security of property, and care in old age. The childless Abram has been forced to consider adopting an heir, but not only is he promised a child of his own but a multitude of descendants.

Abram responds by putting his faith in God, and this was counted "as making him justified." Given that this verse plays such a critical role in Paul's argument in Romans and Galatians (and in Reformation polemics) about the primacy of faith over works, it's good that it's heard again in Lent (Second Sunday, Year C), and not just in this optional reading during summer holiday time.

The reading interweaves narrative and the dialogue between God and Abram. The sentences are short and straightforward enough, though Sarah does appear unannounced in the latter part of the reading. The end result is a story that's interesting both for readers to tell and for the assembly to hear.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 104:1–6, 8–9

**R.** The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.  
O sing to him, sing his praise;  
tell all his wonderful works! **R.**

Be proud of his holy name,  
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.  
Consider the Lord and his strength;  
constantly seek his face. **R.**

Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, the judgements he spoke.  
O children of Abraham, his servant,  
O sons of the Jacob he chose. **R.**

He remembers his covenant for ever,  
his promise for a thousand generations,  
the covenant he made with Abraham,  
the oath he swore to Isaac. **R.**

## Responsorial Psalm

There's no explicit mention of covenant in the reading from Genesis, but the essential ingredients are certainly identified. God makes a pledge to Abram and Abram responds with faith. A bond is forged. Psalm 104/105 is a lengthy hymn of praise for God's fidelity to the covenant with Abraham. This fidelity extends far beyond the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It encompasses the wonders Moses worked to liberate the Hebrew slaves, their protection throughout the exodus, and their entry into the Promised Land. The psalm's constant focus is on God's faithful saving works. It makes no mention of Israel's infidelities.

The verses of the responsorial psalm are taken from the first part of the psalm. The first two stanzas are a general call for everyone to praise their wonderful God and always seek God's face. The remaining two make specific mention of the covenant with Abraham. All four are in standard four-line format, their language simple, and their spirit uniformly positive. Readers who are attuned to the psalms' mode of poetic prayer should find this a joy to proclaim.

## **A reading from the letter to the Hebrews**

**11:8, 11–12, 17–19**

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 2:22–40**

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord [- observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord - and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.'

## **Second Reading**

Whoever composed the letter to the Hebrews was steeped in Jewish tradition and well versed in Jewish scripture. The unknown author (in all likelihood a male) would therefore have been well aware of passages like 1 Maccabees 2:51-46, and above all the several chapters of Ecclesiasticus 44-50, that are spent in praise of Jewish heroes and heroines of faith. Accordingly, he devotes a full and lengthy chapter of Hebrews to the same enterprise.

Today's reading is a combination of extracts referring to Abraham and Sarah. Three examples of exemplary faith are cited. The first is Abraham's decision to leave his homeland for an unknown destination. The second is Sarah's trust in God's promise of a child in spite of her advanced years. The third is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice the one on whom all his hopes of posterity were pinned, his only son Isaac. There is no mention of Abraham and Sarah in the gospel that follows, but Luke's account of the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple is peopled with characters who emulate the faith of their forebears.

The letter to the Hebrews is a literary and theological masterpiece. It is written in a high rhetorical style that is evident in today's text. Readers would do well to read and re-read it until they are confident they are fully at home with it. They will increase the chances of illuminating the faith of the assembly when they proclaim it with authority.

## **Gospel**

No doubt the compilers of the lectionary were well aware of the length of Luke's account of Jesus' presentation in the Temple. In deciding to offer a shorter option, they consciously or unconsciously struck a blow for gender equity. They excised the stories of both Simeon and Anna. This leaves the Southern Hemisphere presider with a somewhat invidious choice. On this Sunday at peak summer holiday time, the shorter gospel will appeal, but it is greatly impoverished by comparison.

The longer text puts Luke's genius on full display. He creates a scene redolent of Jewish tradition (even if not with complete accuracy, as Joseph had no need of purification). Mary and Joseph conscientiously do what the Law of Moses required. Simeon and Anna embody the patient, trusting faith of God's humble ones who long for the divine promises to be fulfilled. But Luke also sows the seeds of a new future. Simeon hails the light "prepared for all the nations to see." Luke will conclude his two-volume work on the same note (Acts 28:28). He also has Simeon hint at the traumatic way that salvation will be accomplished.

The gospel concludes with a snapshot of Jesus as the ideal Jewish child, growing to maturity, filled with wisdom and blessed by God. This seems perfect for the feast of the Holy Family. But next year we will hear of Jesus' defiance of his parents and the distress they suffer.

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected - and a sword will pierce your own soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem].

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

[*Short Form: omit text in brackets.*]

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

### THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

#### FIRST READING (NRSV)

##### **A reading from the book of Genesis                    15:1–6; 21:1–3**

The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision,  
"Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield;  
your reward shall be very great."  
But Abram said,  
"O Lord God, what will you give me,  
for I continue childless,  
and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"  
And Abram said,  
"You have given me no offspring,  
and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir."  
But the word of the Lord came to him,  
"This man shall not be your heir;  
no one but your very own issue shall be your heir."  
The Lord brought Abraham outside and said,  
"Look toward heaven and count the stars,  
if you are able to count them."  
Then he said to him,  
"So shall your descendants be."  
And Abram believed the Lord;  
and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.  
The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said,  
and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised.  
Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age,  
at the time of which God had spoken to him.  
Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.  
And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac  
when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.  
Abraham was a hundred years old  
when his son Isaac was born to him.

#### SECOND READING (NRSV)

##### **A reading from the letter to the Hebrews            11:8, 11–12, 17–19**

By faith Abraham obeyed  
when he was called to set out for a place  
that he was to receive as an inheritance;  
and he set out, not knowing where he was going.  
By faith Sarah herself, though barren,  
received power to conceive, even when she was too old,  
because she considered God, who had made the promise,  
to be faithful.  
Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead,  
descendants were born,  
"as many as the stars of heaven  
and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."  
By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac.  
He who had received the promises  
was ready to offer up his only son,  
of whom he had been told,

"It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you."  
Abraham considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

## **GOSPEL (NRSV)**

### **A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 2:22–40**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord,  
[(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."]

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,

[Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Then] Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

[There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.

She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came,

and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.]

When Mary and Joseph had finished everything required by the law of the Lord,

they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

## Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate  
the splendour of true love,  
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again  
experience violence, rejection and division:  
may all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
make us once more mindful  
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
graciously hear our prayer.  
Amen.

*Pope Francis*

(Prayer for the Synod on the Family given by Pope Francis on the Feast of the Holy Family, 2013)



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## Family:

# an adventure in love

**OK. We all admit it. Family life is difficult.**

**What family does not know the tension of a personality clash, the heartache of a tragedy, the dull pain of daily irritations?**

**Family life is a challenge because the stakes are so high. What other relationship can hold out so much promise: a lifelong sense of belonging, a rare depth of intimacy, the experience of creating life itself?**

**Family life is indeed a risky adventure in love; a relational experience at the core of human existence with the power to make or break not only persons, but society itself.**

**Small wonder that it came under the microscope of Church reflections at the 1980 Synod on the Family where bishops around the world met with Pope John Paul II to feed back the issues and concerns of families in their dioceses.**

**From that meeting emerged a papal document (technically described as a post-synodal apostolic exhortation) titled *Familiaris Consortio*: 'The Christian Family in the Modern World.'**

### One night...

*'When our baby daughter was very sick, her ear infection made it too painful for her to lie down in her cot. My husband sat up all night cradling her feverish little body in his arms so that she and I could both sleep. This incident has given me an image of God's love which I will treasure always.'* (FP)

### God's plan for marriage and family. (FC, 11-16)

What is family all about? In *Familiaris Consortio* John Paul II takes us right back to basics: God is love. How simple that sounds; and yet there is nothing more fundamental to human existence. Created in God's image, each person is called into being *through* love and *for* love.

The Church identifies marriage as one clear way in which human persons live out their vocation to love. In marriage husband and wife say to each other: "All of me is yours forever." It is a total gift of one's personhood. Spouses hold nothing back in seeking a deeply personal unity of body, heart and soul. This bond of marital love holds great significance for the Church community. The daily surrender of husband and wife to one another in marriage reflects the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Married love is a special sign or 'sacrament' of the way Christ loves us - completely, unconditionally, forever.

### From love comes life

Out of this love between a man and a woman comes more of God's love: a child created in God's image. That the unity of married love expressed in sexual intercourse is inseparable from its lifegiving dimension is an important belief for the Catholic community and explains why it cannot accept contraceptive practices which separate the two. (see FC,32)

Unlike artificial forms of contraception, natural methods of family planning enable a couple to make responsible decisions about the size and spacing of their family without compromising the sacred 'language' of sexual intercourse by which a spouse says: *I give you all of me - my manhood/ womanhood, my capacity to bring forth life, my deepest self. And I want to receive and accept all of you.*

It is this selfgiving union between man and woman and the new human life generated, which makes marriage a foundation stone of the wider family community, the Church and society.

### Something sacred

*'In our love-making, Geoff and I are aware of something sacred happening. It is as if we are saying to each other: "Take, this is my body, given for you." For us, sexual intercourse is a sacred "rite" through which we celebrate and strengthen the love bond between us.'* (Sue)

# Power-cell of life & love

## The role of the Christian family

Put simply: the mission of the family is to BE what it IS, namely 'an intimate communion of life and love' (FC,17). How does it do this? *Familiaris Consortio* identifies four ways:

### 1. Families form community.

(FC, 18-27)

'Love one another' is the gospel commandment at the heart of family life. If the world is to be a place of self-giving love, then it has to start with the tiniest cell of human loving: the married couple and their family.

Through countless everyday caring actions in the lives of spouses, children, extended family and neighbours, the family acts as a little 'power cell' of hope in the world at large. From the lifegiving presence of a newborn child to the wisdom of an elderly grandparent, 'all members...have the grace and responsibility of building day by day, the communion of persons, making the family "a school of deeper humanity": this happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick,

the aged; where there is mutual service every day; where there is a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows' (FC, 21).

Loving each other is not easy. Every family has its share of tension and conflict. *Familiaris Consortio* acknowledges that 'family communion can only be preserved...through a great spirit of sacrifice' (n.21). Family members are called to develop gospel qualities such as generosity, openness, forgiveness and to recognise each other's dignity and gifts. Strengthened by the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, families find the grace to move towards the ardent desire of Jesus 'that they may be one' (Jn 17:21).

### 2. Families serve life. (FC, 28-41)

While having children is not the only fruit of marriage, it is without doubt a precious way in which the family brings forth new life into the world. In this way each new person bears the imprint of the divine image, the original blessing of the Creator.

Bringing forth a child includes the responsibility of helping that new

## The decision

*'I have a childhood memory of my parents standing in the kitchen exchanging sharp words. Suddenly my father broke the cycle of tension, went up to my mum and tapped her gently on the arm saying expectantly, "Hey, tell me something..." Her scowl relaxed into a half-smile before returning her half of the equation. "I love you," she said. I came to understand that this little exchange, repeated over 42 years of marriage, symbolised for them a decision: No issue is so big that we will allow it to come between our love for each other.'* (VC)

## A forgiving home

*'For years after my divorce I prayed that I would be a good parent to my children. Then one day it dawned on me that the best prayer I could pray was a prayer of forgiveness. Jack had left me and I had never forgiven him for that. Of course, I thought I had, but instead I had simply shut down part of my heart. Here I was trying to be "super-mum", but ignoring the fact that my parenthood had come from my marriage, and the more at peace I was with my ex-husband, the more at peace my children would be.*

*'After that my prayer changed. Each day I asked Jesus to bring healing into the woundedness of my married life. I prayed that, with this forgiveness, I could communicate to my children that they were the fruit of our love, even if that love had been far from perfect. Many tears flowed. I began to realise the extent of the pain beneath my "super-parent" image.*

*'Over time I have seen the power of this kind of prayer. There is a growing peace in our home. The children feel freer to talk about their daddy, what they miss about him, how they feel angry sometimes. And I can handle their questions peacefully. Bitterness wells up from time to time, but I have a better way to deal with it.'* (Terry)

## Bright spots and shadows for the family today. (see FC, 4-10)

***Familiaris Cosortio* is responding to a critical moment in history; an era in which the family finds itself grappling with a multitude of conflicting forces - some positively enriching, others destructive. In the pressure-cooker of life, it is not always easy to distinguish between these social forces. Sometimes a positive attribute such as 'personal autonomy' is exaggerated and becomes selfish pursuit, bringing not freedom but inner slavery; and a seemingly distasteful demand such as 'self-sacrifice' can in fact bring a depth of inner freedom never thought possible.**

**Through *Familiaris Consortio* the Church calls all families to a careful 'discernment'; i.e. an informed and prayerful reflection on the meaning of life and its fundamental values. In this way families can make wise judgments amidst the complex array of choices offered in today's society.**

# at the **heart** of the **Church's** mission

person to live a fully human life.

*Familiaris Consortio* emphasizes the fact that parents are the prime educators of their children. Certainly other people and agencies (e.g., schools) can help. But when it comes to forming a child in God's laws of love, nothing can replace the impact of the parents and the family community. It is in the atmosphere of the home that a child 'catches' a spirit of love...or discovers its lack. It is through the religious practices of the home that a child first senses a reverence for God...or feels the absence of faith. It is in the family unit that a child first learns 'those social virtues which every society needs' (FC,37), including a spirit of service, self-sacrifice and respect for one's sexuality.

The task of the Christian family to educate its members is a true ministry through which the Gospel is spread, says *Familiaris Consortio*. Do not think of your family responsibilities as something separate or secondary to the mission of the Church. When you teach your children (and they teach you!) to love, to pray, to celebrate

the sacraments and to serve one's neighbour, you are not just 'helping' the Church's mission, you are living its very mission!

So central is the family to the life and mission of the Church that it is often called the 'domestic church' or the 'little church'. 'The family, called together by word and sacrament as the Church of the home, is both teacher and mother, the same as the worldwide Church' (FC,38).

## Queen Emily

*'Emily is our youngest child. At a family meal on the eve of her First Communion day, all her big brothers and sisters decided to dress up in formal wear—suits, bow ties, evening dresses, the works—to make it a very special occasion in her honour. Pretty amazing given their usual attire of jeans and T-shirts!*

*'We had a lot of laughs and Emily felt like a queen. The Body of Christ we received the next day was all the more a special experience because of the presence of Christ we had celebrated in one another the night before.'* (M & MJ)

## Pastoral care of the family

(see FC,65-85)

**In this section, which addresses the many difficulties facing couples and families, two key themes emerge: COMPASSION and TRUTH. The beliefs held by the Church about marriage and family can be painful for many people. The wounds of hurt, failure and disillusionment run deep. Faced with such pain we can be tempted to stop speaking the truth; for instance, we might avoid saying things like 'marriage is forever'. But when we do this we only undermine our capacity to live the truth. We rob married people of encouragement, we rob our children of inspiration, and we fail to recognize the enormity of a divorced person's loss. Instead of diluting our Catholic beliefs, let us courageously SPEAK them with love and sensitivity; let us gently LISTEN to each other's experience of joy, loss, hope, loneliness and REACH OUT with healing hands.**

## Families have a vital role in protecting human life.

**Against the pessimism of anti-life attitudes that cast a shadow over the world, families are called to say 'YES' to life.**

**It is through the supportive, practical love of families that the Church can most effectively express its conviction:**

**'...that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a splendid gift of God's goodness... In each human life she sees the splendour of that 'YES', that 'Amen', who is Christ himself. To the "No" which assails and afflicts the world, she replies with this living "Yes"' (FC, 30).**

Think/Talk/Act: Describe a family whom you admire for the way its members live this 'Yes!' to life. In a letter or phone call, communicate your admiration.

# Family:

## first & vital cell of society

### 3. Families participate in the development of society

(FC, 43-44)

In a society that is becoming increasingly dehumanized by its glorification of material and technological power, families can offer an essential humanizing and personalizing influence. In a family, one's value as a person is not determined by salary, status, age or talents. Rather, a family says to each member: *We love you simply for who you are: you belong to us.*

By virtue of their lifestyle of mutual giving and receiving, families are a potent force in society. Since a lack of love is at the root of so many social ills, the world's future depends heavily on the strength and quality of family life.

Through practical hospitality and service among their neighbours, families have an enormous contribution to make to social justice and development. In turn, the State must recognise that *'the family is a society in its own original right...The State*

***'Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships'*** (FC, 64).

• What lessons from family life can we apply to the way our parish/diocese operates?

*cannot and must not take away from families the functions that they can just as well perform on their own or in free associations; instead it must positively favour and encourage as far as possible initiative by families'* (FC, 45).

### 4. Families share in the life and mission of the Church.

Just as we refer to Jesus as 'prophet, priest and king', so is the Christian family called to be:

#### (i) Prophetic

The witness of a Christian family is a 'luminous sign' to its neighbours. Families have a mission to speak and share their lived faith with enthusiasm and conviction. (see FC, 51-54)

#### (ii) Sacred

How does a family stay open to God? Some tips in this section include family prayer (e.g., grace before meals, reading the scriptures), a spirit of forgiveness, drawing strength from the sacraments, fostering a love for the mother of Jesus. (see FC, 55-62)

***'For those who have no natural family the doors of the great family which is the Church...must be opened even wider. No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone...'*** (FC, 85).

The credibility of the above statement rests on the hospitality of our own hearts and homes. In what ways has your (i) family (ii) parish offered somebody 'a place to call home'?

### Healing love

*'In my neighbourhood lives a couple with three adopted children. The children all suffered abuse at their original homes. One child had been so emotionally damaged that his speech was impaired. For a long time he hardly spoke. Thankfully, his adoptive parents have given him a lifegiving home. With all the love lavished upon him, a bond of trust is strengthening and his speech is returning.'* (CA)

#### (iii) Outreaching

The family's mission as 'a community of service' extends beyond itself to the wider community. Families are called to exercise their social conscience as a natural expression of the Christ-like laws of service and justice at work in their homes. (see FC, 63-64)

### Conclusion

*Familiaris Consortio* concludes with a reminder about the power of family love to change the world. The three year public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth did not arise out of the blue. It was in the hidden and uncelebrated years of family life—growing up in the home of Joseph and Mary—that the foundations of his ministry were laid. By reflecting on the impact of the Holy Family in history, may we have hope in the love which lies 'hidden' in our own families and its bearing on the future of the world. With John Paul II we pray, *'May each Christian family become a "little church" in which the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life'* (FC, 86).



# Ten ways to Grow closer to Mary

**Why should we want to grow closer to Mary, the mother Jesus? Because she draws us closer to Christ and deeper into the heart of the Church. Mary is a member of our faith family who holds a unique place in the story of salvation. Here are ten ways to grow in appreciation of her amazing Spirit-led vocation as Mother of God and Mother of the Church.**

## 1. Learn from others

Do you know someone with a healthy, vibrant love for Mary? Spend time with this person and allow his/her love for Mary to influence your own faith perspective.

## 2. Read a good book

Rediscover Mary through the eyes of contemporary scholarship. Find out what the reputable theologians are saying about Mary and her relevance to the world today. Check out a good Catholic bookshop or contact your nearest Catholic adult education centre.

## 3. Gaze upon an icon

The history of Christian art includes striking icons of Mary that draw the viewer to contemplate the Christian mystery. Pray before a Marian icon and allow the Holy Spirit to 'speak' to you through the image. Adorn your home with an icon or statue of Mary.

## 4. Teach your children

Teach your children about Mary: who she was, what she did, why the Church honours her today. You may need to do some homework yourself, but that's OK. We learn best when we teach others.\

## 5. Pray with Mary

The Church's tradition contains many beautiful Marian prayers and images, not least the rosary to which has been added five new mysteries (the 'mysteries of light'). Incorporate some of these riches into your prayer life.

## 6. Be open to Marian charisms

The Church is home to numerous religious congregations and groups who profess a special love for Mary. Call upon such people to share with you their Marian charism and any resources and publications that might be available through their networks.

## 7. Be formed through song

Music and song are a wonderful medium for touching hearts. Obtain a CD of Marian hymns—traditional or contemporary—or find them in your parish hymn book or on the net. Introduce these musical prayers to your home and your prayer life.

## 8. Celebrate her feast days

Take note of the Marian solemnities and feast days which pepper the Church's calendar (e.g. Mary, Mother of God; the Immaculate Conception; the

Assumption). Take time to reflect on the meaning of these celebrations and the way they highlight the various dimensions of the mystery of faith.

## 9. Follow her story in the scriptures

Mary, the Jewish mother of Jesus, appears in the bible at significant points in the unfolding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection: at his conception and birth, in the temple, his journey to manhood, at Cana, at Calvary, at the birth of the Church at Pentecost... Allow Mary to enfold you in her relationship with Jesus by meditating on the relevant scripture passages.

## 10. Draw close to the saints

The great saints of the Church had a deep love for Mary. When praying with or reading about a particular saint be attentive to his/her love for Mary. Open yourself to their Marian perspective.

### Helpful Hint

Today there is a renewed and growing interest in Mary, even amongst people who are not Catholics. In this post-Vatican II era, the Church today is in a position to rediscover the beauty of its Marian heritage and the powerful role Mary plays in the life of God's people. With confidence pursue your calling to follow Christ, with Mary as your companion.

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