

**Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family
of Jesus, Mary and Joseph**

(Please read and/or make available at all Masses during the
weekend of the 26/27th December 2020)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we continue to celebrate the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ I take this opportunity to wish you a very happy and blessed Christmas.

For many of us the past year has been marked by difficulty and distress. Opportunities for Christmas family gatherings have been very restricted and some of us have unwelcome memories of enduring a pandemic that has yet to run its course.

In his Gospel Saint John reminds us of the necessity of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ - "God so loved the world that He sent His only Son" and that love continues in the midst of human confusion and suffering. Faithful disciples of Christ - the Saints of the Church - are people who witness to the gifts of God even in unpromising times.

All human beings need to meet Christ. In today's Gospel Simeon and Anna encounter the Christ child and his family. They learn what so many have learned over the centuries; personal knowledge of Jesus brings salvation and peace. Simeon and Anna are moved to praise God as they rejoice in the light and glory of Christ.

In his recent Apostolic Letter about the place of Saint Joseph in the Church Pope Francis speaks of the courage of Joseph in the face of adverse events - "The Holy Family had to face concrete problems like every other family, like so many of our migrant brothers and sisters who, today too, risk their lives to escape misfortune and hunger. In this regard, I can consider Saint Joseph the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty".

It may be that words of encouragement and consolation are difficult to hear this Christmas. During the pandemic we have become acutely aware of the fragility of human life but those who believe in Christ look for the gifts of God which are freely given despite the almost impossible circumstances we can find ourselves in.

In his reading today Saint Paul describes what happens when we allow ourselves to be loved by God. Followers of Christ live out compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Christ's love clothes us with rich gifts; joy and gratitude find their home within us. Joseph - a pre-eminent follower of Christ - became a true father to his foster son through these virtues.

As we move forward we can thank God for medical workers and many others who care for us when we are ill and whose work has produced vaccines that hold out so much hope. We can be grateful for these gifts of God but Pope Francis encourages us, above all, to ask for "the grace of graces: our own conversion" during the coming New Year.

The Holy Father ends his letter with a short but powerful prayer:–

*Blessed Joseph, to us too,
Show yourself a father
And guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
And defend us from every evil. Amen*

With continued prayers,
Yours in Christ, Mary and Joseph,

+Alan Williams, sm
Bishop of Brentwood