

HOMILY FOR ADVENT 4C

A couple of years ago you might remember how thousands of people were stranded at Heathrow due to fog. I just wonder was God telling us something. Surely Christmas is more about staying at home with our loved ones than going away. I have a song on CD's entitled 'going home for Christmas' and the singer is really looking forward to being with his family to where, as he says, 'his heart belongs.' Maybe the obsession with going away casts a shadow over family life as it is lived today.

In the gospel Mary can't wait to be with her cousin Elizabeth. The Gospel today says that 'she went as quickly as she could' to visit her. The meeting reinforces elements of family life we seem to be losing today. Sending Christmas cards is one thing but, like Mary and Elizabeth, we also need to meet each other in person from time to time - and I don't mean just at funerals or weddings. I've heard of situations where the husband and wife only see each other during the week as they come and go to work. It's a hello/goodbye routine. I wonder where that leaves the children. The Pope the traditional family get-together for Sunday lunch no longer being as popular as it once was.

If work means that parents are too tired to have quality time with their children, then something needs to give. It's not just about being a biological father or mother. Children and teens need quality time with Mum and Dad so that they can grow in confidence and learn from their parents how to love and be loved. A disturbing newspaper article I read recently said that many teenagers feel more at home with their peers than with the family. Problems in later life often stem from a home life which may leave a lot to be desired.

Mary and Elizabeth were women of unwavering faith. Elizabeth didn't doubt the Angel who said she would conceive even in old age. Mary also took on board the angel's words who said she would conceive without human intervention. They say that everything comes to those who wait. Well the same is true for

those who believe. Mary and Elizabeth bear this out.

Referring to the faith in the family we wholeheartedly commend those parents who, Sunday after Sunday, bring their children here to Mass. At Sunday Mass their faith in God is strengthened and their sense of Christian community is boosted. It is very worrying, however, that after a year or two into secondary school, a lot of those same children drop out from Mass. Well done to those who stay put. Remember, Mary was only in her middle teens when she became the mother of God. And yes, she would have got plenty of jibes from her peers - even Joseph felt uneasy about the situation until the angel reassured him. But Mary stood firm. Her faith saw her through all difficulties.

This Christmas, and in the year ahead let us endeavour to live more fully as a family. Elizabeth said to Mary; 'blessed is the fruit of your womb.' May we always see the children as blessings from God and be close to them on their journey to adulthood. May the holy family be our inspiration and guide?