

Feast of the Holy Family (A B C)

Some young Christians were attending an international summer camp. One of the projects set before them was to discuss and explore ideas for spreading the Gospel. The discussion was wide and varied. It included the use of television and radio programmes, newspaper articles, magazine notices and so on. Finally, when they were out of ideas, an African girl stood up and gave her opinion: 'In my country, when we think that a pagan village is ready for Christianity, we don't send books and missionaries. We send them a good Christian family. The family's example is a more powerful proclamation of the gospel than all the books in the world.'

Soon after celebrating the Birth of Jesus, it is only fitting that we celebrate the Feast of the Holy family. Jesus, like all mortals, needed the warmth, security and closeness of a family unit to grow and develop as a fully integrated person.

From today's reading Mary and Joseph had pressures imposed on them from the outset. For a start they seemed to be constantly on the move. I was reading recently that its 93 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. For a expectant woman, that journey would have been very hazardous. And then, of course, the long trek to Egypt with the baby would have been even more precarious. But Mary and Joseph put God first in their lives and not their own convenience.

Today's Reading says that Mary, Joseph and Jesus settled down in a town called Nazareth. Children thrive best if they grow up in a settled secure environment. Instability in family life can lead to its breakup. Broken homes fuel childhood worries. It's not helped by the fact that the traditional ties between the immediate and extended family have become rather tenuous these days.

Herod was hell-bent on decimating the Holy Family. He symbolises all those dark forces at work in our society which militate against family stability. Some time back the Holy Father said: 'Those who undermine the fundamental role of the family cause a deep wound to society which is often impossible to repair'. Referring to life styles which militate against Christian marriage and the family the Pope said: 'The Church opposes legislation that permits so called marriage other than between a man and woman. Also proponents of the 'gender theory', very much in the news these days, do family life no favours when they peddle the false notion that male and female genders are interchangeable and not grounded on the God-given attributes specific to male and female. And again the same Holy Father went on: 'The family based on marriage between a man and woman is a natural and irreplaceable institution and is fundamental towards the common good of every society'.

The term 'dysfunctional family' is often used rather glibly. It seems to refer to them and not us. To a certain extent there are dysfunctional elements in every family. Families with faith, however, will be able to 'ride any storm' when things get difficult. They will rely on the grace of God given through the Sacrament of Marriage.

So, as the New Year approaches, let us dedicate and consecrate our home life to the Lord and through the intercession of Mary and Joseph may family life be constantly renewed in the likeness of the Holy Family whose feast we celebrate today.