

Feast of the Holy Family (C)

A study conducted over a seven-year period at the University of Virginia found that one year after their divorce, 60 per cent of the men and 73 per cent of the women felt they made a mistake by splitting up. Even those who were miserable in their marriages said that if they had tried harder, they might have been able to work out their marital problems and stay together.

Soon after celebrating the Birth of Jesus, it is only fitting that we celebrate the Feast of the Holy family. Jesus needed the warmth and security of a family to grow and develop as a person. It was very distressing news recently about little Arthur and Star. Parental break-up was part of the backdrop to what went heartbreakingly wrong.

From today's reading Mary and Joseph had pressures imposed on them from the outset. For a start they seemed to have been constantly on the move. I discovered recently that it's nearly 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. For a woman with child, that journey would have been very hazardous. And then of course when the baby was born they had to make the long harrowing journey to Egypt. In this context we could spare a thought and a prayer for all those migrant families who are on the move as a result of war or famine or dire economic necessity.

Today's Reading says that Mary, Joseph and Jesus settled down in a town called Nazareth. Families, and especially children, need a settled environment in order to grow and develop as persons. Too much 'chopping and changing' does them no good.

Herod was hell bent on decimating the Holy Family. He symbolises all those forces at work in our society which militate against family cohesion. Some years ago Pope Benedict said: 'Those who undermine the fundamental role of the family cause a deep wound to society which is often impossible to repair'. There are alternate family set-ups today which are far removed from our Christian understanding of marriage and family life as taught by the Church from the beginning.

The Holy Father goes on: "The family based on marriage (not living together) between a man and woman is a natural and irreplaceable institution and is fundamental towards the common good of every society. Having said that there is no such thing as the flawless family just as there no such thing as the perfect priesthood.

To a certain extent because of sin there are anomalies in every family. Families with faith, however, will be able to 'weather the storm' when things go a bit awry for them. They will rely on the grace of God which will help them pull together in good times and bad. The holy family had their share of difficulties but their faithfulness in carrying out the will of God was their prime concern. Let it be ours too.

So, as the New Year approaches, let us dedicate and consecrate our home life to the Lord and through the intercession of Jesus, Mary and Joseph may family solidarity be constantly renewed and strengthened