

Feast of the Holy Family (B)

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 in the world. The discussion was wide and varied. It included the use of television and radio programmes, newspaper articles, notices in magazines 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 person.

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 was reading recently that its 93 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. For a pregnant woman, that journey would have been very hazardous. And then, of course, the long trek to Egypt with the baby would have been frightening. Because of their experience, the Holy Family can identify and be close to all those migrant families today 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. In today's 'nuclear' family the traditional ties between the immediate and extended family have become rather tenuous. This is a fact of modern living but it's not making family life any easier. Families split by divorce also fuel childhood worries.

Herod was hell bent on decimating the Holy Family. He symbolises all those dark forces at work in our society which militate against family solidarity. Recently 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 undercut marriage and the family he says: 'The Church opposes legislation that

permits same sex 'marriage' or gives legal status to co-habiting couples'. Also proponents of the 'gender theory' do family life no favours at all when they peddle the misleading notion that male and female roles are interchangeable at will and not based on the God-given attributes specific to men and women. And again he says: '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 'weather the 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 unity be constantly renewed and supported.