

Holy Family (A)

29<sup>th</sup> December 2013

'The challenges of the Holy Family'

Eccl 3: He who fears the Lord respects his parents. Ps 127: Your wife like a fruitful vine in the heart of your house Col 3: Family life in the Lord  
Mt 2:13–15,19–23: *escape into Egypt!*

At Christmas we might often gaze at the Christmas Crib, in its rustic simplicity and its nostalgic peacefulness — it's a familiar scene for us, and we look forward to having our Crib up each Christmas, and to praying at it, and taking our children to see the baby Jesus there.

But, if we think about it, the Crib scene hides a huge amount of suffering and stress for the Holy Family. There is, of course, the fact that Jesus was born in a grimy cattle shed, since there was no proper accommodation available. This must have been terribly distressing for Mary & Joseph — the newborn Christ-child had nowhere to be laid but the animal trough, the manger.

But, as we hear today in the Gospel, there were more stresses and worries to follow. King Herod the Great hears from the Magi that some sort of a 'new born King' has arrived on the scene — perhaps the Messiah! And this gets him worried, and he sets out to eliminate any possible

rival. Joseph and Mary have to flee the coming genocide. They become refugees, fleeing their own country and crossing the border, out of Herod's jurisdiction. What could be more terrifying, than to have to escape from your country just to save your life? This is the reality for Jesus, Mary & Joseph. It is also the reality for millions of people alive today, fleeing fighting and atrocity. Two million, at least, have left their homes in Syria alone, according to the Red Cross; and 1 million of them are children. Jesus, the Son of God, shared in these horrors even as an infant, protected by the love and faith of Mary & Joseph. Jesus's upbringing was not insulated from the sufferings of life; the Holy Family lived in the real world!

No wonder, then, that after the horrors of the threats from Herod the Great, there followed all those ordinary years of Jesus's hidden life: 30 years in the family home at Nazareth in which Jesus's true nature as Son of God was, effectively, kept quiet. Our Lady knew that her Son was truly of divine origin; and yet it was also part of God's plan that all those years should be spent in the home and in the

simple workshop, the carpentry trade. Jesus did not shun family life, nor manual labour: he spent years and years in these settings. We should learn from this that perfect holiness can be sought in the everyday settings of our lives. The Most Holy Son of God existed all those years within the holy family home of Nazareth — we, too, can make our family home, and our workplace, a setting for an education in holiness. The daily challenges, the daily sacrifices, finding ways of loving despite the frustrations and annoyances of life; ... It is our faith, and it is the example of Our Lord Himself, that this can all be achieved in the family home. A family that is centred on Jesus: where each member of the family is determined to keep their focus on living to please God ... this will be the recipe for happiness.

Happiness, ultimately, is that one's family is reunited one day with God in heaven: this should be the goal of all our family life, one day to be with the Holy Family in heaven, where, as the family of God, the family of the Church, we shall be able to live the greatest family

life ever, perfect loving, and perfect harmony, with God and with one another. Is our family life aimed at this, at present? Do we have our sights set on heaven? If we are to be focussed on the real purpose of family life, then everything we do as families needs to be done to keep us on the path towards heaven. The greatest, most exalted duty and privilege, of Mothers and Fathers is that they guide their children towards Christ for life, and for eternal life.

As we celebrate today with joy and wonder, that God becomes man, and takes His place in a human family, let's ask that by the blessings of Jesus — and the prayers of Mary & Joseph — our families are lifted closer to God in this coming year. Let us consecrate our family life for 2014 to God, imploring Him by fervent prayer to bless our parish with His grace and protection, against all the evils that threaten us, and the sorrows that can disturb us ...

*[There follows the Prayer of Consecration of the Family to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary ...]*

CONSECRATION OF THE FAMILY TO THE  
SACRED HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY

Most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary,  
united in perfect love,  
as you look upon us with mercy and caring,  
we consecrate our hearts,  
our lives, our family to you.

We know the beautiful example  
of your home in Nazareth was meant to be  
a model for each of our families.

We hope to have,  
with your help,  
the unity and strong, enduring love you gave to one  
another.

May our home be filled with joy.

May sincere affection, patience,  
tolerance and mutual respect be freely given to all.

May our prayers be filled with the needs of others,  
not just ourselves and may we always be close to your  
sacraments.

Bless those who are present,  
as well as those who are absent,  
both the living and the dead;  
may peace be among us  
and when we are tested,  
grant us the Christian acceptance of God's will.  
Keep our family close to your Hearts;  
may your special protection be with us always.  
Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,  
hear our prayer. Amen