

Holy Family (C)

27<sup>th</sup> December 2015

‘Synod on Family Life’

1Sam 1: Hannah gives birth to Samuel.

Ps 83:

1Jn 3: *The Father ... letting us be called God's children*

Lk 2: 41–52: the finding in the Temple

I hope indeed that —for most of you at least — you had the chance of the enjoyment of family company for Christmas Day, and maybe a bit beyond that. I am glad to say that I did, and shall return to spending time with my family this afternoon. The best bit, of course, was that teamed up with my 15-yr-old nephew I won the Christmas-evening quiz-game against the rest of my family! Families are never perfect ... families can frustrate us and have tensions, but still, they can also bring out the best in us. The building block of society, as given by God, is of the family, founded on the marriage of a man & a woman committed in a life-long union of love & service, bringing into the world in a stable loving environment the children which are conceived naturally of the physical loving of that married couple. This is not just a traditional family in the sense that it is old-fashioned, but indeed what is right & natural for mankind, for the stable upbringing of children, and the

healthy moral sense of society. It makes sense, and it's normal, because it's the way God has intended it. Jesus Himself has hallowed the union of marriage & family life by His very presence within the Holy Family, and His 30 years of life & work within the home and trade of Joseph. This is no mere accident of history, implying that all sorts of other lifestyles would be equally valid. No, God created mankind in the two sexes precisely to form that beautiful human bond of marriage and family. As Catholics, we are duty bound in our faith to defend marriage & family life, and to fend off all the recent assaults on it as inappropriate and unhealthy for individuals, especially children.

The recent Synod on Marriage and the Family — held at the Vatican in October, and convened by Pope Francis — touched on many of the issues of the modern family, its joys and sorrows, its delights and challenges. I want to give you a flavour of their final report, delivered into the hands of Pope Francis on the final day of the three-week Synod. The report runs to 94 paragraphs, so obviously I can only quote to you a tiny sample of the

bishops' words, but even so, these words can be encouraging to us, as we try to live our family lives from day to day in goodness and in faith. Near the beginning of the report, the bishops say:

We thank the Lord for the great number of Christian families who generously and faithfully respond to their vocation and mission, despite the many obstacles, misunderstandings and trials. These families need the encouragement of the entire Church, who, together with her Lord and supported by the action of the Spirit, knows that she has a word of truth and hope to address to all mankind. Pope Francis recalled this in opening the final phase of this synodal journey dedicated to the family: "God did not create us to live in sorrow or to be alone. He made men and women for happiness, to share their journey with someone who complements them. (n.1).

Even amidst joys and trials, the family is the primary and fundamental "school of humanity." Despite signs of a crisis, in various contexts, in the institution of the family, the desire to form a family remains vibrant among the younger generations. The Church, expert in humanity and true to her mission, announces with deep conviction the "Gospel of the Family," which she received as revealed by Jesus Christ and constantly taught by the Fathers, the masters in spirituality and the Church's Magisterium. In the course of the Church's life, the family has assumed special significance: "So great was his love that he [God] began to walk with mankind, he began to walk alongside his people, until the right time came and then he gave the greatest demonstration of love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? To a palace, to a city, to an office building? He sent him to a family. God came into the world in a family. And he could do this because that family was a family with a heart open to love, a family whose doors were open." (n. 2).

And, finally, converging with the themes of this 'Year of Mercy' I quote a later section of the report:

The great values of marriage and the Christian family are a response to the search inherent in human existence, even at a time characterized by individualism and hedonism. People ought to be received with understanding and sensitivity to their real-life situations and to learn how to continue their search for meaning in life. Faith inspires a desire for God and to feel fully part of the Church, even in those who are experiencing failure or are in very difficult situations. The Christian message always contains the reality and dynamics of mercy and truth, which converge in Christ: "The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident" (*MV*, 12). In formation for conjugal and family life, pastoral care is to take into account the diversity of real-life situations. ... Everyone needs to be understood, bearing in mind that situations far from the life of the Church are not always desired; oftentimes, they are created, and, at times, simply endured. From the vantage point of faith, no one is excluded: all are loved by God and are important in the Church's pastoral activity. (n.34).

On this feast-day of the Holy Family, let's invite the blessings of the Son of God, and the prayers of His most holy Mother and St Joseph, to assist us spiritually in the daily life of our families in 2016. How much we need that blessing and encouragement! How we would want to imitate the Holy Family, and know happy blessedness!