

Homily – ‘Family Life’ - 26th December 2021

To the secular, pagan world this is Boxing Day, whether that be exchanging boxes or hopefully not boxing each other’s ears in the family. To the Catholic World this is much more beautifully calls The Feast of the Holy Family, the first Sunday after Christmas. To seek out in the Nativity the child Jesus cherished and loved by Mary and Joseph. We are blessed that the Catholic Primary School in Winchburgh is named after the Holy Family – What a perfect model for children to learn from in their growth in faith. ‘The Family’ is what defines us from childhood for the rest of our lives.

As it says in the Catechism, ‘The Family is the original ‘cell’ of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life’.

‘The Family is the community in which from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God; and again, ‘Civil authority should consider it a grave duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality’

I have always believed from my earliest days as a priest, that faithful and loving, close families are the bedrock of any parish. In fact, in America and Southern Europe, a parish is counted not on individuals but the members of the family.

As we see from the Gospel today, Mary and Joseph, are a committed Jewish Family, they say their prayers, love their child and seek to fulfil all the religious rituals and traditions of religious life, centred on the Temple. It should be noted that Jesus, the Son of God, despite his Divinity, lives as a child under the authority of Mary and Joseph. Remember the fourth commandment is to honour your Father and Mother.

When I was a boy, you never questioned the judgement of my dad; he didn’t speak a lot, but when he spoke, he spoke with authority; our mum was such a loving caring maternal presence, that you wouldn’t wish to offend her, though you may moan at the time, she told you to go back upstairs and put on a decent shirt.

The structures and workings of the family home have been hewn or carved out of the rock of humanity over thousands of years; so we play around with them at our peril.

As Leo Tolstoy, famous Russian author, once wrote, ‘all happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way’.

When we decide to break with traditional conventions or choose to ignore moral definitions of Christian values, then we put family life on a shaky peg.

When we don’t pray together as a family, when we lapse from the Catholic faith, when we avoid commitments, and seek sexual fulfilment outside our marriage, when we only want what we can get out of a family, when we put our work before our family, when we become very materialistic or selfish, then the structure of the family starts to fall apart.

Our present culture, if you can call it a culture, and the political and media ‘circus’ that goes with it, doesn’t acknowledge or defend truly the ‘nuclear family’. Husbands and wives are both expected to work – to pay a mortgage, - babies in arms are put into childcare, - there is little or no time for a family meal, and teenagers are glued to their phones. Elderly grandparents are often expected to be childminders, and then when they become too much of a handful are out into nursing homes.

The message today of the Feast of the Holy Family is build your family on faith, children honour and obey your parents, parents be devoted to your children, don't drive them to distraction, and don't build their lives on secular values exposed in Coronation Street, Emmerdale and River City.

Keep the Faith, come to Mass as a family. That will be the anchor that will see you through the storms of life.

God Bless all,

Canon Jeremy C Bath