

## Homily on Holy Family

This Sunday's Theme: Family Life. Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The feast of the Holy Family is the natural continuation of the Christmas Season. All the scripture readings of today reflect on aspects of family including the duties and blessings that come about as a result of the faithful living of family life. "The first thing that a person finds in life and the last to which they hold out their hand, and the most precious thing that they possess, even if they do not realize it, is family life." (Blessed Adolph Kolping). In the gospels Jesus' family life is hardly described. Like all of us family life would have been a big influence in his life. Because of its importance, the Church has always placed a great value on family. Without doubt it's needed today to promote the authority and responsibility of parents, the obedience of their children, family dialogue and solidarity. Without these values the family fails. But not just any family responds to the demands of God's reign set forth by Jesus. There are families open to the service of society, and those who are selfish, withdrawn into themselves. There are authoritarian families, and ones where they learn to dialogue. Families who train in selfishness, and families who teach solidarity. A new reality now is that family life now very varied: divorced and separated parents, gay parents, widowed parents; while caring for all, the church proposes the family of mother and father where possible as the ideal. We need to be aware of the stresses of family life and to understand them. No matter what there are stresses in family life – the sacrament of marriage promises the help of God and the community. The church encourages family prayer, like visiting the crib with children at Christmas, and making the most of religious occasions in the family.

The gospel today is about the life of Jesus growing in humanity and wisdom. He was brought to the temple; Mary and Joseph taught him to pray. There is a special presence of God in the family: in close love God is present. In all the aspects of family life. God isn't very fussy where He lives and moves and has his being- sometimes it's even in a wonderfully imperfect family! What holds families together also in times of difficulty is love and forgiveness. It is love which triumphs in the end, even if sometimes it may have to take the form of "tough love" and honest talking. When discipline needs to be imposed, if it is not given in love it is rejected as abuse. If ever our families fail in any way, it is because of a lack of love on someone's part. Whenever families are successful, it is because they are places where love is highly prized. A major threat facing families nowadays is simply that we don't spend enough time together. We are so busy working, socialising, on our iPads and androids, or watching TV that we have less and less time to talk to each other. In an audience, Pope Paul VI told how one day, when he was Archbishop of Milan, he went out on parish visitation. During the course of the visitation he found an old woman living alone. "How are you?" he asked her. "Not bad," she answered. "I have enough food, and I'm not suffering from the cold." "You must be reasonably happy then?" he said. "No, I'm not," she said as she started to cry. "You see, my son and daughter-in-law never come to see me. I'm dying of loneliness." Afterwards he was haunted by the phrase "I'm dying of loneliness." And the Pope concluded: "Food and warmth are not enough in themselves. People need something more. They need our presence, our time, our love. They need to be touched, to be reassured that they are not forgotten." Just as the holy family survived all its crises through their love for each other and their faith in God, let us pray during this Mass that our families will deal with their difficulties and hold together through love for each other and faith in God.