

28 December 2012

Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

During my recent visit to Pakistan, I met a man, a Hindu, who was planning to leave Pakistan to live in India. He was very fearful for the safety and wellbeing of his family due to the frequent outbreaks of violence in Karachi. He knew he was taking a risk, because though he had somewhere to live in India, he had no guarantee of employment. However, the risk of staying in Karachi was greater than being unable financially to support his family. He told me that in these difficult times the strong bonds of love the family have for one another gives them strength.

His story reminded me of the journey Joseph took with Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the violence of Herod. Still today, many families have to leave their homeland and become refugees. Often this is through no fault of their own. They are tragic victims of other peoples greed for power or material gain. I ask you to remember those in war torn countries, especially Syria and other Middle Eastern countries where there is unrest.

Today's feast of the Holy Family reminds us of the importance of family life for the wellbeing of society. It is also a reminder of the struggles and challenges which families have to face, especially at a time of financial austerity. We may not have to face the reality of physical violence, but there are many families who are experiencing the stress of economic hardship. What enables them and all of us to live through these hardships and what gives us hope, is the reality of loving relationships. Where there is love there is life. In the Christmas season as we give presents to one another, the greatest gift we can give is the gift of our love.

Pope Benedict often reminds us that our love must be a reality and not mere words. If the message of Christ in all its richness finds a home in us, then our parish communities will be welcoming and supportive to all who are in need. Our parishes will not only be life giving to all who belong to them, but also a sign of hope for the wider community. Once again, people should be able to say "See how they love one another", echoing a description given to the early Church.

In this Year of Faith our acts of love and concern for one another are a means to deepen our faith. To come closer to Jesus Christ is to grow in faith and love and have hope in our lives. He is the way to life and to truth. He is the one who draws us closer to God our Father and reconciles us to one another. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes a sign of communion with God and a sign and instrument of unity among all people.

From visiting parishes and schools, I know there are many activities which show our concern for others both within our own country and abroad. I believe such acts lead to a renewal of faith within our communities because it means we are looking outward - broadening our horizons and deepening our understanding of what it means to be the Church for the world. As Jesus gave his life for all, so are his disciples called to do the same. He is the saviour of the world. We are called to be a sign of this.

As we continue to celebrate the Christmas season, I wish you all a holy and peaceful time. May the peace of Christ proclaimed by the angels, be a reality in our family life - whether the immediate family, the family of the Church or the family of mankind.

With my best wishes and prayers

Rt Rev Declan Lang
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and/or made available in all Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese on the Feast of the Holy Family, 29/30 December 2012.