



PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY
27th and 28th December 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Feast of the Holy Family, which we celebrate on the first Sunday after Christmas Day, is very much at the heart of Christmas. This year it is also the day on which bishops all over the world gather in their cathedrals with the faithful, solemnly to close the Holy Year of Jubilee, which was opened exactly one year ago on this Feast in 2024.

The Jubilee invited us to become 'Pilgrims of Hope' and it has been a year when the virtue of Hope has been needed so much within our world. The lives of families and individuals have been, and are being, devastated in so many countries by wars, acts of violence and hatred, civil unrest and social discord, political oppression and international tensions. The light and hope which the birth of the Christ Child brought two thousand years ago is still so desperately needed by us today.

Just a couple of days ago, we contemplated the image of the Holy Family in the stable of Bethlehem and the adoration of the shepherds that first Christmas night. Today, we contemplate the image of the Holy Family on the sorrowful road of exile, seeking refuge in Egypt.

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem brought into our world a unique and exceptional family in the history of humankind. In this family, the Son of God, the true light and hope of the world, was conceived and born of the Virgin Mother Mary and entrusted to the fatherly care of Joseph. In their loving embrace, the eternal and transcendent Word of God was born in time and flesh. By their faithful obedience to God's Word, He was nurtured as a boy and grew to manhood.

In the gospel for today from St Matthew's account, we see the Holy Family afraid and fleeing into exile in Egypt. The family of Jesus Christ Himself is seen here to be frightened and vulnerable and so has fled to safety in a faraway land. For the Jewish people at the time of Jesus, Egypt was a symbol of enslavement and oppression, a remembrance of a time of servitude and suffering. This gospel account therefore contains a deep mystery; that the terrifying experiences which many families face in our world today, like those of the Holy Family, can be overcome if members of the family can find a place to live in peace where they can be united in their faith and trust in God.

Pope St Paul VI taught that the Holy Family of Nazareth is a “school” where we learn the true science of life and a higher wisdom of divine truths. It is in the school of the Holy Family, he said, where “*we learn to observe, to listen, to meditate, and to penetrate the profound and mysterious meaning of that simple, humble, and lovely manifestation of the Son of God. And perhaps we learn almost imperceptibly to imitate Him. Here we learn the method by which we can come to understand Christ.*” May the Holy Family teach us, he wrote, “*the meaning of family life, its harmony of love, its simplicity and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character; may it teach us how sweet and irreplaceable is its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role on the social plane*”.ⁱ

In today’s sacred liturgy, therefore, the Church presents before the eyes of all families the model for the holiness of every human family. The Church teaches us that “*The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God himself*”.ⁱⁱ That mission is rooted in the vocation given to the Holy Family by God, to bring His loving presence into the world. This is why, despite the problems that all families face, the Church has always promoted and encouraged the preservation of family life amongst the faithful in our communities.

Not all families look like the Holy Family; but, at the centre of every family where its members are loved and nurtured, the needs and sorrows of each person are borne together, and their joys and hopes are shared. As we heard in St Paul’s letter to the Colossians, when family life is lived in the Lord, we find “*compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*”; people bear “*with one another and, if one has a complaint against another*” they forgive each other. Love is what “*binds everything together in perfect harmony*”, and it is the hearts of those who are ruled by the “*peace of Christ*” which live as one.

Of all the ways that God might have chosen to communicate the gift of salvation, He chose to do it through the bonds of family. On this Feast of the Holy Family, and at the conclusion of this Holy Year of Jubilee, let us ask Almighty God to bless all our families and to grant us the grace we need to continue our pilgrimage of life together in the light and hope given to us in the birth of His Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on 19th December 2025 and appointed to be read in the churches and chapels of the Diocese at all Sunday Masses on 27th and 28th December 2025, the Feast of the Holy Family.

ⁱ Pope St Paul VI, Address at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, 1964

ⁱⁱ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, §11, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, Second Vatican Council