

**A PASTORAL LETTER  
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER  
FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY**



**Appointed to be read aloud at all weekend Public Masses in the  
Diocese of Lancaster on the weekend of 26/27 December 2015**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This Sunday the Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth. It was within the family home of Mary and Joseph that the Son of God chose to be born. God entrusted his Son to the care and protection of these two devout and committed parents, who would bring Him up in their ancestral Jewish faith and so play their part in giving the world its Saviour.

As we know from the gospel stories and which we profess in our Creed, the child Jesus was uniquely conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, yet He was also fully human and needed all the protection and support of any new-born infant, which he received from Mary his mother and foster-father Joseph. We should not however imagine that the Holy Family were spared the trials and difficulties that all families have to face in the course of their life.

The material surroundings of a stable where the child was born was hardly an ideal beginning for the Holy Family, and the mortal threat from the ruthless King Herod meant that the family had to rise in the night and flee to Egypt, becoming refugees or displaced people in that country. We can only guess at the resulting confusion and anxiety of Mary and Joseph, and their deep concern for the very special child entrusted to them. And as we have just heard in the gospel, they also suffered the pain of losing Him for three days in Jerusalem during the feast of the Passover when He was twelve years of age. Much later, His mother, faithful to the end, had to endure witnessing her Son die on the cross.

The Holy Family therefore fully experienced what we call the 'ups and downs' of life, but they remained together and persevered in the vocation God gave them. The Church today sets the Holy Family before us as an inspiration and encouragement to each one of us to be faithful in our own vocation, whatever form that may take. Let us pray today for all families, in particular those who

are finding life difficult for whatever reason. They should remember that Christ walks alongside them and never deserts those He loves. Almighty God is never far from families!

Here in the Diocese of Lancaster our thoughts and our prayers continue to reach out to all families affected by the recent devastating floods and their aftermath. While assisting them practically as best we can, we commend them to the protection and intercession of Mary and Joseph, and the divine Son of God, for all the courage and determination they will need in facing the future.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you and your families every blessing on this lovely feast of the Holy Family, and promise you a place in my prayers for the New Year which will shortly be upon us.

Assuring you of my prayers, and with a blessing,

Yours sincerely,

+ *Michael Campbell OSA*

✠ Michael G Campbell OSA  
**Bishop of Lancaster**