

## Homily    Christmas 1    Holy Family

### Mass Readings:

No matter what journeys we take up in life, how far we travel, there is one journey that is more important than any other, the journey of the heart. By that I don't mean a sentimental journey, quite the opposite, but a courageous journey, the sort of journey Paul refers to in his letter to the Colossians. Before we go anywhere, on any type of journey, we usually look outside to see what to wear, if it's dry or wet, warm or cold. We dress accordingly. Even so, before we go out to engage with people Paul tells us we should dress accordingly. Clothe yourselves, he says, in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience, forgiveness and, of course, love. That, as we all know too well, requires bravery. Let the message of Christ find a home in you – in your heart. That requires courage.

Where do we learn that? There is one place we must learn it first. We can learn it elsewhere later of course but the first place, the best place to learn the journey of the heart, to live from the heart, to discover how to love, is the home. That doesn't mean that the home and the family have to be perfect places, often they aren't, but they are the first place, the principal place, where love and forgiveness and patience are the priority. The family is the place where we learn that what is most important is who we are, not what we do. We learn who to be and who to become at home. If we don't learn at home the simple virtues that Paul refers to, and the family is the school where we first learn them, then it doesn't matter what we do later, how high we climb, how much we earn, we will go nowhere.

The family isn't the place primarily where we learn how to achieve in life, but who to become in life – how to live from within, from the heart, from the spirit, from that inner depth where Christ and His love live in us. We form relationships, which are the core of society, not by achieving functions but by becoming mature persons, persons who relate on a basis of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love. All these teach us community. All these teach us how to relate to others and care for others and our world. The home is where we must first learn them.

The family is so sacred because there we discover we are valued and loved simply for who we are, not for how we measure up. In the family we realise that our identity as persons is rooted in being, not in doing, or performing. Without the family we just become isolated individuals, striving for identity through performance, competition, acquisition and aggression. What we do is a consequence of who we are, not the other way round. There are enough people who are full of information and skills, yet without much idea of who they are or why they are here, or where they are going.

Family, marriage, friendship has to be worked at, but there is no greater work. In the end it doesn't matter how effective our weapons systems are, or how efficient our national defence is or how healthy the economy is. What matters is who we are as persons. If we are strong and loving as people, with a sense of care and love for each other then we can survive anything. It is the home that must first teach us these things. But if there is nothing at home, if there is no family then no matter how rich or powerful we are, we'll crumble. Of course, the immediate family can be a painful place. I know that, my parents separated when I was eight, and before their going their different ways it wasn't easy. Sometimes we have to find family elsewhere, and there is a sense of family of course given by community, through friendship, through the Church of course. However, the earliest of our human experiences of love and acceptance and care are the most important in life and, for them to be healthy and secure, home life and family life there must be supported and nourished and cherished as widely and as richly as possible.

When you read and study Polish history you discover that when under such brutal attack from her neighbours, Poland survived, not because of her weapons, because she didn't have very many, and not because of her financial wealth because she didn't have much of that either. Poland survived because of her culture, and the preservation of her culture, language, tradition, faith, family, and the inner resources of her courageous people. This is true of a number of other countries too of course. Pope John Paul often spoke of this, the importance of culture. We can learn many things from those who visit us from other places.

So much of who Jesus was in His humanity He received at home in Nazareth. *"He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority."* So much of our psychological and emotional health and maturity and integration of personality emerges out of what went on in our early years. Mary and Joseph were obviously crucial to Jesus' early years. So much of His teaching through the parables and other stories He told was built on

what He saw and heard and felt at home with Mary and Joseph. His obvious very strong masculine character totally together with His huge personal warmth and sensitivity to both men and women was rooted in the quality and depth of relationship He obviously had with Joseph and Mary, and all the others who made up family life in the village. Joseph may not speak many words in the gospel text, in fact he says nothing, but in Jesus strength of character and identity, on a purely human level, Joseph's influence was paramount. We know of Jesus' divine origin and status of course. His humanity, and all that goes with being human though, He assumed for us. In His humanity as a little boy Joseph would have been His daddy. Joseph's influence would have been essential. Jesus' wisdom and stature as a man that the gospel refers to He learnt at home initially, as all people do, firstly from Mum and Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, Uncle, Auntie, Cousins. In this Jesus was no different to you and I.

There is no more important job in the world than being a Mum or a Dad, a wife or a husband. No job is more important. With you doing your job as a parent and a spouse as best you can we will survive anything. May the Holy Family bless, guard and protect you and your families today, through the coming year, and always. Amen