



DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Yesterday, as the family of the Church, we celebrated the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. With the shepherds we came to see the baby who is the Saviour of the world, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This child is truly God and truly human. He is the Word of God made flesh enabling the conversation to happen between God, humanity and the whole of creation.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family – Joseph, Mary and Jesus. We know the importance of family life and how it can shape the rest of our lives for better or for worse. In the family hopefully we first experience love and forgiveness. We learn to give way to one another and be generous in our relationships both within the nuclear family and the wider community. Breakdown in family life leaves a deep hurt within family members. At such time people need the support and friendship of others.

In today's Gospel we listen to the story of when Joseph, Mary and Jesus were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover. This journey is a reminder to all that we are a pilgrim people. Our homeland is in Heaven. On the journey we hear the call by Jesus to holiness, to live a life based upon the person of Jesus who by the power of the Holy Spirit leads us to the Father. Holiness is a call to be compassionate as our heavenly Father is compassionate especially to those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. We need to listen to their voices because they can often be the voice of Christ challenging us to change our lifestyle. Pope Francis recently called us to hear the voice of refugees and asylum seekers who are our brother and sisters in need. They have often experienced traumatic events which have filled them with fear and a distrust about the motives of others. The exploitation of these people and the drowning of some of them as they seek to come to the United Kingdom should concern us all. We should not turn a blind eye to their plight.

Pope Francis has invited us as members of the family of the Church to participate in a process of preparing for the Synod in Rome in 2023. The Synod is about synodality, of walking together along the way of Jesus. The Pope has called us to listen to God through the Scriptures and the

Sacraments; to listen to one another as members of the Church; to listen to the wider community with its needs and hopes and to become a Church that preaches and lives the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The wish of God is to have conversation with all humanity not just the few. At Christmas we celebrate the Word of God who enables us to be at peace within ourselves and with the whole of creation of which we are part.

We are called to be a people of Communion, Participation and Mission. We are to grow in our union with Christ and with one another as members of a Universal Church. We are called to participate in the work of Christ giving the world reasons for hoping and living. We are challenged not to be a Church for ourselves but a Church which is of service to all.

During the new year there will be the opportunity to meet and listen to one another expressing our hopes for the Church both universal and within our own Diocese. This has been organised through parish delegates by the department for Adult Education and Evangelisation. The voice of the whole Church needs to be heard not just those who come on Sundays to celebrate the Eucharist.

In celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family we are celebrating the truth that we are already the children of God. What we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed to us but then we shall see God face to face and know fully the good purpose for which we were created.

May I wish you many blessings for the new year and pray that it may be a time of peace for the world, a peace that the world cannot give but is given to us through the baby at Bethlehem.

With my best wishes and prayers

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Declan", with a small cross symbol to the left.

Rt Rev Declan Lang
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available in all
Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese
on the Feast of the Holy Family, 25/26 December 2021.
This pastoral letter is also available from our website
cliftondiocese.com