

Right Reverend Christopher Budd
Bishop of Plymouth



PASTORAL LETTER
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY
30 December 2012

Dear Sisters and Brothers

It would be both easy and understandable if we assumed a siege mentality about marriage and family. There are so many items in our society which clash head-on with what the Christian tradition holds dear about these fundamentally important relationships. Tragically, these relationships can go wrong. Some of us have experienced this and we know how difficult it is to pick up the pieces and move on.

Sadly, in responding to the things that can go wrong, our society enshrines in law and regulations elements of the causes of these disasters. Marriage and family relationships really do need strong and clear institutions to support them, while making sure that ways of dealing with breakdown do not become punishment for those who are already its victims. It requires great wisdom and sensitivity to find the right path in these matters.

So what then is this Feast about? What do we celebrate? We celebrate the only thing we can – namely, the presence of God in Christ in a family setting. This is not an over-idealised family, despite the presence in it of the source of all holiness, Jesus, and that of his mother - such an outstanding sign of holiness to all of us - and Joseph, the holy man.

Today's Gospel is a very human story of a child lost and found and the anxiety of his parents. We are invited to note the ultimate resolution of this crisis in the acceptance by all that "I must be busy with my Father's business".

We are called to allow God to be God in our family and marriage relationships. God's business in any family and marriage is that those involved may so experience love that they come to love each other increasingly and that they come to recognise the source of all love, namely God our Father. As St John puts it, "Think of the love that God has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children and that is what we are." (1 John 3.1)

May I make two requests of parents and older children in our families in this Year of Faith and into the future:

- Find time to come together occasionally in prayer in the home. Family prayers are notoriously difficult to organise and have a propensity to dissolve into mirth! However, try it as a family exercise in 2013 and see what happens. It may be just a short reading from scripture, a silence and an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be, or it may be a decade of the Rosary. Whatever you choose as your prayer, try to involve everyone - even the family pet!
- Share faith with each other. Parents may need to take the lead here, but older children may have important questions to address to the faith of the Church and those questions need to be heard and dealt with. If answers do not readily come to hand, do consider discussing the issue within your parish community. We all work in the Lord's vineyard.

A family that has made room for prayer and faith enquiry is most certainly busy about God's work. How about this for a New Year's resolution!

With every good wish and blessing from God in 2013.

✠ Christopher
Bishop of Plymouth

*To be read and made available at all Masses
on 30 December*



YEAR OF FAITH ²⁰¹²/₂₀₁₃