

Homily: Holy Family 27th December 2020

One of the fall-outs of the pandemic has been the lack of families in many cases being unable to get together for Christmas. That has been true for friends as well. I remember an old saying a parishioner years ago had on her kitchen wall ‘Friends are the family you chose for yourself.’

The family is the one we were born into. Of course some of the fall-out from lockdown has families been force to be together much more than usual, and those often in small or cramped conditions, has led to an increase in tensions that for some spill over into abuse and violence. Our home environment is critical for our formation as human beings.

We can tend to idolise the Holy Family as being so different from ours, but a few moments of reflection can soon dispel that view.

Every family has a story, and that is very true of the Holy Family. All the people in our readings today have a family story to tell, some of which we know, some we don’t. And they all one way or another spread across all age ranges. We know Abram was called by God probably in mid- life, and Sarah, at the time childless and worrying as time was passing by. Abraham, our father in faith, responds to God’s call to be the patriarch of a new nation, a people united to God in a covenant of goodness and justice. The birth of Isaac to Sarah is the beginning of this new people God made his own. This covenant God has made for a thousand generations, is celebrated in the Psalm, which calls Abraham’s descendants to remember all that God has done and to celebrate his presence in their midst.

For the writer to the Hebrews, our 2nd reading, the faithfulness of Abraham that enables him not to withhold his beloved son Isaac prefigures God’s giving of his own Son, and raising him from the dead.

As faithful Jews Mary and Joseph meet their obligation to comply with the law taking Jesus into the Temple. This was something any devout Jewish family would have done. There they meet Simeon and Anna, both as it says or implies, getting on in years, both idealised portraits of the faithful remnant of Israel, awaiting the Messiah’s coming. Simeon’s canticle that

we know as Nunc Dimittis, is prayed every night by the Church at Compline, (Night Prayer) just as Zechariah's Benedictus at the birth of his son, John the Baptist is at Lauds (Morning Prayer) as is Mary's Magnificat at Vespers (Evening Prayer).

In Simeon's ominous prophecy the shadow of the cross to come falls upon the Holy Family.

Anna, as an 84 year old widow of many years, in those days considered among the most vulnerable and poor of society.

All those mentioned are a cross section of human life. Babies, parents, spanning different ages, elderly.

What they all had in common was faith in God, a God who was, had been and is with them through life. All of them hearing those so important words, Do not be afraid

May they be a guide and example to all of us, whatever state we are in as we go through the ups and downs of life, and on into 2021