



Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family Pilgrims of Hope

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today is an important moment in the unfolding salvation story of our Church. On Christmas Eve, the St Peter's Basilica Holy Door of grace was thrown open by Pope Francis. We began a Jubilee year. Today, the Feast of the Holy Family, Pope Francis has asked every diocesan bishop to celebrate Holy Mass in his Cathedral. Every Jubilee year is about the mercy our heavenly Father wishes to share with us, especially in the forgiveness of sins. The motto of this particular Jubilee Year is *Pilgrims of Hope*. It is fitting that we should reflect on this theme on this Feast of the Holy Family.

In the Gospel moment we have just shared together, we are immersed into a drama reflected in some way for many within family life today. The Holy Family, along with others, had been to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. Mary and Joseph are a day's journey back to Nazareth. Then they realised something devastating. They had supposed the boy Jesus was somewhere in the midst of the group of Galilean pilgrims. They discovered he is not. And so they return to Jerusalem to search for him. Many parents and grandparents speak of their sense of sorrow when their children and grandchildren choose not to continue with the practise of the faith which has been handed on to them. There is a feeling of profound loss within the family. In a similar vein, others speak of their concerns about the state of things in our society. They feel deeply the loss of Christian faith in a secular society. Faithful disciples of the Lord speak of their sense of loss, when their relationship with the Lord becomes barren and dry. They experience a dark night and this feels uncomfortable. In our lives today then, there are echoes of this Gospel moment and the concern of Mary and Joseph as they search for Jesus.

When they returned to Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph were pilgrims of hope. How could the Mother of God forget what had been revealed to her in the annunciation by the angel? How could Joseph forget what he had heard in his dreams? They walked into the day ahead with trust. And we too are invited to become pilgrims of hope this year. Pope Francis has told us that hope does not disappoint¹. This is because 'hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross'². We too need to remember what

¹ cf *Spes Non Confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025, 1

² *Ibid* 3

has been revealed to us. We recall these mysteries of faith in our celebration of the liturgy and when we ponder the Scriptures. Our hope needs to be constantly fed with the loving words of the Lord. As Jesus taught us, 'Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?'³ Our heavenly Father gives us everything we need for the journey as pilgrims of hope. In a family life, often lived within the immediacy of the moment, we need to remember there is a tomorrow as well as a today⁴. Hope within the life of every disciple, and within family life, begs for patience and the waiting on the Lord exemplified in the lives of Mary and Joseph.

And so we pray for each other. We ask the Lord to open our hearts to the many graces he wishes to give to us in this Jubilee Year. We pray for our families, that the longing and yearning of each heart within our family will be moulded to the love, the faith and the hope of the Holy Family.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

✠ David J Oakley

Bishop of Northampton

Given at Northampton on 3rd December 2024,
The Memorial of St Francis Xavier

and appointed to be read or distributed in all churches and chapels of the Diocese
on the Feast of the Holy Family, 29th December 2024

³ Mt 7.9-10

⁴ cf *Spes Non Confundit* 4