

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,  
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ



**Pastoral Letter for Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph  
31 December 2017**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

I hope that during these last few days you have managed to visit the crib. It's still there, waiting for you to make that visit, especially today, on the Feast of the Holy Family.

Come with me and let's take a look at this new and tiny family, in Bethlehem, a long way from home and in circumstances of real hardship.

See, there is St Joseph, the good and faithful servant, entrusted with Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. He reminds me of my father, whose name was Henry Joseph. He was an unfailing point of stability and wisdom for our family. He gave us a sense of order and purpose. A bit like St Joseph, I think. But I also know, too well, that not every family is so blessed.

Next, look, there is our Blessed Lady, Mary, the mother of Jesus. She gave her body to be the first home of Jesus, who was conceived in her through the direct power of the Holy Spirit.

My mum's name was Mary, too. She gave her entire self to us as a family. I must admit, a little sheepishly, that she did most of the work around the house, especially at Christmas. She made it a time of graciousness, welcome and generosity. That's what mothers do; and not only mothers, of course!

This is the heart of the Holy Family, the heart of family life. In families, loving hands create places of safety and joy, just as God's loving hands hold all creation together, giving every moment its meaning and purpose. The rhythm of every day family life, of food, rest and play, watched over by a loving parent, no matter its simplicity, is a parable of that deeper love, a reflection of God's own work of creation.

I find it most reassuring, in this time of uncertainty and stress, to see how family life continues to create well-springs of selfless love. So much of the true goodness in our society comes by way of the family, so many marvellous young people, so many generous neighbours! And this is true not only of stable family life, but also of families who face their difficulties with faithfulness and courage, and of families who find forgiveness after

a breakdown, or who bear tragedy with dignity and fortitude. Family life is so often our saving grace. As a society we neglect the support of family life at our peril.

Today, let us thank God for the life of our family, whether we are close together or scattered to the four winds; whether we are in harmony with each other, or marked by discord and discontent. Thank God for the grace we have received, the maturity and wisdom into which we are growing in our homes, through joys and trials alike, just as Jesus did in his home in Nazareth (Lk 2:40).

As we approach this New Year and ponder on the resolutions we are going to make, we can do no better than to heed the words of St Paul:

'You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive one another as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts' (Col. 3:12-15).

Now these are resolutions in plenty!

Recently a member of staff at Heathrow said to me how much he admired Pope Francis. 'What difficult journeys the Pope makes!', he exclaimed. Then he added, 'He teaches us all, he teaches the whole world, so clearly by what he does, by his actions!'

May that be said of us, too. In every home, in every family, may our actions speak more eloquently than our words!

May I wish you all a very happy New Year and may God bless you always.

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. To the left of the first letter 'V' is a small cross symbol.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster