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**Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph  
Sunday, 30 December 2018**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

These days of Christmas are a time for going home. Our hearts, like homing pigeons just after their release, turn homeward at this time. We want to spend time 'at home'. Yet those two simple words carry many meanings.

Being 'at home', in its obvious sense, is to be in the circle into which we were born, bringing together the generations of which we are a part. Yet, 'at home' also means celebrating all the love and friendships that sustain us. It includes embracing again the important life-choices we have made, the duties of faithfulness and its graces, too.

This lovely Feast of the Holy Family is a moment for thanking God for the family, the families, to which we belong, be they bonds of flesh and blood, bonds of friendship, or bonds created by freely given commitments, including the promises of religious life. The word 'family', then, is capable of including many different patterns and dimensions of life, and some bring with them the experience of sadness and failure.

Today's Gospel takes us to the rich heart of these experiences. Two young parents, Mary and Joseph, are beside themselves with anxiety at the disappearance of their son, the young Jesus. He has been missing for two days! When eventually they find him, the words they exchange are both familiar and revealing. In a cry echoed by parents throughout the ages, Mary says: 'Why have you done this to us? See how anxious your father and I have been, looking for you!' (Luke 2:48-49). How deep and inescapable are these bonds of family!

In his reply, Jesus seems to defy them: 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know I must be about my Father's business!' (Luke 2:50).

To understand, we must look more closely. Jesus returns home with them and 'lives under their authority'. The inner calling within the boy Jesus has to wait until he comes to an age of human maturity. But Mary knows there is something afoot. In the beautiful words of St Luke, we read that she 'treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19). Their truth is finally revealed to her at the foot of the Cross and in the Upper Room, where the 'business' of the Father is made clear: that in her Son the darkness of this world, the stranglehold of death, is finally overcome.

What do we learn here? We learn that all family love has to be rooted in the soil of God's grace. We learn that the will of our Heavenly Father is the source of the enduring love with which our

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lives are graced. We learn that nurturing, protecting and fostering that love is to 'be about the Father's business'. When we recognise this truth, we make a more clear and definite space in our family life for this Heavenly Father, so that our love may be deeply rooted and blessed. In contrast, a family which, day by day, lives without reference to God, in prayer and action, risks closing itself off from the very source of its love. Then, all the more easily, that love may wither or break under the remorseless pressure of daily living.

Kneeling at the crib can refresh in us an openness to the deepest meaning and source of the family love we treasure. The babe we see in the manger is the Eternal Word of the Father. The source of all love is at the heart of this Holy Family. Here is God, who is love, giving that love to us, knitting that love into our story in a way which changes everything. Mary and Joseph are wrapped in awe because they know that here is something beyond their doing. And that same awe can fill our hearts as we, in our turn, rejoice in the love of our families. It is a precious gift of God, even if it is still marked and shaped by our shortcomings and sins.

This great truth of love, as the creative gift of God, lies at the heart of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The former Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks, speaking in Rome in 2014, expressed this truth so beautifully in these words:

'When a man and woman turn to one another in a bond of faithfulness, God robes them in garments of light, and we come as close as we will ever get to God himself, bringing new life into being, turning the prose of biology into the poetry of human spirit, redeeming the darkness of the world by the radiance of love' (Jonathan Sacks, Rome, November 17, 2014).

May the radiance of the love of your families not only encourage and enlighten you today but also be a source of strength and support for all whom you meet. May your lives bear witness to the radiance of that love for, no matter its measure, it is a great gift of God.

To God we give our joyful praise today. Amen.

Yours devotedly,

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster

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