



*Archdiocese of Southwark*

## **Pastoral Letter for the Solemnity of the Holy Family 2023**

*To be read at all Sunday Masses on Sat 30/Sun 31 December 2023*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

*A Saviour has been born for us who is Christ the Lord! (Lk 2:11)* I am so pleased to be able to greet you with Christmas good wishes - for you and your family and friends - in this holy season of hope. Each year we rejoice in celebrating the changeless truth that God sent his Son into our world because he loves us. More specifically, in the Lord Jesus God loves you, in the reality of your life here and now, in your tears and in your smiles. This is why, individually and together, we can look to the future with confidence.

Dear friends, I pray that something of God's love touches your heart this Christmastime, even if you face challenge or suffering. In Christ, no one is ever alone. God really is with you. Whatever happens, God will never abandon you.

As the family of the Church, within all our relationships, it's so important that we try to make the love of God we have received, something tangible for others. We do this by imitating the example of the Holy Family: through sensitivity, kindness and generosity, and especially, through our faith. A famous song once declared '*love is all around us.*' This is true; but love can only be all around us if, first, it comes from within us. It is God's love in Christ, born into our hearts again this Christmas, which compels us to put love in action. Faith and love are inseparable. We seek to love others in faithfulness to Christ who was born, died, and rose again.

Loving relationship is at the heart of our faith: the loving relationship of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who live eternally as one God in three persons; the loving relationship of the Father who sent his Son to take flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary; the loving relationship of Our Blessed Lady and St Joseph to the Lord Jesus; the loving relationship, through the Holy Spirit, by which we share the gift of

faith as disciples. According to God's plan for humanity, we are created in God's image and likeness for loving relationship. This is shown so beautifully in family life.

It was faith in God, and fidelity to God's word, that enabled Abraham and Sarah to believe God's promise. It was faith in God, and fidelity to God's word, that made Our Lady and St Joseph capable of cooperating so uniquely and beautifully with God's purpose for their lives and our salvation. It is our Catholic faith that gives identity and meaning to the Sacrament of Marriage and to family life as the domestic church. The family, in the closer and wider senses, remains the most important building block of the Church and of society. When the family flourishes, the Church flourishes. When the family flourishes, society flourishes. Catholic faith is intrinsic to our understanding of marriage and family life, supported by our parishes and schools.

I have been privileged over the past year to witness so many inspiring examples of husbands and wives, with their children and extended families, living and celebrating their Catholic faith, passing it on, and making it central to their day-to-day life. We know that every family has its difficulties. Sometimes, sadly, we also know there is breakdown, both in marriage and in family life. To anyone who is wounded by damaged or broken relationships, please know that the Church is your home, a compassionate 'hospital' of healing and mercy. I want to say a very sincere 'thank you' to every family which forms part of our Archdiocese. Thank you for your commitment to your faith and for making your homes holy places where the values and virtues of the Holy Family of Nazareth are put into practice.

Our relationships with each other matter. They matter in the family, in our Church, and in our society and world. It's so necessary that we take time to listen to each other and to walk beside one another as we journey on the way together with Christ in faith. As a child, in his family home with Mary and Joseph, the Lord Jesus grew in maturity. He was filled with wisdom and God's favour was with him. This is our desire for every disciple, for every family, and for our Church in the Archdiocese of Southwark.

As we look to all that 2024 will bring in God's providence, we commit ourselves to fulfilling our mission to share the Gospel of salvation in Christ through words and actions that build relationships in service of a civilisation of faith, love, and peace.

With every blessing for this Christmas Season and the New Year,  
and the assurance of my prayers and gratitude.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ John Wilson

Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark