

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

The shepherds went in haste,  
and found Mary and Joseph and the Infant  
lying in a manger.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, who were pleased to give us  
the shining example of the Holy Family,  
graciously grant that we may imitate them  
in practising the virtues of family life and in the  
bonds of charity,  
and so, in the joy of your house,  
delight one day in eternal rewards.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the  
Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Gn 15:1-6; 21:1-3

A reading from the book of Genesis.

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in  
a vision, 'Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield;  
your reward will be very great.'

'My Lord,' Abram replied 'what do you intend  
to give me? I go childless...' Then Abram said,  
'See, you have given me no descendants; some  
man of my household will be my heir.' And then  
this word of the Lord was spoken to him, 'He  
shall not be your heir; your heir shall be of your  
own flesh and blood.' Then taking him outside  
he said, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars  
if you can. Such will be your descendants' he  
told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who  
counted this as making him justified.  
The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had  
said and did what he had promised. So, Sarah  
conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old  
age, at the time God had promised. Abraham  
named the son born to him Isaac, the son to  
whom Sarah had given birth.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Ps 104:1-6, 8-9

Response:

**He, the Lord, is our God. He remembers his  
covenant for ever.**

1. Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.  
O sing to him, sing his praise;  
tell all his wonderful works. (R.)

2. Be proud of his holy name,  
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.  
Consider the Lord and his strength;  
constantly seek his face. (R.)
3. Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, the judgements he spoke.  
O children of Abraham, his servant,  
O sons of the Jacob he chose. (R.)
4. He remembers his covenant for ever,  
his promise for a thousand generations,  
the covenant he made with Abraham,  
the oath he swore to Isaac. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

A reading from the letters to the Hebrews

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to  
set out for a country that was the inheritance  
given to him and his descendants, and that he  
set out without knowing where he was going.  
It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of  
being past the age, was made able to conceive,  
because she believed that he who had made  
the promise would be faithful to it. Because of  
this, there came from one man, and one who  
was already as good as dead himself, more  
descendants than could be counted, as many  
as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on  
the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the  
test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his  
only son even though the promises had been  
made to him and he had been told: *It is through  
Isaac that your name will be carried on.* He was  
confident that God had the power even to raise  
the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was  
given back Isaac from the dead.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

At various times in the past  
and in various different ways,  
God spoke to our ancestors through the  
prophets;  
but in our own time, the last days,  
he has spoken to us through his Son. Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Lk 2:22-40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Luke

(For shorter form read between ><) Lk 2:22, 39-40

>When the day came for them to be purified as  
laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of  
Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him  
to the Lord, < – observing what stands written in  
the Law of the Lord: *Every first-born male must  
be consecrated to the Lord* – and also to offer  
in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in  
the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two  
young pigeons.

Now in Jerusalem there was a man named  
Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he  
looked forward to Israel's comforting and the  
Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed  
to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see  
death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the  
Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the  
Temple and when the parents brought in the  
child Jesus to do for him what the Law required,  
he took him into his arms and blessed God; and  
he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in  
peace,  
just as you promised.  
because my eyes have seen the salvation

which you have prepared for all the nations  
to see,  
a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory  
of your people Israel.'

As the child's father and mother stood there  
wondering at the things that were being said  
about him, Simeon blessed them and said  
to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is  
destined for the fall and for the rising of many in  
Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and  
a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that  
the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetess also, Anna the  
daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She  
was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over,  
she had been married for seven years before  
becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four  
years old and never left the Temple, serving  
God night and day with fasting and prayer.  
She came by just at that moment and began  
to praise God; and she spoke of the child to  
all who looked forward to the deliverance of  
Jerusalem.

>When they had done everything the Law of  
the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to  
their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child  
grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom;  
and God's favour was with him<

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the  
Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

We offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation,  
humbly asking that,  
through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of  
God and Saint Joseph,  
you may establish our families firmly in your  
grace and your peace.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

**Our God has appeared on the earth and lived  
among us.**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Bring those you refresh with this heavenly  
Sacrament,  
most merciful Father,  
to imitate constantly the example of the Holy  
Family,  
so that, after the trials of this world,  
we may share their company for ever.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

# Sunday Message

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

## THE WORD

Year B • 31 December 2023 • Colour: White • Psalter Week 1

### WOUNDED FAMILIES

LK 2:22-40

I grew up in the 1970s, the eldest of five siblings on a family farm in rural Ireland. I was also lucky. My parents were hard-working and devoted to each other and to us.

I never saw them having an argument, I noticed the casual way they showed affection to each other; I experienced the unconditional love they had for my siblings and me.

In my innocence, I thought that's how most families were. Domestic violence, conflict, marriage break up, physical, sexual or substance abuse - these were outside my frame of reference because I had never encountered them.

So when, as a young priest, I came across cases of dreadful domestic abuse, I was stupefied. I quickly realised that we live in a world of non-perfect families, of people caught up in difficult domestic environments, very often not of their own making. And in the 35 years since my ordination, my own family has experienced its own share of heartbreak. I'm sure all our families have in one way or another.

So much about family life in the past was good - the stability of the family unit, the hard work and sense of duty and commitment to each other of so many parents and children.

But we know that not everything about the past was good. Think of the culture of secrecy and shame that sent young women to Mother and Baby Homes while allowing the men to escape scot-free, the crippling hangups about sex that paralysed so many, the crushing loneliness of those who were LGBTI and dared not admit it.

Think of how marriage was often understood as a legal contract rather than a love commitment; how corporal punishment was acceptable; how the husband had more rights than his wife. It was he who made the marriage proposal, sought her father's permission to marry, put a ring on her finger, symbolising she was now his and would take his name. In many countries, marital rape was protected by law.

Thankfully, the situation has improved. We are more aware today of the complexity of the human condition, that relationships and family life are not always straightforward. Even the best families have their troubles.

In his letter about marriage and the family, *Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), Pope Francis uses three expressions that are helpful to remember today.

The first is 'wounded families.' Families are not perfect, Pope Francis stresses. Try as we might, we are not perfect. We know from hard

experience that the ideal of Christian marriage and family life is hard to live, and people fall out and relationships suffer. Pope Francis calls them "wounded families," and says we must "avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations" and "be attentive to how people experience distress because of their condition."

All families are wounded, and Pope Francis says it's okay to admit it. His letter is not a simple rehash of Church teaching on marriage and sexuality. It acknowledges our broken humanity. Perfection, as individuals or as families, is impossible this side of the grave.

The second expression is 'gradualism.' Families are a work in progress, the pope says. No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; "families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love... All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse." We must always aim at being better - to grow all the time in holiness, patience, compassion, understanding, perfection. The Holy Family itself was a work in progress.

The third expression is 'field hospital.' The Church must be a field hospital that cleans and heals people's wounds. So many families are wounded - members who don't talk to each other, or who hurt each other, members who disappoint those they love, or make decisions that let them down. The family is the primary battlefield where these hurts are experienced. So the family must be the primary field hospital that cleans and heals these wounds. It means a willingness to forgive, to talk, to listen, to spend quality time together, to understand differences, to appreciate one another. Each family must be a field hospital that never allows wounds to fester. ■

### REFLECT

Pope Francis sums up what families need in three words: "A big heart." That's what Jesus, Mary and Joseph had for each other. A big heart. That's what family members must have for each other. A big heart. A big heart toward a loved one whose marriage is in crisis, a big heart towards the sibling captured by addiction, a big heart toward the adolescent struggling with her sexuality or gender identity; a big heart, Francis says, even toward "those who have made a shipwreck of their lives."

A big heart kept the Holy Family together. A big heart will help sustain our families too, whatever their circumstances. ■

### SAY

"Lord, help me to always treat those closest to me with love and respect. Amen."

### LEARN

The feast of the Holy Family was instituted in 1921, and has been celebrated on the first Sunday after Christmas since 1969. The Holy Family is seen as the model for the human family, the religious community and the Church itself. The feast is a celebration not only of the Holy Family itself but of the ideal of the Christian family on which the Church has always placed great emphasis.



### DO

Reach out to a family member with whom you may have a difficult relationship.

### PRAY

Pray for families everywhere, that they may grow in holiness and love. Pray for families in distress.