

DECEMBER

Proposed Theme: A child is born for us

The Joy of Love – Pope Francis

Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod's implacable violence..... Like the Magi, our families are invited to contemplate the Child and his Mother, to bow down and worship him. Like Mary they are asked to face their family's challenge with courage and serenity, in good times and in bad, and to keep in their heart the great things God has done. (30)

Family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening this paschal faith. A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell God our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and its blessings, and ask Our Lady to protect us beneath her maternal mantle. (318)

Some Thoughts:

- Christmas is very much centre-stage all through the month of December.
 - This is true commercially and it is true from the point of view of our Christian faith.
 - Sometimes people say that Christmas is for children. This could not be further from the truth.
 - Rather Christmas is the time when we are taught by children.
 - First of all we are taught by the child born in Bethlehem, Jesus the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He teaches us the most important message for human life, namely the wonderful love that God has for us and for all human beings.
 - Secondly Christmas is a time when children teach us the important things of our own lives.
1. They teach us that our family life is the most important thing of all as we prepare for this great feast.
 2. They teach us the importance of joy in our homes as they laugh and look forward to, not just Santa, but also to the Crib
 3. They teach us the importance of a sense of wonder about the mystery of life as their eyes open wide with wonder at everything during this time.
 4. They teach us the importance of love and affection by their hugs and kisses
 5. They teach us a sense of adventure as they live this season with freshness and with expectation.
 6. And they teach us the importance of taking time with one another and not just giving things to one another.

And Christmas its self is celebrated around the Crib where Jesus Mary and Joseph are presented to us as the very core of this very special event. This is followed up by the feast of the Holy Family, giving us an opportunity to consecrate our family to them and set out to become an ever greater family through our love for one another and for our God who loves us so much.

Questions:

1. What are some of your best memories of Christmas as you grew up? This is for parents to share with their children
2. What are some of the things you would like to do this Christmas as a family? This is for children to share with their parents.
3. How could you use Advent/December to prepare yourselves as a family for Christmas this year?
4. How could you, as a family, help to bring joy to other people in your parish and beyond during this season of Advent and Christmas?

Suggested actions:

1. Make a list of all the people who make up your family, beginning with those in your immediate family and then going out to those in your extended family e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins etc.
2. Make a sacred space in your home where you can create an Advent wreath.
3. Take 5 minutes together each day during Advent/December to pray for your family, taking one person each day to think about and to pray for – a decade of the Rosary could be a good prayer to say each day for that person.
4. Include in this list the names of your priest(s); your bishop; Pope Francis and all the leadership of the Church both lay and clerical and take a day as a family to pray for each of these.
5. Write a family letter of appreciation and support to the priest(s) of your parish and send it for Christmas.
6. Write a family letter of appreciation and support to the Bishop of your Diocese and send it for Christmas.

Points for the organising group to keep in mind

- A full day of Prayer for Marriage & Family Life every month is a very significant event in a parish.
- Because it is a quiet event it could easily go unnoticed. That is why preparing for it each month is so important.
- A notice should be put into the Parish Newsletter on the weekend before the date for your parish.
- This notice should be an appreciation of the generosity of those who have taken on an hour of prayer for that day. It should also be an invitation to others to sign up for an hour, with clear instructions on how to do so.
- This notice should also be a call to focus all the prayer of the parish on Marriage & Family Life for that day.
- Each month you receive a document with a particular focus for the month. This is meant to open us up to developments in parish support for various aspects of Marriage & Family Life.
- These developments need planning; they need people who will lead them; they need resources to support them. But they are coming from, and are grounded in, the on-going monthly day of prayer. The Organising Group has a special place in initiating these developments and in getting other people to help to implement them.
- One or two initiatives each year, even small ones, will eventually make a real difference to our homes and to the whole parish.