

Feast of The Holy Family *Sunday 28 December 2025*

Dear brothers and sisters,

We gather today to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth, a celebration that is dear to this parish which is under the name and care of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. As far back as the old Nissan hut church from which the parish was born, the men who set up its sanctuary inscribed above it the prayer: *Jesus, Maria, Joseph vobis dono cor meum et animam mean: Jesus Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.* Under the tender care of that Holy Family, this parish has been home to many families who have lived and flourished and gone home to Heaven from this Catholic community.

This Feast reminds us how God sent His Son into an ordinary family not so different from ours, and that knew our joys and hopes, our worries and sorrows. Today's Gospel recalls a highlight in their family life, when they were visited by Magi kings from the East. But it also records a low point, hounded by another king Herod and his armies. They would live for many years as a displaced family in Egypt before they could return to the normal life of Nazareth and the peace to grow and flourish as any family hopes to do.

Today we commend our own families to the Holy Family of Nazareth, praying it to be with our families, to guide and protect us as the LORD protected them. As we have seen, GOD's presence in the Holy Family did not make life easy for them, but it mostly assured them years of peace and normality.

Above all, from this family, GOD brought about the salvation of the world. So, we pray for our families; that they can be blessed with good parents who are wise and loving guides to their children; and blessed with children who are thankful and caring of their parents even unto their children's children. It is no less the case today that the future of our Church and world depend on happy and holy families, and that the LORD still means to bring salvation in our times especially through good family homes and their witness.

This year, however, this Feast, marks the sad moment of the closure of this parish and its assumption into Saint John's and Saint Francis. It is hard to grasp the magnitude of this day or its significance for the lives of so many families in the town of Port Glasgow. We come to Mass today perhaps with broken hearts, but full of memories and gratitude for precious times lived here. We remember the first Masses in 1946 in the HMS Monck hut, celebrated by Fr. Sweeney, the first parish priest. Even with five Sunday Masses, parishioners had to queue along Parkhill Avenue as far as the cemetery gate to get in. Then the other halls, one that served as a make-shift presbytery for Fr. Sweeney and Fr. Rice, the other that became the parish hall with its basket-teas, record hops, concerts, pantomimes and film shows. Then the excitement of the parish as this magnificent church rose out of the ground in 1959 towering over the hill. We remember the heyday of four priests and five Sunday Masses, largely full, in a church with a capacity of eight hundred, the sunlight streaming in from its stained-glass: it Holy Days of Obligation packed to the gunnels; the evening devotions in Lent, May and October; the family weddings, baptisms, First Holy communions, the priestly ordinations of our young men; the young women who went off to the religious life. The Holy

Family parish has been a place where families worshipped together, taking up their own rows, and making this community into one big Catholic family in the middle of the Port.

Then there was Hall built in 1980 and the hub of a lively social life from scouts, brownies and guides to the UCM serving family life, the SSVP reaching out to the marginalised, the Legion of Mary spreading the Gospel into the parish homes, the Pensioners Club, the Pro-Life and Prayer Groups. So many blessed memories for which to be thankful. They intertwine with sad times when families brought their loved ones here at the end of their earthly journeys to commend them to the LORD and their eternal family home.

Like the Christian community in the Second Reading, the clergy and parishioners learned here compassion, kindness and patience, how to make space for each other, how to forgive and forget; a parish where, beneath petty squabbles, the LORD's love and peace reigned. Looking back, we are thankful for how the Word and grace of Christ have dwelled here so richly and we thank GOD for the teaching we received, the hymns that raised the roof. How so much was achieved in the name of the Lord!

Since then, many of the houses have gone, along with the population. The clergy are not as abundant, and this church has grown old, needing repair beyond the means of the faithful parishioners who remain.

Thinking of the Holy Family of Nazareth brought back to me memories of my pilgrimages to the Holy Land. At Bethlehem I prayed at the Basilica of the Nativity, built over the grotto that marks Jesus' birthplace. It is the oldest major church and place of continual Christian worship in the Holy

Land. When I got there, of course, I saw no stable or shepherds, kings and angels. That moment, most precious to Mary and Joseph, had moved on, even though it would have remained nostalgic in their family history. At Nazareth, I found a modern, sprawling city and the Church of Saint Joseph, said to be built over his workshop. It is unclear whether this church or the nearby convent of the Sisters of Nazareth marks the real spot of Jesus' childhood home. In any case the little village of Nazareth, so familiar to Mary and Joseph, is long since gone.

It struck me how much had changed. The physical moorings of the Holy Family were long since gone. Yet there I was, along with millions of pilgrims in veneration of a family whose family life has left a legacy that remains strong and influential on in world today.

Today marks the closing of the Jubilee Holy Year of Hope in dioceses across the world. At the beginning of this Holy Year, Pope Francis pointed us to Our Lady and Her witness of hope. Like every mother, Mary thought often of her family's future. She remembered Simeon's words above a sword piercing Her heart and at Calvary, She witnessed the death of Her innocent son. Overwhelmed with grief, She nonetheless renewed her "Yes", never abandoning Her hope and trust in God. In this way, She took part in her Son's rising again and became for us the Star of the Sea, that sure hope that, even amid the tempests of this life, GOD comes to our aid; He sustains us and encourages us to persevere in hope.

This parish of the Holy Family has been the life of Catholics in this part of Port Glasgow, not just in its bricks and mortar but above all in its faith and community, its way of life of family and friendships. All of this will

live on. In times to come, we may not see the parish and buildings that formed the backbone of our lives of family, community and faith, just as I never saw the old home of the Holy Family in Bethlehem or Nazareth. But, just as there, we will never cease to benefit from and venerate the spirit of the Holy Family parish community, and the legacy that will continue to rise and go on as we carry on our journey of faith, in gratitude for the past and with hope for the future. May the Holy Family of Nazareth pray for us, guide us still and prosper GOD's Kingdom among us.

