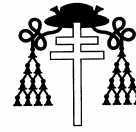


Feast
of the
Holy
Family
of
Jesus,
Mary
and
Joseph

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Pastoral Letter

*To be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese of Liverpool
on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
Sunday 28 December 2008*



My dear people,

Old age: Abraham: Sarah: Simeon: Anna: old men and women: no doubt what I must write about this year on the Feast of the Holy Family: old age. No problem about what: easy.

Then I remembered: a psalm says: "our span is 70 years, and 80 for those who are strong". I was 70 in November. I have my Senior Rail Card, State Pension, Bus Pass and Winter Heating Fuel Allowance. Am I really an OAP?

I look at photos of my father and uncles and aunts when they were only 60 and wonder: do I look as old as that? And I have to admit: twice, in London, when I was not wearing my dog collar I've been offered a seat on a crowded tube.

First of all I do not want to wear rose-tinted spectacles about old age. I remember with gratitude what my mother once said when the arthritis was bad and instead of her once boundless energy most days were spent in a chair: "Well, Patrick, I know our Lord was crucified, but at least he never knew what it was like to be old".

But next: I have no idea if I feel or look 30, 50, 70 or 80. I just don't know. So my first lesson for any real conversation with others, especially those who are older: watch: listen and learn how they see and feel themselves to be. No hasty: "snap out of it" or "we'll soon have you on your feet again". Enter their life with respect: receive them as they are to themselves: in a phrase, so often repeated: "God loves us as we are". But then I think of the scene in the film the Lord of the Rings: Wormtongue, by whispering bad news, gloomy tales, suggesting frailty and helplessness has made King Theoden into a bent, fearful, timid, helpless old man. Gandalf brings light, and challenge and courage and Theoden's face becomes young again and his arm strong.

So, while we begin full of respect, we will not allow anyone to be old, afraid, alone, helpless before their time. It is the same for us as it is with God: it is true that God loves us as we are, but he loves us far too much to leave us as we are. We will not be to anyone a Wormtongue: whispering dark rumours and frightful tales to bring them down. We will love others too much just to leave them as they are. I am never quite sure what I may be asked to do when I visit our High Schools: some of our School Chaplains and Teachers of RE have wicked senses of humour. But I do not mind: they will not let me be just 70, a "twirly" when it comes to buses, allowed to sit in an armchair wearing slippers.

And this year when families are afraid and anxious about mortgages, employment, pensions, I suggest we receive this invitation from Saint Paul: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Christ," so that each family and our family, the Church, upbuilds itself in love.

I have no way of knowing what 2009 will bring: I do not understand what is happening in the economy or where it will all end; I have no solution to suggest. But I am certain: all may receive the blessing proclaimed when we come to Mass on New Year's Day, the Day of Mary, Mother of the Lord:

"May the Lord
bless you and keep you.
May the Lord
let his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you.
May the Lord
uncover his face to you
and bring you peace."

Yours sincerely in Christ,



Archbishop of Liverpool