



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY
29/30 DECEMBER 2018**

He went down with them to Nazareth and lived under their authority.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As 2018 draws towards a close I want to thank you for another year of faithful witnessing to Our Lord. In every parish and chaplaincy where this Pastoral Letter is read, in your homes and schools, among your neighbours or colleagues at work, your faith in Christ will have made a difference to somebody.

Looking back over the course of this year you may not be able to recognise those times when what you have said and done have had a good influence on people. We are not always aware when our words and deeds have revealed our Christian faith or brought somebody closer to the Catholic Church. But that doesn't matter – what we cannot see is known in its fullness to God.

Today, on the Feast of the Holy Family, I want to reflect with you for a moment as fellow members of the family of our Archdiocese. This passing year will have brought many blessings and some trials to each one of us. When we try to understand and accept them we begin to see God's work at hand, shaping and purifying our lives.

Today's Gospel describes a trying moment for the anxious parents of Jesus as they searched for him for three days. When they eventually found him in the Temple they gained a remarkable insight, even though they were not to understand it immediately. They must have been bewildered when the twelve-year-old Christ asked: *Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?*

There may have been things said and done in the course of this year which we will only fully appreciate in time to come. We can learn from Our Lady who *stored up all these things in her heart*. The heart often forms an appreciation of what is good and true before the mind has reached its understanding.

Among the blessings we have stored up as an Archdiocese is last September's *Adoremus* National Eucharistic Congress at Liverpool. More than seven hundred of our parishioners took part, with many more participating at home, deepening our appreciation for the abiding gift of Our Lord's presence in the Eucharist. *Adoremus* has strengthened our communion with Christ and with one another.

Adoremus also helped us to prepare for the part that we were to play during November and December in the IICSA hearings. Once again I thank you for the prayers that you offered, especially for the victims and survivors of abuse in our Archdiocese, for whom the days of the hearing have been especially difficult. Responding to IICSA will help us to be more faithful to the Lord's teaching: *Treat others as you would like them to treat you.*

This rule of life was surely learnt and lived within the Holy Family of Nazareth. It was also evident during the World Meeting of Families last August in Dublin. I must again congratulate each one of our eighteen deaneries for sending a family to Dublin. Ours was the largest diocesan group from England and Wales and many blessings have flowed back to us in support of marriage and family life.

As we look ahead to 2019 I want to mention an important diocesan celebration for married couples and their families. On Sunday 3 February at 11am I shall be celebrating a special Mass of Thanksgiving at St Chad's Cathedral. All married couples are invited, but especially those who will be celebrating significant wedding anniversaries next year. I also hope that those who are preparing to marry in 2019 will come to this Mass. (You can find more details in the current edition of *The Sower* or on the diocesan website.)

The marriage of Our Lady and St Joseph was lifelong and loving as they nurtured and brought up the Son of God. May the Holy Family of Nazareth watch over the family of our Archdiocese this coming year – and may you and your family be richly blessed this Christmastide and as the new year unfolds.

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 21 December 2018 and appointed to be read in all Churches of the Archdiocese on the weekend of 29/30 December 2018.