



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY, 30/31 DECEMBER 2023**

My eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This is my first opportunity to wish you all the blessings and joy that we always associate with the great feast of Christmas. I hope that you have found an opportunity to welcome members of your family to your homes over Christmas or perhaps to pay them a visit. For many of us, with family in distant places, a phone call will have brought us close to those we love – and for others the memories of those who are no longer with us will have brought us some comfort over the Christmas season.

I mention all these experiences of family because today we are celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family. We remember that Christmas is not only the birth of the Word made flesh – it also marks the beginning of family life for Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Holy Family of Nazareth. Through them we learn that God chose to enter our world as part of a family – and to share the experience of life and love that only the family can offer.

Today is also New Year's Eve, when we bid farewell to the old year and prepare for what may lie ahead. I am sure we shall remember 2023 with immense sadness for the continuing dreadful war in Ukraine, for the horrific Hamas attacks on innocent Israeli citizens, for the seizing and captivity of the Israeli hostages and for the prolonged and extensive suffering of the people of Gaza.

In the midst of all this it is families who are suffering the most, whether in Ukraine, Israel or Gaza. It is parents or children, siblings or cousins who are being prayed for, treated for their injuries or mourned – and it is these offences against families that provoke destructive resentment and make forgiveness and reconciliation so difficult.

On this feastday we remember and pray for the two Christian women who were murdered just before Christmas in the grounds of the Holy Family Catholic Church in Gaza. They are a tragic symbol of all the family suffering that the Prince of Peace came to heal and redeem by growing in maturity and wisdom as a member of his own family in Bethlehem and Nazareth.

As we pray for an end to these terrible conflicts we look ahead to the coming year as a Year of Prayer in preparation for the Holy Year of 2025. Pope Francis has urged us to put the Lord's Prayer at the very heart of all our prayer this year. The Our Father is essentially the prayer of God's family, looking to our provident and forgiving Father, to care for us and to enable us to care for others after the example of his beloved Son.

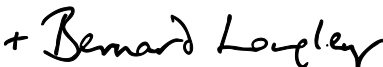
At the outset of a new year we remember that the family is part of the natural world that God has created and entrusted to us. All living creatures form a kind of global family, guaranteeing their continuity and sustaining the quality of their lives. Pope Francis has said that we need *education in the care of the common home* to help us understand that *environmental problems are linked to human needs*.

For all of us the human needs on which we depend for life and happiness should find their fulfilment in the family. I invite you to pray especially for your own family and for all the families of your parish today – and please pray for the families in Ukraine, Israel and Gaza that politicians and leaders may find just and lasting ways to end the warfare and violence and to give people the peace for which they long.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth help us all, this New Year, to grow closer to Christ the Prince of Peace and to serve one another with kindness and generosity.

With my prayers for you and your family this Christmastide.

Yours devotedly in Christ

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✠ Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 22 December 2023 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the Feast of the Holy Family, 30/31 December 2023.