



Archdiocese of Southwark

Pastoral Letter on the Solemnity of the Holy Family 2024 for the Opening of the Jubilee Year of Hope

To be read at all Sunday Masses on Sat 28/Sun 29 December 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

Peace and joy to you, and to your families and loved ones, in this holy season of Christmas.

Today's Feast of the Holy Family marks the opening of the Jubilee Year in our Archdiocese and across the Catholic Church worldwide. Its theme is 'Pilgrims of Hope.' As we launch this Year of renewal in faith, we seek to learn from the blessed household in Nazareth where the Lord Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, lived in simplicity, in love, and in faithfulness to the Father's will.

Looking to the Holy Family, we too are called to be pilgrims of hope, just like Mary and Joseph. As they journeyed with faith and trust, so must we. So, how do you live hopefully in light of Christ? In a world yearning for the tender closeness of Christ, how are you his hopeful presence to others?

'See what kind of love the Father has given to us,' explains St John, 'that we should be called children of God.' (1 John 3:1) Our identity as beloved children of God is the foundation of our discipleship as the family of God. The Lord Jesus came into the world in the embrace of a family. Through him, we are drawn into the very life of God as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This Jubilee Year is a summons to live together as pilgrims of hope. This is not just about being optimistic, or trying to keep cheerful. Christian hope means living with the desire for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life. It means relying on Christ's promises and the help of the Holy Spirit. (cf. CCC 1817)

Our world needs witnesses to this hope. It needs disciples whose lives shine with the certainty that the Lord is near, even in times of darkness and suffering. Our hope grows stronger, not by avoiding difficulties, but by facing them with faith. God in Christ is Emmanuel - God with us always, no matter what. The famous words of Padre Pio, St Pio, encourage us all - 'Pray, hope and don't worry.' Or, at least, pray, hope and try not to worry. The Lord is with us, the Lord is with you. Trust him and draw closer to him, especially through prayer and the Scriptures, through confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, through the Holy Eucharist, and through adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. As pilgrims of hope, in this Jubilee year of grace, I invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to renew your spiritual life and your service to others.

The Holy Family reminds us that evangelisation and mission begin in the heart and in the home. To parents I say 'thank you' for teaching your children to love the Lord Jesus, to pray, and to understand their faith; and, not least, to know the friendship of the saints. To our young people, I say 'do not be afraid to embrace your faith with courage.' The Lord Jesus is calling you to great things. Know, love and serve him, and he will guide your steps.

So many people today carry heavy burdens – whether of sickness, grief, or loneliness, or in others ways, sometimes hidden. Know that you are especially close to the heart of the Lord Jesus and his Church. You can be powerful missionaries of hope, showing the world that God in Christ is near to the broken-hearted and raises up those who are crushed in spirit. (Cf. Ps. 34:18) The Church is a family of families. There are no orphans in Christ. We all have a home in the Church. In Christ, we are united as brothers and sisters, called to bear one another's burdens and rejoice in one another's happiness.

In this Jubilee year, I ask everyone in our Archdiocese to renew our commitment to building a culture of welcome and belonging within our parishes and schools. Let us seek out those on the margins – people who experience isolation, poverty, and despair. Let us be a Church where all feel at home, where the wounded find mercy, where the weary encounter rest, and where we all journey together in faith, hope and love.

As we begin our Jubilee pilgrimage, may our lives shine with the light of Christ, and, through him, may we bring his hope-filled joy to everyone we meet along the way.

With every blessing for this Christmas Season for the Jubilee Year,
and with the assurance of my prayers and gratitude

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ John Wilson
Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark