



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph Year B**

### ***Simeon and Anna***

*Readings: Genesis 15: 1-6, 21: 1-13, Ps 104, Hebrews 11: 8, 11-12, 17-19, Luke 2: 22-40*

One of the less religious greetings card we received recently was the picture of an elderly gent, in a Santa hat, looking out of his window down the drive and declaiming, 'Bother', (or the Cornish equivalent), 'The whole family is coming up the drive.'

Ironically it was sent by a very old friend who had just lost the last of her earthly family. But it did seem to accurately summarise where some festive gatherings have got to by this stage of the feast. We are reminded of the old saw, 'You can't choose your family, thank God you can choose your friends,'

So here we are on the Feast of the Holy Family and you will be looking forward to a profound meditation on the nature of family.

Of course, as Christians, we are members of a supernatural family.

It is both timeless and universal. We did not choose it. We responded to the invitation to be part of it. We belong to it, as Jesus said, as we are observant of God's Word and obedient to His will.

We have God as Our Father and the Church as Our Mother. In baptism we have become little brothers and sisters of Jesus. We have become family to one another and to all the followers of Christ down all the ages. We are part of something colossal. It has little to do with our complex genetic inheritance, except that we are sons of Adam, and everything to do with the bonds of divine love that will survive the disintegration of this little dust and reconstitute us in glory.

In today's Gospel we meet two more of that supernatural family, Simeon and Anna. They are old people. Anna is well into her eighties and Simeon is preparing for death. They are there to greet the new family when they make the first outing to church after the birth of the new-born. It is instructive for all sorts of reasons for our pastoral practice and spiritual preparation.

Old people often say they can't do much. As the demographic of our church is very elderly that is not good news. This story gives the lie to that song of despair. Here, old people are key.

First of all, please note, they are open to the Holy Spirit. They are not closed down, tidied up sort of folk. They are alive to what God wants, they are open to the possibilities and willing to do it.

Second, they are regular and fervent pray-ers. Simeon is drawn back to the Temple by prayer. Anna never leaves it. It is her work.

Third, they are confident of the promises of God. Simeon tells us of God's promise and that he knows he will see its fulfilment.

Fourth they are not afraid of death - because of the coming of the Messiah.

Fifth, they are given the gift of prophecy, the telling of God's word to the people. They proclaim the Word. Indeed, as far as we know these are the first people to hold the baby Jesus in their arms apart from Mary and Joseph.

Sixth, they are presenters of Christ to the world and they talk openly about Him to all who will listen.

So, as you can see, there is really not much old people can do at all.

What can we learn from these two great witnesses? The priority of prayer. No great active ministry takes place without a rich undergirding of prayer. 'I'm afraid I can only pray', is a phrase I love to hear because the priest can give you a stack of work to do.

Then there is the ministry of welcome. The new family arrive at church and they are made a fuss of. So often welcome, help, encouragement and friendship are the key to newcomers staying.

Openness to the Holy Spirit.... We are in a church that does not change its doctrine or its ethics so we don't have to panic if we are asked to take

a different approach to presenting it to a different culture from that of our own youth. That is part of what the Holy Father is asking.

Telling people about Jesus. We are the people who know the story. We are the people who have no fear of death. We are the people who have held Christ in our arms.

We then are the people who, with Mary and Joseph, present Jesus to the world.

Old people have a lot of time, a lot of opportunities and a lot of things to do if we are to make the same confident prayer as Simeon when our time comes to hand on the baton and answer the call home with confidence.

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