



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph Year B

The Sagrada Familia

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

When the various rumblings of Catalonian independence invade the news bulletins of other European nations there is a stirring of the memory. Most who have visited the region will think of Barcelona - either a night stroll down the Ramblas, a memorable football match at the Nou Camp or a visit to the extraordinary architectural marvel that is the Minor Basilica, Sagrada Familia, the Church of the Holy Family.

No experience of European building can prepare the pilgrim for the riot of revived Gothic majesty swathed in curvilinear Art Nouveau that challenges the senses and inspires the soul. The architect, Gaudi, inherited the project in 1883 and, when he died in 1926 – run over by the proverbial bus and so humbly attired that he was mistaken for a luckless tramp – his great vision was less than one quarter completed. Today, as we approach the centenary of his death, the great church still awaits its final form. The Holy Family is magnificent – but it is incomplete.

For ordinary worshippers like you and me the Feast of the Holy Family, coming on Christmas' equivalent of Low Sunday, is a time to reflect on the mystery of God's choosing and the long slow building plan of salvation history.

In our mind's eye will likely be a series of simple images. We will still be at the crib with the shepherds, or at the house awaiting the Magi. We may be on the dangerous road out of Bethlehem or resting on the flight to Egypt and the safety of exile. Any which way our pictures are likely to be focussed on the little trinity of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. And much ink has been spilt on the implications of these pictures for Christian living and Christian family life.

Hidden between the Feast of the Nativity and that of the Holy Family are a series of days that we, marooned on our sofas by too much turkey, too often miss. The stoning of Stephen, the deacon martyr, the first to follow Christ in sacrifice. The Beloved Disciple, John, who lay on Christ's breast at the Last Supper and cared for Our Lady and gave us the key to the cosmic significance of our Faith in Jesus. The nameless, numberless innocent of Bethlehem, the little martyrs who died at the hands of power and corruption, the rear-guard of the infant king, now translated to the Eternal Presence. The clever, powerful, committed churchman, Becket of Canterbury, called to choose between a king in this world, his former friend, and the King of the Ages and violent death.

These too, separated in the long litany of saints, by age, background, experience and centuries are part of the Holy Family. They join with that long list of patriarchs that we recall with the first candle of our Advent

wreath. They are part of the word proclaimers of the prophetic brotherhood that lit our second candle. They stand, with the Baptist, the cousin, who pointed to Jesus who illuminates our third.

The Holy Family incorporates the long line of the genealogy read out at the Vigil Mass of Nativity and flows down through the long centuries of those who have followed Christ. The Holy Family is made up of all those who have kept the light of Christ burning in their generation. It is made up of all the adopted children of Mary, all the little brothers and sisters of Jesus. It contains all the creatures of the Fall who have become the children of God.

We belong to Him and to one another – throughout the world and throughout time. Like Gaudi's magnificent architectural dream, we are a mixture of styles and history and culture but we all point to the glory of God.

The Sagrada Familia in Barcelona points to that little threesome, Mary, Joseph and Jesus. But it points beyond it to the whole family of God which is drawn from this simple journey of faith and love. And it is unfinished. As we, the Holy Family, the Church of God, will be until the last living stone has been laid in the House of God and the last chosen soul brought home to the child in the arms of Mary.