



2023 OUR WORLD, FAMILY OF FAMILIES – MARFAM DAILY THOUGHTS

DECEMBER – FAMILY, HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



DAILY THOUGHTS on www.marfam.org.za, facebook and twitter. Request for email to info@marfam.org.za.

Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG = Evangelii Gaudium
LD = Laudate Deum. Synod on Synodality documents.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2023. ECO-FAMILY FRIENDLY THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY

with **A CHILDREN’S PEACE PILGRIMAGE**, a parable for our time, 18 – 26 December



Introduction. December – Advent and Christmas. “Family, Hope for the Future.” What does this mean to be a family of families and hope for the future? Each family is unique with our own special relationships, our love, hopes, joys and anxieties. We thank our Creator for the inbuilt sense of family, of belonging to one another and to our God. Family-mindedness is a cause of our hope. St Francis and Pope Francis speak of all the creatures, animal and plant paying homage to their Creator. We acknowledge that we humans alone can address the challenges and fulfill the hope for a future filled with peace and joy.

Two significant societal events to commemorate at this time: **COP28 the Dubai 2023 climate conference** from 30 November to 12 December and **16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM** for no violence against women and children. from 25 November to 10 December.

Pope Francis: What to expect from COP28 in DUBAI? *If we are confident in the capacity of human beings to transcend their personal interests and to think in bigger terms we can keep hoping that COP 28 will allow for a decisive acceleration of energy transition, with effective commitments and subject to ongoing monitoring. We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned, but have the courage needed to produce substantial changes. LD 54-56. The Judaeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous concert of all God’s creatures. Today we are forced to recognise that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. As part of the universe all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. LD 67.*

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we need to encounter the Lord ever anew in his Word and sacramental presence, in order to share the liberating message of the Gospel with others. In our troubled world, so many people await a word of hope. May all Christians take up the challenge of sharing the joy of their own encounter with the risen Lord, the new life of his Spirit, and the freedom born of trust in his promises. "An encounter with Jesus always brings you joy and, if this does not happen to you, it is not a true encounter with Jesus." November 15

A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH. *Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity, community of infinite love. You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love that we may protect all life and beauty. Fill us with humility, peace and joy that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. Encourage us in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Praise to you! Amen. Laudato Si.*

PEACE PRAYER OF ST FRANCE..... SEE children’s peace pilgrimage.

SETTING THE SCENE. December is holiday season in the southern hemisphere and no doubt we all need and deserve some time out however we choose. There are many important issues to consider in our own lives, as well as the wars in parts of the world that affect people everywhere. COP 28 and the 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM are kept in mind. As we “Put Christ back into Christmas,” may we “Arrive Alive” and not “shop till we drop.”

The THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY use the See-Judge-Act method and are based on the daily scripture readings and include extracts from Pope Francis documents. In addition to the symbols used in the parish, families are encouraged to make their own Advent wreath, spend a few moments daily to light the candles, pray and share.

See www.marfam.org.za for MARFAM ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS activities e.g. an Advent wreath. A Jesse Tree. A Family Reconciliation, Prayer meal, Fast day.

1 December World AIDS Day. Shame and guilt. Johnson sat thinking back over the last 25 years or so. Although the incidence and infection rate has declined since the greater use of anti-retroviral drugs HIV/AIDS is still a major health issue. All sectors of the population, men, women and children continue to be affected and have to remain on treatment. "When AIDS was first diagnosed there was so much fear, shame and stigma. Few people would say, "My son is infected," or "My daughter died of AIDS." Families closed ranks and AIDS was the reason why we ended up looking after 6 grandchildren at one time and our daughter and son came home very sick. She died in those early days but he is well and 2 of the grandchildren are on ARV treatment." Johnson turned to Josephine and asked, "Should there still be shame attached? We say it is a disease and not a sin and it can be, but so often there was a sinful act committed somewhere that caused the infection and had such an impact on many others in families. It is wrong that the rate is still too high, maybe that should make us feel guilt and shame. Right from the time of Adam and Eve there has been sin and shame. They were created to live in harmony with God and one another. After their sin of disobedience when God came looking for them he found them wearing fig leaves because they had become ashamed of their nakedness. Do we feel shame and guilt about the way we have sinned by abusing God's creation?" Josephine responded. "But there is hope. AIDS is hardly the curse it was before."

Scripture: *Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they come out in leaf know the summer is near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Luke 21:29-33* **Pope Francis:** *Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships : with God, with our neighbour and with the earth. These three have been broken, outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. LS 66 Attacks on nature have consequences for people's lives. The African bishops state that climate change makes manifest a tragic and striking example of structural sin. LD 3. The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible. LS 74. Reflect, share, and pray:* People are very sensitive to being blamed and shamed. In times of corruption, other wrongdoing and damaging the environment could blaming and shaming be a deterrent? We can examine our lives and pray for conversion.

2 December. Noah and his Family. A well-known and loved story is that of Noah, the ark, the Flood and his family. At some time God was so disappointed in the behaviour and actions of his creatures that he decided to destroy them all. The exception was Noah, described as the only righteous man of his day. We are not told what made it so. Was he a good father or husband? Did they have a relationship with God to keep them on track? The Bible tells us how God did save pairs of creatures from total destruction. What are the warning signs God has given us in our day when humankind is again disappointing God? His covenant was that he would be with them for all time. The rainbow was its sign, a sign of hope, a reminder to us still today, each time a rainbow appears. But as humanity so often continues to do, we rebel and need God's warnings, each year at this time.

Scripture: *At that time Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things and to stand before the Son of man. Luke 21:34-35.* **Pope Francis.** *No one can ignore that in recent years we have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought, floods and other cries of protest on the part of the earth that are only a few expressions of a silent disease that affects everyone. LD 5. Reflect, share, and pray:* How would we rate our family as a righteous one? Would God use us as he used Noah? Are we heeding the warnings, even taking note of the rainbow as a sign?

3 December. Advent 1 B. Isaiah. The 1st Advent candle is lit as we pray.. People were beginning to prepare for the holidays and Fr Teddy reminded them not to forget to talk with God while they were away. Mabel and Joseph were alone in the family home waiting, as holidays had not quite started. After reading the 1st reading Mabel commented, "It is interesting how Isaiah dialogues with God. He doesn't blame God but states the facts. We, the people, don't call on God, but God also has left us to our own devices. And yet, he concludes that God is the potter and we are the clay. So there is a need for us to be together in this situation." Joseph added, "That is how it is with us and our children. We moulded them and now have to leave them to do their own thing as they grow up. But still when they come here during holiday time I do feel as if we have some influence still. Thank God for that. We must prepare well and be ready when the time comes."

Scripture: *There is no one that calls upon your name. You have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the hand of our sins. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Is 64:3b-8* **Pope Francis.** *The family is the first school of human values where we learn the wise use of freedom. AL274. Eight years have passed since I published the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si', I have wanted to share with all of you my*

heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home. Our responses have not been adequate while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. The impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, source of employment, access to resources, housing forced migrations etc. LD 2. . For reflection and sharing. Share with one another on the value of moulding and shaping of our children within families. Is that always a good thing? Are they too free or not free enough?

4 December. Abraham and Sarah. In the context of the Israel-Hamas war some members of a faith sharing group attempted to explore some of the underlying causes of the centuries-old conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The war began after a violent attack on Israel by the extremist Islamic group Hamas on 7 October and was followed by equally extreme retaliation by Israel government forces. The complexity of this whole situation cannot be denied, and oversimplifying or taking sides mainly on political grounds, as has too emotionally and simplistically been done all over the world, has complicated it even more and divided groups of nations, preventing everyone from reaching a compromise position. Some helpful observations are made in the article referred to which recognizes that the conflict is driven by ethnic, national, historical and religious factors.

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/religion-and-israel-palestinian-conflict-cause-conse>. The religious factor dates from the time of Abraham, the father of all three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The story is well known. Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of many descendants. As his wife was childless he had a son with his slave woman, but God intervened and Sarah also bore a son. Hagar and her son Ishmael were banished, but became ancestors of Islam some 600 years after Christ, through the prophet Mohammed. Abraham' descendants through Isaac formed the Jewish and later the Christian religion.

Peace has reigned at times, but conflict has existed between these three faiths. Extremist positions on both sides, as well as political power, have exacerbated the situation frequently. Fundamentalist, radical and extremist labels are often used and certainly in a world where current political and economic power dominates in the mainly Christian west, resentment has grown into at times violent extremism in lesser developed parts of the world.

The group discussed and debated this rather simplistic explanation and following the request from Pope Francis decided that as Christians their response should include prayer for peace and an end to war. "As we prepare for Christmas and the coming of the Prince of Peace let us redouble our efforts, fast, sacrifice and pray for our suffering brothers and sisters, especially the children." "Let us also not forget the suffering of our earth as so much destruction can only result in pollution and even loss of biodiversity."

Scripture: *It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and all the nations shall flow to it. People will say let us go up to the mountain of the Lord that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. He shall judge between the nations and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more. Is 2:1-5, **Pope Francis:** Our world has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex that a different framework for effective cooperation is required. It is not enough to think only of balances of power but also of the need to provide a response to new problems and to react with global mechanisms to the environmental, public health, cultural and social challenges, in order to consolidate respect for the most elementary human rights, social rights and the protection of our common home. LD 42. War is a defeat. Always. **Reflect, share, and pray:** As we prepare for Christmas and the coming of the Prince of Peace let us redouble our efforts, fast, sacrifice and pray for our suffering brothers and sisters, especially the children. Let us not forget the suffering of our world either, so much destruction can only result in pollution and even loss of biodiversity.*

5 December. Many countries around the world are gearing up for elections of national or local leadership, sometimes voting for specific individuals or for political parties but, whatever form their government and the election processes take, there is plenty of in-fighting, criticism and vilification of opponents in the battle for power, which it all it is. Parties issue their manifestos and it is up to us the people to check how true they are to the values they express. In our country with the unfinished business of dealing with State Capture, and corruption a scourge who does one believe? Who can convince the voters and what political points have they scored? Voter education, of the youth but also of older persons should be done in families too and I would like to think that the new synodal approach, of sharing and listening, rather than arguing and scoring points, would be a helpful way to go about it. Each time round we hope and pray for wise and ethical leaders.

Scripture: *On that day there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him the spirit of wisdom and understanding. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Is 11:1-10.* **Pope Francis:** *Not every increase in power represents progress for humanity. We need only think of the admirable technologies that were employed to decimate populations, drop atomic bombs and annihilate ethnic groups. That risk is always present, because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. We stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. LD24.* **Reflect, share, and pray:** let us be good leaders and pray for a good leadership for our country in the future.

6 December. St Nicholas. On the last day of school at their assembly young Nick had been given a task to speak about St Nicholas, the original Santa Claus, who had been a bishop in the very early days of the church. He said, "The story is told that he was particularly generous, especially with the poor, giving them food and clothing. How this all became commercialised into giving expensive presents is not clear, but our class decided to collect food and clothes for the homeless people who live in the veldt near our school. The principal arranged for us to meet with some of them and they told us a lot about their life and how they were separated from their families because of poverty. We felt pleased to help a little. And I told my folks I really don't want an expensive present this year."

Scripture: *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?" I answered, "here I am, send me." Isaiah 6:1-8.* **Pope Francis:** *"Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor" (Tob 4:7). These words help us to understand the essence of our witness from the Book of Tobit. Tobit's advice to his son, Tobias, Whenever we encounter a poor person, we cannot look away, for that would prevent us from the face of the Lord Jesus. Consider his words: "from anyone who is poor". Everyone is our neighbour, regardless of the colour of their skin, social standing, the place from which they came, if I myself am poor, I can recognize my brothers or sisters in need of my help. We are called to acknowledge every poor person and every form of poverty, abandoning the indifference and the banal excuses we make to protect our illusory well-being. From Message on the 7th World Day of the Poor 2023.*

Reflect, share, and pray: *This Christmas season year what can we do as individuals and as a family to help the poor in some way, even if we are not well-off ourselves?*

7 December. A strong House. Father had always said, "a strong family needs a strong house." Mom would laugh and reply "A strong house needs a strong family." They hadn't always had a decent house and at one stage had lived in a shack and it had taken their strong relationship, their faith and commitment to hard work that had been the resource they needed to progress in life practically and spiritually. "I don't know why so many people still build their shacks on the edge of a river. With the weather we're having these days, heavy rains, big storms and flash floods, they are likely to lose their house and everything in it. They get warned, but do they listen?" **Scripture:** *Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mind and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell, and great was its fall. Matt 7:24-27.* **Pope Francis:** *The Judaeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous concert of all God's creatures., but today we see ourselves forced to realize that it is only possible to recognize that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. Together we form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. LD 67* **Reflect, share, and pray:** Pray for wisdom to use this time to build strong families in our homes.

8 December. Immaculate conception. The women of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception obviously had a great devotion to Mary, conceived without sin by the special grace of God, as she was to be the mother of God's Son. They aimed to model their lives on Mary's perfect relationship with God. "That is my prayer for each of my girls, " Dawn shared with her sister-in-law. "and I've told them too, when they are tempted to sin, they should pray to Mary for strength." Doris responded, "as we're in the time of 16 days of Activism against Women and Child Abuse, we need to speak about that with the whole family, men too as well as the women and girls."

Scripture: *At that time the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her and said "Hail full of grace. The Lord is with you." Luke 1: 26-38.* **Pope Francis:** *In imitation of May the mother of Jesus, we want to be a Church that serves, that*

leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity. FT 276. **Reflect, share, and pray:** What is our family relationship with Mary, even if not all members are Catholic?

9 December. Driving along through the vast mealeie fields around the farm Joseph was thinking about his namesake, Joseph, the spoilt son, abused by his jealous brothers who planned to get rid of him, but rescued and taken to Egypt. Through his ability to interpret dreams he was fortunate to become Pharaoh's right-hand man managing his estates and crops. A very special attribute he had was his ability to forgive his brothers who had done him such serious wrong. A lesser known fact about him is that he was falsely accused of sexual abuse by Pharaoh's wife and ended up spending time in jail. "I wonder who could be the wise and peace-loving Joseph personality in our day" Joseph thought, "I think every era needs such a person."

Scripture: *Yes, O people in Zion, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you. At the sound of your cry when he hears it he will answer you. And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see him. And your ears shall hear a word, "This is the way, walk in it." He will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground. Is 30:19-26* **Pope Francis:** *The information that we can gather from the past eight years allows us to clarify that despite all attempts to deny conceal, gloss over or relativize the issue the signs of climate change are here and are increasingly evident in extreme weather phenomena. LD2. There are no lasting changes without cultural changes, without a maturing of lifestyles and convictions within societies and there are no cultural changes without personal changes. LD 70.* **Reflect, share, and pray:** The same Issues of concern in our day are as relevant as they were 3000 years ago. COP 28 focuses on creation and the 16 Days of Activism on sexual abuse although its main focus is on women. Pray for commitment to make the needed changes for a better world.

10 December. Advent Sunday 2B. Two candles are lit on the Advent wreath and we pray. After they had participated in a hurting marriage programme Audrey and Josh had belonged to a couple support group for quite a few years. As couples they used a dialogue technique and in the larger group they adapted it slightly so that everyone could share and listen to one another's stories. This technique was promoted and used at the recent Synodality gatherings. Some members had experienced violence and sexual abuse. Adam shared how they had also benefited from being involved in the 16 Days of Activism for no violence against Women and Children. The group listened lovingly without debate as Adam shared that it wasn't just a women's issue but something they as a couple had to work through, by sharing their feelings and learning conflict resolutions skills. In the group discussion time they talked about how common domestic violence is often a question of power and the importance of offering this type of dialogue type resource in the community.

Scripture: *Do not ignore this one fact, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief and the heavens will pass away with a loud noise and with fire. Therefore, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace. 2 Peter 3:8-14.* **Pope Francis.** *Climate change is a global issue and is intimately related to the dignity of human life. Our concern goes beyond an ecological approach, because our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together. We need to rethink the question of human power, its meaning and its limits. For our power has frenetically increased in a few decades. We have made impressive technological advances and have not realized that at the same time we have turned into highly dangerous beings, capable of threatening the lives of many beings and our own survival. We need lucidity and honesty to recognize that our power and the progress we are producing are turning against us. LD 28.* **Reflect, share, and pray:** Pray for commitment to examine the use of power and make the needed changes for a better world and society.

11 December. The Power of Forgiveness. Michael said, "You know what, when we did training for marriage preparation I was quite challenged by the idea that couples through their Sacrament have the grace of forgiveness. It's not quite the same as God's taking away our sins, but after I had that affair and you found out I felt terrible, so guilty I just wanted to crawl into a hole. When after some time and some counselling you said, "I forgive you, and would like to start over it felt like being healed and reborn. I was over the moon to be able to pick up my bed and come back home to you. I can't say thank you often enough for that." Their intimate smile to each other spoke volumes.

Scripture: *Jesus said, "Why do you question? What is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Rise and walk?" But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the man who was paralysed, "Rise up, take up your bed and go home." Luke 5:17-26.* **Pope Francis:** *Couples should be helped to realise that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their*

union. AL 232 In resolving to forgive the other, each has to ask quietly and humbly if he or she has not somehow created the conditions that led to the other's mistakes. AL 236. **Reflect, share, and pray:** Pray for openness to growth and willingness to be forgiving.

12 December. Ethics. "Grandad do you really have a hundred sheep here on the farm?" George asked "and would you go searching for one that is missing?" "My child, I have much more than a hundred sheep and we do count them. But things are different these days. We know that stock theft is a very big problem. Some farmers have even given up because thieves steal all the time. I don't know why people have become so dishonest and greedy and don't respect other peoples' property. It makes it hard to value anything. Will it ever change again? Over dinner they had a serious discussion about COP 28, theft and ethical decadence in general. Will there be genuine concern for the common good or self-interest only?. Does poverty have a part in this?

Scripture: *If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety nine on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray? Mat 18:12-13.* **Pope Francis:** *Ethically speaking, in conscience, and with an eye to the children who will pay for the harm done by the actions of those who don't care the question of meaning inevitably arises, "What is the meaning of my life and my time on earth? What is the meaning of all my work and effort?"* **Reflect, share, and pray:** Crime and corruption of all kinds are rife everywhere today. How are our own ethical standards?

13 December. St Lucy. Lucy is revered as a young virgin martyr. According to tradition her parents wanted her to marry a pagan man and she refused. He denounced her as a Christian at the time Christians were persecuted. She was tortured for her faith and her eyes were gouged out and she was later executed. She is patron saint of the blind. The name Lucy means light. Her feastday is during the time of the Hannukah, the Jewish Festival of Light.

Scripture *No one who lights a lamp hides it away or places it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. Luke 11:33.* **Prayer to St Lucy.** *Saint Lucy, you did not hide your light under a basket, but let it shine for the whole world, for all the centuries to see. We may not suffer torture in our lives the way you did, but we are still called to let the light of our Christianity light up our daily lives. Please help us to have the courage to bring the light of our faith into our work, our recreation, our relationships, our conversation -- every corner of our day. Amen.* **Pope Francis** writes of the communion of saints. *The holiness of the saints in the communion of saints comes to the aid of our weakness in a way that enables the Church to fortify the weakness of some with the strength of others. The Face of Mercy 22.* **Reflect, share, and pray:** *During the holiday season remember those people who are suffering from various disabilities, like blindness and others. Offer any need you can.*

14 December. God provides through his mercy. Granny Mabel was getting ready to welcome all the family visitors while the children and grandchildren were packing up and leaving their normal lives behind. Jessica stopped to think. "When we go away on holiday we easily forget about our ordinary daily lives. But all aspects of the world and of nature need to continue to function. If it doesn't rain we complain of the heat and drought. If it rains too much we complain too. Ideally according to the natural law of creation there should be a balance but our exploitation of nature in the last 200 years has upset the balance. Although many climate-related disasters like drought and floods, and extreme heat and cold do happen more and more frequently God nevertheless continues to sustain his world because of his concern and his mercy. Let us take God on holiday, pray for good weather but remember to give Him thanks every day.

Scripture: *You shall rejoice in the Lord. When the poor and needy seek water and there is none and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them." Is 41:13-20,* **Pope Francis:** *Praise God for all his creatures." That was the message of St Francis of Assis of his life, and his actions. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." How can we not admire this tenderness of Jesus for all the being that accompany us along the way.* **Reflect, share, and pray:** Let us take God on holiday, thank him daily and pray for good weather but do our bit too, drive safely, spend wisely and be kind to one another.

December 15. December 11th. Arrive alive. In an end-of-the-year project the children had made a poster of the 10 Commandments. "Which ones should we be aware of at this time, I wonder," Mom had asked. "Probably all of them" was the answer. "But let us pray around the 5th commandment "Do not kill." Cornelius had spent two years studying to become a paramedic. "It isn't just doing a bit of first aid, you know," he stated. "We do a lot of serious life-saving, but

sometimes road accidents, road rage, drowning, reckless driving, drinking and driving are so often so unnecessary, and even make us cross. I know we do a lot of good, but too much “snot and trane” (Afrikaans saying) could be avoided.”

Scripture: “O that you had listened to my commandments. Then your peace would have been like a river . your offspring would have been like the sand and your descendants like its grains. Is 48:17-19 **Pope Francis:** Pope Benedict asked us to recognize that the natural environment and the social environment have been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour. Both are due to the same evil: the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless. LS 6. **Reflect, share, and pray:** How many people will die on the roads these holidays? Will it be more or less than last year? Let us pray to St Christopher for protection and that all drivers will act responsibly for the safety of their passengers and other families on the road.”

16 December. Day of Reconciliation. This is a special South African day, a public holiday, celebrated by all of our people to remind us of the divisions of the past; racial, religious, cultural, even economic and political. These divisions were also experienced in our families and between different groups of families. Beginning with our own we can reflect on the divisions and conflicts, on the hurt and harm they caused and our need for reconciliation and peace. Then reach out to others too. Forgiveness is a decision to be merciful, not to forget but to choose to let go.

Scripture: O God, bring us back, let your face shine on us, and we shall be saved. May your hand be on the man at your right hand as your own, and we shall never forsake you again; give us life that we may call upon your name. Ps 80. **Pope Francis:** Forgiving does not mean forgetting. In the face of an action that can never be tolerated, justified or excused we can still forgive. Free and heartfelt forgiveness is some noble act, a reflection of God’s own infinite ability to forgive. If forgiveness is gratuitous it can be shown even to someone who resists repentance and is unable to beg pardon. **Reflect, share, and pray,** for an increase in willingness to forgive and accept forgiveness.

17 December. Sunday Advent 3B. Live in Joy! Three candles are lit on the Advent wreath and we pray to live in joy! Fr Teddy looked around the congregation and noted that it had grown much smaller as people had started to go away. Nevertheless, he focused on those staying behind and others coming to visit. That is how families experience Advent and Christmas in many parts of the country. He said to them, “ This is holiday time but Advent is quite a serious time of reflection. So far we have had COP 28 the climate conference, and 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM plus being faced with images and news of the wars and conflicts around the world. However its real purpose is to celebrate the fulfilment of the promise of a Messiah and our welcoming him each year with great joy. What are the real joys in your family life? Are they simple everyday things like having fun together or bigger things, like father and other family members coming home from work for the holidays, or for some of us a going away together? Working at and achieving family unity in our own particular type of family is one of a family’s most important tasks. Use the time to practice the ‘listening and sharing’ technique we have spoken about when you spend a little prayer time together.” He concluded, “I will miss my own family but look forward to enjoying special time with some of you. Please invite me!”

Scripture: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted. I will rejoice greatly in the Lord. As the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring before all the nations. Is 61. **Pope Francis:** General audience November 15 2023. “An encounter with Jesus always brings you joy and if this does not happen to you it is not a true encounter with Jesus.” Pope Francis concluded by offering comforting words for the faithful to take to heart, and some homework. “Each of us today take a little time and think: ‘Jesus, You are within me: I want to meet You every day. You are a Person, not an idea; You are a companion, not a programme. You are Love that solves so many problems. You are the beginning of evangelization, of good news for all. You, Jesus, are the source of joy.’ Amen” **Reflect, share, and pray.** Don’t forget, The family that prays, + plays together, stays together!

A CHILDREN'S PEACE PILGRIMAGE. A Christmas parable for our time for families.



Introduction. An activity to prepare for and discuss the story. **Read:** This is a family story for reading, sharing and discussing and telling in simpler form to young children. rather than a story to be read to them.

Activity for families: To make a poster begin with a large image of a map of the world. Mark Israel and Bethlehem on the map. (Is this not nearly in the centre of the world?) With the help of google find and mark all the places where there is war going on, or places where peace has just been made. Find out something about the history of the places, what happened and how the children there were hurt, injured and kidnapped or orphaned. Draw a line from each place to Bethlehem in Israel and see if you can make a big star on the world map, like the silver star in the cave in Bethlehem which you can see from google

Think also about the little wars that we fight in our own homes and communities. Is there something you can do as a family to help to bring peace into your world?

THE PEACE PILGRIMAGE STORY. (also published daily in THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY for December.)

18 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. To prepare for their family Christmas weekend Grandad Joseph and Granny Mabel decided to tell a story that they had put together with Granny Toni. Some of it came from their own history, some from local history, some from their lives, praying and sharing over the years and some also from very recent world events, especially the Israel-Hamas war, which had begun on October 7, with a surprise attack and which was still carrying on after more than a month. The story was about pilgrimages. Pope Francis, after the important meeting in Rome in October 2023, had spoken about the way forward in life as a pilgrimage, a journey, walking together. That made Granny Toni decide to include some thoughts from her own pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2005.

Granny Toni started by saying, "Do children go on pilgrimages? And if so where do they go? Most likely they would go with their parents if the family was going to Ngome, Fatima or maybe to Rome or the Holy Land. Do those names bring to your mind pictures of holy people and holy places? When we see pictures of Jesus and Mary and other saints we often see them in churches or deserts or quiet places, but remember that Jesus lived 2000 years ago in a normal family in a normal little market town called Nazareth. There were probably goats and sheep in the streets, dirt roads or tracks running up the hill, a well where the women went to fetch water and have a gossip about the affairs of the town, and where the children played with the kind of toys they had 2000 years ago. I saw that Nazareth doesn't look like that any more, nor does Jerusalem or Bethlehem or any of the places we read about in the Bible.

Going on a pilgrimage is a journey to a place that is special for you. It can be a journey of discovery into the past or to a place that is special and sacred to your own family, like the grave of your great-grandfather. For Catholics pilgrimages are often to places where Mary, Jesus' mother appeared. She has appeared to children, like at Fatima more than 100 years ago, or Medjugorje until quite recently, to give them a message from Jesus. These messages are always about love, making peace, about mercy, accepting one another and caring for one another.

Scripture: We shall go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. For the sake of my family and friends let me say, "Peace upon you. For the sake of the house of the Lord, our God, I will seek good things for you. Ps 122 **Pope Francis.** I ask everyone to go with me on this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful. LD 69.

19 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Grandpa Joseph had been a catechist and had studied some of the history of Israel, the Holy Land, where Jesus lived and died 2000 years ago. He explained how many times it has been invaded, wars were fought and villages were destroyed, people were captured and taken to foreign countries. According to the Bible God was always on their side, even if he was punishing them for not following his laws. The Holy Land has been ruled by different nations for 3000 years, already long before the time of Jesus. Seldom has there been peace in the land for long, also not in the other nearby countries. In our day Israelis, mainly Jews, and Palestinians, who are mostly Muslims, live there and at present there is no peace. A brutal surprise attack happened on October 7, 2023. Hamas, a militant group in Gaza, part of the country, wanting to overthrow the Israeli government invaded villages, killed many family members and captured others, taking them away as hostages. Israel's army retaliated and the war that followed almost immediately, using all kinds of the most modern weapons is one of the most horrific and brutal wars imaginable. The whole world could watch on TV and social media as the tragedy unfolded of more than 10,000 deaths including 5000 children. Massive destruction and thousands more injuries of innocent Palestinian people, who found themselves in the way of the warring parties, continued for days.

"Who is ultimately responsible?" "How and when will the air strikes, bombing, and killing end?" "Is the end of the world about to happen?" people were asking. "But what can we ordinary people and our families do?" "Pope Francis has asked us to pray every day for peace and an end to war, which, as he keeps on saying, is a defeat where no one ever wins." Many world leaders tried to stop the war, and to mediate but Israel demanded the return of their hostages, before they would stop and so carried on their attacks against Hamas. The Archbishop of Jerusalem even offered himself in exchange for the release of captured children. People are asking, "Was it a war between different religions, or was it political, ethnic, between groups of people, and about land?"

Scripture: *The Lord turns his face against the wicked to destroy their remembrance from the earth. Where the just cry out the Lord hears and rescues them in all their distress. Ps 34..* **Pope Francis:** *War is a defeat. Always.*

20 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Grandad Joseph and Granny Mabel knew about war, as they had experienced political fighting in their own part of the country, just as they knew was happening elsewhere, with children so often the innocent sufferers. How could they be compensated?

Granny shared a story. "Imagine what it would be like for children to travel from all over the world, from near and far, meeting up with others and finally ending up altogether from different countries in Jesus' birthplace, in time for his birthday. That is what happened to Busi a young boy from Shoboshobane, a small village in the old kingdom of KwaZulu-Natal, where one Christmas, when he was just a baby, a very sad thing happened. Different clans had been fighting amongst themselves for a long time. Things came to a head that December. On Christmas eve, no one would have expected it, but when many of the local people had gathered in one of the bigger houses to pray together there was a sudden loud noise and a crowd of men with spears and assegais rushed into the village and began attacking, beating people and stabbing them. The local men were not prepared for this and could not defend their people. Quickly the battle was over, the attackers fled and many villagers were left dead or seriously wounded. Busi, whose full name is Sibusiso, meaning blessing, was one of the few children who survived with his mother. The survivors of the massacre fled into the hills and later moved on to different places, leaving their village abandoned, as if there was a curse on it. Years later it still lay, overgrown with grass and weeds, roofless, empty shells of homes. "It's a bit like what has just happened in the Holy Land," she sighed

Scripture: *I will hear what the Lord god speaks, he speaks of peace for his people and his faithful. PS 85.* **Pope Francis:** *In the name of victims of wars, persecution and injustice we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue. FT 285*

21 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. When Busi was old enough he was sent to the local mission school. That was where he heard more about Jesus, the greatest king of all, a strong king who did not make war but believed in peace. Busi often listened to stories told by Brother Francis, who had come from far away across the sea and still remembered the great war in Europe and other parts of the world more than 60 years ago. Many millions of people were killed as opposing sides fought fierce battles. Many Jewish people too were killed, especially because of their faith. Brother Francis believed only in peace, like Jesus did and the first Franciscan brother, St Francis himself, and of course our own Pope Francis who so often says how sad he is about the many wars today and how he prays for the many children who suffer.

It was Brother Francis who thought up the idea of a pilgrimage for children, bringing them together from many countries where they have suffered because of war. He wanted to bring them to the place where Jesus, the real king of peace was born. He knew that nowadays even young children can surf the net and soon they can find out on their parents' or their own computers about the conflicts that happened in all kinds of countries all over the world. He thought how children

know so much with their heads and at times with their bodies too, but sometimes they have not felt these painful things yet in their hearts.

Scripture: *Jesus said, "suffer little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* **Pope Francis:** *Children need help in the process of inner healing and in this way grow in the ability to understand and live in peace with others.*

22 December.. Read, reflect, share, pray. First Brother Francis sent messages to other Franciscan brothers all over the world. They found many boys and girls who had suffered when there had been war in their countries and they began to connect them with one another. They also found some generous people who were willing to donate money, and so the plan began to come together. Eventually 50 children from all over the world would make their pilgrimage for peace together.

Busi started writing letters and sending messages via one of Brother Francis' friends. He wrote to Balekwa from Somalia. Christo from Colombia sent emails to his namesake Christo from Indonesia. Moses from Israel wrote to Mohamed from Palestine, Adam from Turkey to Aadam from Iraq and many more. Girls named Mary, Miriam, Mara or Maria from Rwanda, Ukraine, Vietnam and Ireland were put in touch with one another. All these children had stories of pain, sadness and loss caused by a lack of peace in the places where they lived. Some of the children had even been child soldiers. Some of the boys had carried guns and killed people. Some of the girls had been attacked and raped. Some children had suffered because of the serious poverty that comes with war and other children had been refugees, or been separated from their families or even abused in their homes. Some were AIDS orphans, some war orphans. Some too were orphans or abandoned children because of violence and crime. For more than a year this network of children was built up using whatsapp, emails, sometimes letters or telephones and radio. One of Brother Francis' brothers set up a chatgroup where the children in the different countries could chat as he guided them to learn about St Francis, his love for nature, for the poor and how he had worked for peace 800 years ago, in Damietta, in the same part of the world as Israel today. Isn't it strange but wonderful that even though there is poverty in the world and so many abandoned children, technology could bring them hope and comfort from other children like themselves, as they told their stories and listened to the tales of the other children.

As the time for the pilgrimage grew closer other people began to take an interest, especially as war in Israel had again been so much in the news and everyone had their opinions. Some politicians and business people and those from TV stations wanted to know what was going on. But this wasn't meant to be a media circus for TV but a children's pilgrimage and Brother Francis and his team did all they could to control the media and to protect the children and keep the simplicity and the personal human closeness alive.

Scripture: *Come Lord, visit us in peace, that we may rejoice in your presence with hearts made new.* **Pope Francis:** *sharing stories and listening is the new way forward for the Church.*

23 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. By the 20th December everything was ready and the children had been prepared. Busi and his mom were so excited they could hardly wait. They were leaving on 22nd December, but some of the children with parents or other companions had left earlier or later, depending on where in the world they were coming from and how they had to travel, by car, bus, train, plane, or ship.

On Christmas eve they all began to arrive in Israel. Jerusalem and Bethlehem are very close to each other but there is a big wall intended to divide the Israeli people in Jerusalem from the Palestinians in Bethlehem. For this special occasion the government had even agreed to a pause in the war and to open the road to them all. The mayors had put their differences aside and the two mayors had come to welcome the Peace Children from all over the world. Boys and girls of all ages, shapes and sizes, all races and colours, first looked one another over, but soon found the friends they had been writing to. It was as if a vast network, a big web, was coming together. They held hands, they danced and sang, they played and laughed and cried too at times. There were a few fights, after all children will be children.

Scripture: *O Lord have mercy on me, be my helper. You have changed my mourning into dancing. I will thank you forever.* **Pope Francis:** *Jesus is our faithful friend. He is with us on our journey.*

24 December. 4th Sunday of Advent. Christmas Eve. Read, reflect, share, pray. Light four candles on the Advent wreath and pray. Granny Toni shared how she remembered her pilgrimage in 2005 and what she had seen and experienced in the cave below the old Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. A very strong sense of motherly tenderness had come over her just thinking of the vulnerable little baby Jesus born in such poverty.

For the Peace Children the time came that everyone had all been waiting for. As the evening grew dark on that peaceful night a little army of children filled Manger Square outside the ancient church in Bethlehem, dating back to the early days of Christianity. In a way, just like for Mary and Joseph 2000 years ago, there was no room for them in the inn either, as the place of the birth of Jesus, believed to be in the cave now under the church, was too small for them all to stand around. So they made their own circle, a tight circle, made up of 50 bodies and hands intertwined, holding one another close. The crib was in the centre, with specially chosen parents in the role of Mary and Joseph and farm animals brought in from the countryside. The baby's crib was surrounded by lights and connected by ribbons from the different countries making like a great big star on a great big world map. As the bells of the world rang out at midnight, Brother Francis brought the baby Jesus, as St Francis had done 800 years ago in Italy, and tenderly laid it in the manger. Who could say that it wasn't an angel choir that sang so sweetly, "Gloria in excelsis deo, et in terra pax hominibus." Yes, it is possible to say, to believe and to live that message that the Peace Children had to take back home with them to countries where peace was still a dream. *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all people of goodwill."*

Scripture & Pope Francis: *Put on Jesus, and go, the world needs you. Love, peace and joy to every child, every family and every home.*

25 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Christmas Day. Grandad Joseph continued the story, "While the adults and family members looked on, the children did praise God, sing and dance through the night, as the well-known story was acted out. They were the angels, messengers from God, who had come with a message of goodwill and peace on earth. They were shepherds, work-men and women and soldiers, workers who had put down their weapons and tools to join in a moment of hope and joyful celebration. Children from the East, from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist families shared their gift, a dream of peace and unity. The gift the Peace Pilgrims of the world brought was the gift of their simplicity, their need for love, harmony, for peace and joy in their homes and in the world, their common home.

Scripture & Pope Francis: *"A little child will lead them." All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout to the Lord, all the earth, sing out your praise.*

26 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Day of Goodwill. The United Nations Secretary General, a sad and hurting man, awoke on Christmas morning to a new hope, a new dream. "You worldly wise men, so-called leaders of the world, who debate and discuss, argue to convince and then veto every possibility of peace, should take a lesson from the children of the world. You, in your climate debates, most recently at COP 28 always claim you are concerned about them and their future. Listen to the hope expressed by the children. And listen to another sad and hurting old man, Pope Francis. In his messages, he repeats the constant refrain of his model and patron St Francis, "Praise God, for all his creatures." St Francis, who lived and loved Jesus totally, ended his life in full communion with him, in poverty and through his sharing in his bodily suffering bearing the wounds of Jesus on his own body. St Francis died as he had lived, proclaiming reconciliation, peace, praise and joy. May that be the blessing of Christmas 2023.

Scripture: *Praise him, sun and moon, praise him all you shining stars. Praise him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created. Ps 148. Pope Francis:* *The Lord does not faint or grow weary. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. (Is 40) LS 73*

Pray the prayer of St Francis together and think about what you each can do to bring peace into the home and the world.
Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love,

where there is injury let me sow pardon,

Where there is discord, harmony.

Where there is doubt faith and where there is despair hope,

Where there is darkness light and where there is sadness joy.

*Divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,*

to be loved as to love, to receive sympathy as to give it.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen



27 December. St John. Apostle and evangelist. Read, reflect, share, pray. The apostle John is often described in the gospels as ‘the one whom Jesus loved.’ He was also chosen to remain with the early Christian community for a long time as a witness of God’s love. The writings of the gospel of John, the three letters and the book of Revelation are all attributed to him directly or indirectly. He writes much about love and becoming one. He presents the contrasting images of light and darkness with reference to Jesus. These qualities are always called for but appear to be particularly important for our world and our time. South Africa’s recent victory in the Rugby World cup is sometimes celebrated with the song “The world in union.” But apart from a few brief moments that union is not the reality in all of creation.

Scripture: *That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. 1 John 1:1-4.* **Pope Francis:** *Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day. For there to be solid and lasting advance in addressing climate change I would insist that preferences should be given to multilateral agreements between states. We are speaking above all of more effective world organisations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty and the sure defence of fundamental human rights. LD 34-35*

28 December. Holy innocents. Read, reflect, share, pray. Lifegiving and lifedestroying. Matthew’s gospel tells the story of the three foreign Wise Men bringing gifts. It also tells how King Herod out of jealousy and fear about a possible new king of the Jews ordered the murder of all baby boys in Bethlehem. Joseph was warned in a dream to take Mary and baby Jesus and escape into exile. There are many lessons to be learned here. We have been outraged daily at news reports of the injustice of killing innocent Palestinians in the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza and there is particular emphasis on the children. However, should we not feel greater outrage at the killing of so many unborn babies through abortion. All over the world there are over 70 million abortions every year and in South Africa over 100 000 per year. At the same time should we not also feel concern for the situations that lead to such a drastic choice? The task of families is to serve life in the widest sense. Would that not also include drinking and driving and destroying our health through substance abuse? How genuinely lifegiving are we being, starting at home?

Scripture: *Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the Wise Men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years old or under. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, :a voice was heard in Ramah, Rachel weeping for children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more.” Matt 2.* **Pope Francis:** *in the name of peoples who have lost their security, peace and the possibility of living together, becoming victims of destruction, calamity and war; in the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith; in the name of all persons of goodwill present in every part of the world; in the name of God we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path, mutual cooperation as the code of conduct, reciprocal understanding as the method and standard. From Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi 2019. Fratelli Tutti 285*

29th December. JESUS. Read, reflect, share, pray. The name Jesus means Saviour, i.e. something active but should also maybe be understood as gift, Mpho. God’s merciful gift of love that he gave to us at Christmas in the Incarnation is not only an abstract something but a person, God’s Son who is also our brother and friend. He came as a humble helpless baby. He lived a simple life in a small country mixing with ordinary people but showed us the way of unconditional love and complete self-giving by his life and finally his death. His Resurrection completed God’s plan of salvation and paved the way for us. How can we show our love and thank him for this saving gift?

Scripture: *The greatest gift a person can give is to give his life for his friends. John 15:13.* **Pope Francis.** *The Holy Father lamented when we Christians do not reflect the joy and hope offered by Christ’s closeness to us. “These unhappy Christians forget: an encounter with Jesus always brings you joy and if this does not happen to you it is not a true encounter with Jesus. Each of us today take a little time and think: ‘Jesus, You are within me: I want to meet You every day. You are a Person, not an idea; You are a companion, not a programme. You are Love that solves so many problems. You are the beginning of evangelisation. You, Jesus, are the source of joy.’ Pope Francis 15 November 2023.*

30 December. Ancestors for today. Read, reflect, share, pray. What role do ancestors play in the Church and society today? Families do continue to have a relationship with their own ancestors, honouring and communicating with them at particular family moments, but what expectations do they have of them and their lifestyle and behaviour? What kind of role models were they to us? Since the time of the 2nd Vatican Council but with greater emphasis today, since the Synod on Synodality and its emphasis on the role of the laity, the Church is looking into its own possible candidates for sainthood

amongst lay people, couples and individuals. These could be considered in a similar light as personal ancestors but their lifestyle is closely scrutinized. In 2015 Benedict Daswa, a school teacher and family man from Venda, who was murdered for his rejection of witchcraft, was beatified as the 1st important step in the process. At present a very devout lay couple from Johannesburg has been proposed for investigation. Domitilla, who with her husband Danny founded Little Eden, which has grown to have two centres catering for severely disabled children and adults providing a home and care.

Scripture: *“May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children’s children!” Ps 128:5-6. Pope Francis: There are no lasting changes without cultural changes and there are no cultural changes without personal changes. LD 70. As families, during these holidays and with the New Year just around the corner make it a project to consider who our positive role models are, that can continue to inspire us to love one another as God loves us. They may be family members, present or past, godparents or friends. They may be living or have lived good saintly lives or may even be martyrs of our time, caring for people or for an aspect of creation, as the world our family of families. Young people in particular need positive role models to imitate and emulate. A good yardstick to measure, without necessarily being too judgemental is the quotation from the prophet Micah. “What the Lord asks of you simply is this, “Act justly. Love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8*

31 December. New Years Eve. Holy Family Sunday. Read, reflect, share, pray. This special day, on the 1st Sunday after Christmas, that commemorates the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, calls on every human family to be a holy family. Holy most simply means whole or complete, not just having our lives in order in a practical way, but living with awareness of God, and God’s love and mercy for each of God’s creatures, human and more, in and beyond our immediate circle. It means aiming at peace, beginning in the home and experiencing the “joy of love” Pope Francis speaks of in *Amoris Laetitia* his letter to Families. Everyone, in every family too is invited to participate with the Synod on Synodality’s continuing process of listening, sharing and walking together for the future of the Church and of its families.

Scripture: *When the time came the parents of Jesus brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Simeon took him in his arms, blessed God and said, “My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” They returned to Nazareth and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and favour of God was upon him. Luke 2:22-40*

BLESSING: *May the Lord bless our home and all who live here. May our home be always filled with the presence of God, in the love, peace and joy shared amongst us. When there is conflict make us willing to be reconciled. May we always care for one another as a true family of God. We ask this in the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

We pray with Pope Francis, *“Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalised find ready comfort and healing. Make us once more mindful of the sacredness of the family and its beauty in God’s plan. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen. AL 325.*

The encyclicals and other writings of Pope Francis are helpful vehicles towards holiness; *Amoris Laetitia* – on the family. the care of creation in *Laudato Si* and the renewed effort required as noted in *Laudate Deum. Fratelli Tutti* addresses social friendship on a wider scale and addresses war and violence of any kind.

These important documents from Pope Francis should be studied and adopted by every human family for the future of our families and the whole family of creation.

The Laudato Si Movement and LS Action Platform can also be companions on our journey to become a holy family.

MARFAM’s *Families caring for God’s Creation* booklet serves as an introduction to the Laudato Si Action Platform goals.

A postscript for some family joy going into 2024. Abraham Lincoln once said, *“I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts, and beer.” (PS TONI)– but not too much beer please!*

