



2024 OUR WORLD, FAMILY OF FAMILIES.

MARFAM DAILY THOUGHTS FOR JANUARY.

Theme: FAMILY BEGINNINGS



DAILY THOUGHTS published daily on www.marfam.org.za, facebook, X, and emailed to subscribers.

To receive by email send request to info@marfam.org.za. Tel +27 82 552 1275

Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG = Evangelii Gaudium LD = Laudate Deum. MM – Misericordia et Misera.

The **2024 FAMILY YEAR PLANNER** can be downloaded from www.marfam.org.za or ordered from us.

DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY FOR WORLD PEACE AND LIVING TOGETHER by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tay-yeb given in Abu Dhabi 2019. A valuable resource. Download from www.vatican.va

POPE FRANCIS MESSAGE ON WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE. JANUARY 1. "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEACE."
Download from www.vatican.va

JANUARY overview. Family Beginnings. In the beginning, before the world, the sun, moon, stars, animals, plants and humankind were created there was only God, as Trinity, a community of love. God had a passion to create, to share and to love, and so every created thing came into being. The desire for creation, co-creation and re-creation was implanted into every creature and through their reproductive ability our world has evolved. Humankind, with the task of being stewards of creation, take responsibility for our own and all the families of creation. This month we can reflect on the family beginnings in human and other elements of creation. How can we resolve to begin again, to love and renewal in every area of our lives? How can we respond to the impact of our harmful behaviour on the earth and its creatures?

Pope Francis: *As never before common destiny begs us to seek a new beginning. Let ours be a time remembered for awakening a new reverence for life, a firm resolve to achieve sustainability, quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life. LS207 Earth Charter.*

The THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY for faith sharing with a family focus use a modified SEE-JUDGE-ACT method.

1. A look at a life situation, built on the scripture passage and the monthly theme.
2. Read from scripture (the scripture of the day) and Church teaching (extracts from Pope Francis writings)
3. Reflect, share, pray, act.

The primary intention is to promote a spirituality of family life, as the normal way of being, for most people in the various family forms, and with the different experiences. The THOUGHTS can be used by individuals or together.

Setting the scene in an imaginary parish setting. To begin the New Year with the theme FAMILY BEGINNINGS – OUR WORLD A FAMILY OF FAMILIES Fr Obed, the parish priest and the PPC invited the parish groups and all parishioners in their own families, i.e their own churches of the home, to make a good start by taking this eco-family concept to heart. "I know it is still holiday time for many of us, but making and carrying out some New Year's resolutions is a good start. Every individual person in their own unique way can do so, but families are invited to make time to listen and share with one another as often as possible, ideally at least once a week. It is a way for eco-family planning, mutual decision-making and it is great for mutual support, using the synodal listening and sharing process ." Families were also encouraged to use the MARFAM Family Year Planner, which they can buy or download, even use as a family events calendar, filling in birthdays, anniversaries of weddings or death, unveilings and other special celebrations. This can become a liturgical calendar for their church of the home.

LAUDATO SI FAMILY PRAYER: God of love show us our place in this world as families and as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future for the coming of your Kingdom, of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you! Amen.

January 1. Mary, Mother of God. World Day of Prayer for Peace. One of Mary's most significant titles is Queen of Peace. In many apparitions over the centuries she has requested prayers for peace in particular countries and in the world. Pope Francis has chosen the theme 'Artificial Intelligence and Peace,' for his 2024, message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace. He urges world leaders to ensure that progress in developing forms of artificial intelligence "will ultimately serve the cause of human fraternity and peace." It is too easy for families to take these new developments for granted but, as an addition to many aspects of daily life, we also need to be aware of the inherent risks, e.g. fake news and social media. Family members can pray this scriptural blessing over one another on this first day of the New Year.

Reflect, share. Scripture Blessing Prayer: “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace. Book of Numbers 6:23-27. **Pope Francis.** New technologies must always be directed to the pursuit of peace and the common good, in the service of the integral development of individuals and communities. Attention is drawn to the ethical dimension of these new technologies which are revolutionizing humanity in all spheres of life, highlighting the ambivalence inherent in any progress in science and technology. On the one hand, he says, it can lead to the betterment of humanity and the transformation of the world if it contributes to greater order in human society and greater fraternal communion and freedom. On the other hand, techno-scientific advances, especially in the digital sphere, are placing in human hands a vast array of options, including some that may pose a risk to our survival and endanger our common home. No technological innovation is neutral. Pope Francis concludes, **Prayer and action:** “It is my prayer at the start of the New Year that the rapid development of forms of artificial intelligence will not increase cases of inequality and injustice all too present in today’s world, but will help put an end to wars and conflicts, and alleviate many forms of suffering that afflict our human family.” Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 57th World Day of Peace 1st January 2024 <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2023/12/14/messaggio-pace.html>.

January 2. “Tweede Nuwejaarsday” is a cultural celebration in Cape Town, a minstrel festival with a flamboyant street parade, singing, banjos and other instruments. Interestingly it commemorates the 19th century slave culture when slaves were given this day off to celebrate the New Year. Family groups shared, “Nowadays we do celebrate this festival, but there is much condemnation of the evils of slavery which was the norm. Human trafficking today can also be seen as a modern form of slavery.” “But what about the war in the Holy Land, isn’t there a case of oppression and domination too?” “We can even ask ourselves in our families if we are fair and just to our workers today, recognising that they have families too to celebrate and spend time with?”

Reflect, share. Scripture All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout to the Lord all the earth, ring out your joy. PS 97:4. **Pope Francis.** Some people attempt to flee from reality; take refuge in their own little world; others react with violence. Between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue. A country flourishes when constructive dialogue occurs between its many rich cultural components: popular culture, university culture, youth, artistic, technological, economic, family and media culture. FT 199 **Pray :** for honesty, acceptance and growing unity in our diversity. Choose appropriate action.

January 3. Most Holy Name of Jesus. Bruce always felt a bit awkward talking about religion at home. Most of the family were Catholic but he had never converted from Judaism. He said to himself, “I think that in the spirit of fraternity it would be good for me to discover more about the Catholic faith. I don’t know where that will lead me, but I will do my best. I won’t talk about it with the others though just yet, as they might push me too hard.”

Reflect, share, Scripture At the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, those in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:10. **Pope Francis:** “The name of Jesus. There is no other name. Perhaps it will do good to all of us, who live in a world that offers us such a multitude of ‘saviours.’ Whenever there are problems people do not commend themselves to Jesus, but to others, even turning to self-styled magicians that they may resolve matters. People consult tarot cards, to know what to do. But there is no salvation there: it is in the name of Jesus. And we should bear witness to this! He is the one Saviour. We can always call on the name of Jesus and repeat this simple prayer. **Pray:** ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’ It’s a beautiful prayer, a prayer of hope, because I am turning to him who can open the doors and solve my problems, and make me see the horizon of hope.” Choose appropriate action.

January 4. Taking stock is an excellent thing, for individuals but for a whole family too. It can be done at the beginning of the year, or regularly, from time to time. Mr Purser suggested, “How are we going to practise our family listening and sharing times this coming school and work year? Will we be able to programme some time into our week, time without cellphones, TV or computers? We can each talk about our own reality and plans and also consider what we can do together to become an “eco-friendly family,” caring for the environment. Let everyone have a chance to express their own ideas.”

Reflect, share. Scripture: My children, do not let anyone lead you astray: to live a holy life is to be holy just as God is holy; to lead a sinful life is to belong to the devil since the devil was a sinner from beginning. 1 John 3:7-8, 11. **Pope Francis:** Consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading to the idea that one’s personality is shaped by his or her desires which are considered absolute. The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasure, leads to intolerance and hostility in families. AL 33. **Pray:** for the year ahead that we may be open to one another and the needs of the greater world of families. Choose appropriate action.

January 5. Words and deeds. Gloria Mason was getting ready for the new school year. She had been teaching for many years and felt as if she had become a little stale. During the holidays she had made a retreat and done much spiritual reading. Although she lived alone she was close to her extended family and had spent Christmas together with them. There had been some old scores to settle and she had been able to help with that after her retreat time away, focusing on God and relationships. Now as she prepared herself for the school year she decided to make a poster and a prayer card for herself and her class with the words from John about deeds and truth.

Reflect, share. Scripture *Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deeds and in truth. From 1 John 3:11-21.*
Pope Francis. *In the power of the risen Lord the church wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters, where there is room for all those whom our societies discard, where justice and peace are resplendent. FT 278. We believers need to find occasion to speak with one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions when we encounter others who think differently to us. FT 282. Pray: let us not express our love in words but also in deeds. Choose appropriate action.*

January 6. May and Paul Ceruti had been in business together for some years and the company had grown nicely although times had been tough too, especially during the Covid years. As they looked back and ahead they thought about temptations to corruption they did face and still would have to face in the battle to survive. As an “ubuntu for truth” pledge for committed Christians they decided to join a spiritual business breakfast group and invite colleagues to join in if they wished.

Reflect, share. Scripture *Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:5.*
Pope Francis. *In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes logically and inevitably a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. LS 157. Pray: for honesty and integrity in our country as we prepare for new elections. Choose appropriate action.*

January 7. Epiphany. Paul thought, “Pope Francis appears to be very open to other Christian religions and also to some so-called non-Christians. I find it very confusing as we were brought up to believe that the Catholic Church is the only true church. Now in my family we have people of all religions, all going to different churches.” They discussed this at home and in their faith sharing group. Moyra summed it up by saying that we have every right to be committed to our faith but Pope Francis is asking for tolerance towards others and not to fight about such matters.

Reflect, share. Scripture *the mystery has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is how the gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. Eph 3:5-6.*
Pope Francis. *A journey of peace is possible between religions. Its point of departure must be God’s way of seeing things. “God does not see with his eyes, God sees with his heart. And God’s love is the same for everyone, regardless of religion. FT281. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. Eg250. Pray: for an increasing openness to other religions. Choose appropriate action.*

January 8. Baptism of the Lord. Paulette wrote to her friend, “I know that the Sacrament of Baptism is an initiation into the Christian family, as the Church also describes itself. All our children were baptised as babies and confirmed later on. When Michael chose to join the liberation army because as he said, he really believed in freedom and dignity for all I supported him but also feared for his life. Soon after joining he wrote to us trying to explain his experience, 'it was like a baptism of fire for me; I felt a sense of belonging and of sacrificing for a cause I believed in.' We still worried about his safety but repeating the words of the gospel made us proud and gave us some of God's strength.”

Reflect, share. Scripture *He saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:7-11.*
Pope Francis. *The New Evangelisation tries to help “the baptised whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism and who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church to experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts. EG14. Pray: for an understanding of “the demands of baptism. Choose appropriate action.*

January 9. Infertility. Ordinary time in year 2 begins with readings from the book of Samuel, an important account of the history of Israel, but also of the important people who played a special role. The book of Samuel begins with a story of Elkanah a man with two wives, one who has children and Hannah who is infertile and is taunted by the other wife. Children are regarded as a natural aspect of married life, infertility is a sadness but even seen as a curse in some cultures and can be a great strain on a marriage too. Infertility treatment has become common today and some couples spend

R1000s to have their own baby. John and Paula consulted medical specialists and also their priest. He explained that it is quite right for couples who want to have their love bear fruit in this way. However the Church teaches that children are not a right but a gift from God. Couples are asked to consider other options. Adoption or fostering are also ways of responding to that need to love.

Reflect, share. Scripture: *In the bitterness of her soul Hannah prayed to the Lord with many tears and made a vow saying, "If you will take notice of the distress of your servant and give me a man-child I will give him to the Lord for the whole of his life." Eli, the priest supposed she was drunk but she said, "I have been speaking from the depth of my grief and my resentment." Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant what you have asked of him." From Sam 1: 9-20. **Pope Francis.** In situations where a child is desired at any cost as a right for one's self-fulfilment adoption and foster care correctly understood manifest an important aspect of parenting and raising of children. They make people aware that children whether natural, adoptive or taken in foster care, are persons in their own right, to be accepted, loved and cared for and not just brought into this world. AL 180. **Pray:** for strength and wisdom for couples experiencing infertility.*

January 10th. Every person through their baptism receives a calling from God. Are parents always open to their children being called to serve God in a totally dedicated way in religious life? Do they encourage this, do they allow children to choose their own vocation in life, or expect them to follow a path they have chosen for them? Even though there might be a hope that a child will come into the family business, at this time of the year young people, whenever possible, are starting out to follow their own dreams in many different directions. Parents often make enormous sacrifices to make this possible. Are these sacrifices really appreciated?

Reflect, share. Scripture: *Eli understood that it was the Lord who was calling the boy and he said, "Go and lie down and if someone calls say, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Samuel 3:1-10. **Pope Francis:** The bishops of Southern Africa have stated, "everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse to God's creation. All of us can cooperate as instrument of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents. LS14 **Pray:** for openness to one's calling and the needs of the Church and the world. Choose appropriate action.*

January 11. In the historical context of the time some of the Old Testament books are full of war and destruction as the people of Israel were building themselves into a nation. They believed God was on their side and the Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God's presence. They came to rely on this to give them power over their enemies and were devastated when they were defeated by the Philistines and the Ark was captured. Today this kind of thinking is considered superstition by many, while in some cultures this kind of belief still persist amongst people. Witchcraft and curses are part of this mentality. At the same time wars over land and other possessions continue to this day all over the world, with the very complex situation around the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas even having some historical Biblical connotations. What is really God's will and the way of justice?

Reflect, share. Scripture: *Let us fetch the Ark of our God so that it may come among us and rescue us from the power of our enemies. However, the Ark did not save them and the Philistines captured it. Samuel 4: 1-11. **Pope Francis:** War is a defeat. FT258. In my fraternal meeting with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb we resolutely declared that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they invite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religions groups who in the course of history have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women. FT 285 **Pray:** for an end to war and a true and lasting peace. Choose appropriate action.*

January 12. 3000 years ago Samuel, one of the wise Judges of the people of Israel, warned the people about possible abuses of leadership. When they asked for a king to lead them he warned them about corruption and abuse of power. Every country, or leadership structure down to a family has this potential. Mr Khumalo taught political science at the university but he and his wife also spoke to their own teenage children. "When elections come up," he said, "think seriously about who will receive your vote. We have to work on moral regeneration, make "ubuntu" a reality and promote true justice."

Reflect, share. Scripture: *It displeased Samuel that they should say "Let us have a king to rule us, so he prayed to the Lord. But the Lord said to Samuel, "obey the voice of the people for it is not you they have rejected, they have rejected me." Samuel 8:4-22. **Pope Francis:** The worship of the golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy. EG55. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up*

provoking a rebellion on the part of nature. LS117. **Pray:** for an end to the scourge of corruption and leadership of integrity. Choose appropriate action.

January 13. Saturday Mass of Our Lady. On any Saturday of the year this Mass can be celebrated and her role as mother or her many other titles and images commemorated. At the beginning of this New year, choose a favourite image e.g. consider Mary as a working mother in the home, in the village, going to fetch water with the other women and caring for her little family as all mothers are called to do to the best of their ability. For some, possibly working mothers, or where a mother is the main breadwinner it can be more difficult to keep this balance. However all mothers and every family member can pray for Mary's guidance and protection.

Reflect, share, and Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, you chose the Virgin Mary to be your mother and provide a worthy home in which to dwell. By her prayers keep us from danger and bring us to the joy of heaven where you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen. **Pope Francis:** The Church has been present for centuries and understands grace and sin, the beauty of universal love. For many Christians the journey of fraternity has a mother whose name is Mary. She received the gift of universal motherhood at the foot of the cross and so cares for all her children. In the power of the risen lord, she wants to give birth to a new world, where all are brothers and sisters and there is room for those whom societies discard. FT 278 Choose appropriate action.

January 14. Sunday 2B. Fr Obed consulted the adult catechesis and marriage preparation teams. He discussed with them how to deal with a recent Church statement which appears to be poorly understood and leads to confusion. They agreed, "Let us study our own bishops' response to one of the most recent statements." Cardinal Brislin, the spokesperson of the SACBC said, "giving a blessing to couples in an irregular situation does not legitimize their union. In a message explaining the December 18 declaration on the the pastoral meaning of blessings *Fiducia Supplicans*, issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and approved by Pope Francis, Cardinal Stephen Brislin of Cape Town Archdiocese said, "The document deals with blessings, the history of blessings and the meaning of blessings in the Bible and the Catholic church. In particular it deals with blessings to couples who are in irregular situations, including same-sex unions. The document reaffirms the teaching of the church veryk, very clearly that marriage is an exclusive, stable and indissoluble union between a man and a woman naturally open to the generation of children. Sometimes people ask for a blessing when they are writing exams, or someone is ill in the family. Perhaps there is a family issue, or somebody is taking a journey or for some other special need. When a blessing is given there is not an interrogation made about the person's moral standing or their moral perfection. It is usually simply given in simple words. The Dicastery is saying yes, blessings can be given to couples who are in same0sex unions, or indeed in other irregular unions. Blessings bring people closer to God. the blessing should not be a ritual that is issued by the bishops or the Bishops' conference or any authority. It should be left to the pastor to spontaneously give a simple blessing that could be done at a shrine, on a pilgrimage or in a prayer group."

Fr Obed observed, "I know that some countries in Africa are not happy about the idea but our SACBC has explained it well and I like how Pope Francis is dealing with these situations to help LGBTIQ+ couples and others, like divorced and remarried couples. I'll preach about it this Sunday and hope the right message will come across."

Reflect, share. Scripture: *The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you? 1 Cor 6:13c – 15a.* **Pope Francis:** *Our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning – in its femininity or masculinity - is an essential element of any genuine human ecology.* LS 155. **Pray:** for a deepening understanding of sexuality. Choose appropriate action.

January 15. Discipline is a tough issue nowadays and parents and educators too have to find positive ways to punish children when they disobey the rules, as corporal punishment is no longer considered acceptable. Confiscating a child's phone, or restricting their TV or computer access, or grounding them, preventing their going out with friends are punishments, while living with the consequences of unacceptable behaviour are also punishment in themselves. As a family with children it is important in developing the attitude to discuss what the rules of the house should be and what punishment there should be for disobedience.

Reflect, share. Scripture: *King Saul disobeyed the commands of the Lord in a battle so Samuel, the judge, told Saul of God's severe punishment. "Since you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king." From Samuel 15:16-23.* **Pope Francis:** *It is essential to help children and adolescents to realise that misbehaviour has consequences. They need to be encouraged to put themselves in other people's shoes and acknowledge the hurt they have caused. It is important to train them firmly to ask forgiveness and to repair the harm done.* AL 268. **Pray:** for an understanding of the need for discipline. Choose appropriate action.

January 16th. The Masons were discussing choosing prefects at school. How do you choose the best person for headboy or headgirl?" "At our school our LO teacher gave us quite a lecture about what to look for and not just choose the most popular person." "But why is a person popular in any case?" Amy asked. "Is it behaviour, attitude? Are they honest, caring for others or just nice to their friends." "Would Jesus be a good role model?"

Reflect, share. Scripture: *The Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance for the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Samuel anointed David and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him. 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Pope Francis: "Jesus, ever young" from Christus Vivit, (CV) Pope Francis letter to young people. From what the gospel tells us, we can say that Jesus in the years of his youth was training, being prepared to carry out the Father's plan. Jesus did not grow up in a narrow and stifling relationship with Mary and Joseph but readily interacted with the wider family, with the relatives of his parents and their friends. We can understand why, when he returned from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem his parents readily thought that as a 12 year old he was wandering freely among the crowd even they did not see him for an entire day. They assumed Jesus was mingling with the others, joking with other young people, listening to the adults tell stories and sharing the joys and sorrows of the group on their journey. CV 227-29 Pray: for young people to grow in their relationship with Jesus. Choose appropriate action.*

January 17th. "There are a good number of "David and Goliath" type incidents in society still today. A small person with little power, influence or strength but with a belief in his cause and also trusting in God's help can stand up against much more powerful forces. Do they always win? If they do who or what has helped them?" Mr Petersen had often asked his teenagers as they were growing up whether they would have the courage of David. One son, Jack, had inherited his father's activist nature and he and his university mates had got involved in the student protests and lobbied for climate justice. "It can be scary, but you have to be brave and clever too," he said. "We are committed to an ecological vision for our own future too."

Reflect, share. Scripture: *David and Goliath. David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone and struck the Philistine down and killed him. Samuel 17:32-51. Pope Francis: The heart of the Church is full of young saints who devoted their lives to Christ, many of them even to dying a martyr's death. They were precious reflections of the young Christ. Their witness encourages us and awakens us from our lethargy. Their example shows what the young are capable of when they open themselves up to encounter Jesus. St Joan of Arc born in 1412 was a young peasant girl who became a soldier and fought to defend her country, France. She was misunderstood and burned at the stake. St Kizito, was the youngest of the Uganda martyrs also burned by a wicked king. Bl Isidore Bakanja was a layman from the Congo who was tortured for having proposed Christianity to young people. CV 49-63. Pray: for young people to develop a sense of commitment to a cause or vision. Choose appropriate action.*

January 18. Jealousy. Whenever there is power there is likely to be some abuse of power. Mirriam experienced it in her office and Jason too in his workplace. People are jealous over promotions or special benefits. In families too jealousy is a common thing and the elders have to keep a balance and not show favouritism in their treatment of children. Children too have to understand that honesty and fair play, call it *ubuntu* is something that has to be learned right from childhood and doesn't just come naturally.

Reflect, share. Scripture: *Saul turned a jealous eye on David from that day forward. Read the long accounts in 1 Samuel 18 and 19. Pope Francis: Envy is a kind of sadness provoked by another's prosperity, it shows that we are not concerned for the happiness of others, but only with our own well-being. True love does not see another person as a threat and frees us from the sour taste of envy. AL 95. Our postmodern world runs the risk of rampant individualism and many problems are connected with today's self-centred culture of instant gratification. LS 162. Pray: for the willingness to deal with jealousy and greed. Choose appropriate action.*

January 19. Mercy. Mercy is not an internal quality only, it is a God-like quality that leads us to value life even over justice. In his letter *The Face of Mercy*, Pope Francis continually describes Jesus' way that goes beyond the law as he practises mercy. In *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis uses the concept of fraternity as social friendship and God-like universal love, qualities similar to mercy. But in real life whenever we hear of a serious crime and a judgement, or a person being granted parole, like Oscar Pistorius, we hear people, especially those closely affected, say, "I won't forgive him. I want him to rot in jail or in hell." Where is the call or the ability to practise mercy in that?

Reflect, share. Scripture: *After King David had saved former king Saul's life, Saul said, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me with good, whereas I have repaid you with evil. You did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands." 1 Samuel 24:2-20. Pope Francis: Mercy is a concrete action of love. By forgiving it transforms and changes lives. In this way the divine mystery of mercy is made manifest. MM2. "In the name of human fraternity, that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal. In the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith..... we declare the adoption of dialogue, mutual cooperation and reciprocal understanding. FT 285 Document on Human Fraternity for world peace and living together. Pray: to learn to be merciful when needed. Choose appropriate action.*

January 20. Friendship. In their discussions during their faith sharing time Mark's family addressed the topic of friendship. Parents don't always like the friends their children bring home when they are young and also as they get older for a variety of reasons e.g. family background, behaviour, appearance. Homosexuality is a recognised reality today. It is a challenge for parents and the young person if they discover their child is gay. How would they deal with their child bringing a gay or lesbian friend home?

Reflect, share. Scripture: *Read from 2 Samuel 1:27. David mourned the death of Saul and Jonathan, his friend and Saul's son. "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished!"* **Pope Francis:** *God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters. FT 5. Every person regardless of sexual orientation ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while every sign of unjust discrimination is to be carefully avoided. AL 250* **Pray:** *to discern wisely on issues related to sexual orientation. Choose appropriate action.*

January 21. Sunday 3B. In his homily Fr Obed reminded the families of their culture of family faith sharing. Later, at home, as the Martins started their sharing Dad began, "You know that the year is nearly a month old, so I think it is a good thing to look at how we are doing. Have we settled down yet into our work, or to school work? How is the new job? I myself sometimes find it hard to feel enthusiastic and get back into the swing of things. Who else feels like that?" Mom agreed that it is good to share one's feelings, to listen and respond without lecturing one another.

Reflect, share. Scripture: *Jesus saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. Mk 1:14-20.* **Pope Francis:** *Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground, all these things are summed up in the word "dialogue." If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue. Unlike disagreement and conflict, persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagine. FT 198.* **Pray:** *as a family in thanksgiving for one another. Choose appropriate action.*

January 22. A large part of the Old Testament contains a history God's involvement with his people. At times they were faithful to his covenant with them, "you will be my people and I will be your God." At other times they were unfaithful, disobeyed and even rejected God to follow local idols and gods of other inhabitants in the land. Many times God renewed his Covenant agreement with them. After Saul was rejected by God for disobedience, David was chosen to succeed him and was seen as the greatest and most successful king. He ruled for forty years, fought many wars and built Israel up as a strong nation. Today some rulers may be revered for a long rule, but mostly we believe in regular change which does help to avoid corruption. There has also been a growing anti-war attitude since the end of WWII and the formation of the United Nations, but this has not been adopted everywhere. Research how many countries in the world are at peace or in a war situation at present and for what reasons. What made or makes those countries and their rulers great or otherwise? Would the same thinking of long service apply within the Church?

Reflect, share. Scripture: *King David grew greater and greater and the Lord, the God of hosts was with him. Read from 2 Samuel 5:1-10.* **Pope Francis.** *The Church while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the building of a better world, or fail to reawaken the spiritual energy that can contribute to the betterment of society. FT276. I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. EG 49* **Pray:** *for our leaders that they may be peace-loving for the good of their people. Choose appropriate action.*

January 23rd. Worship. After the recent church choir festival one old missionary shared with an old choir master friend. "The Church in South Africa has changed so much in the last 30 years. I liked the traditional choirs and beautiful music we used to have." "Yes, but in the church of today there is other "traditional" music and some excellent singing, and dancing as well. People really do feel the spirit is alive. Whether we like it or not that is the best way to keep the youth close to the Church."

Reflect, share. Scripture: *David brought up the ark of God with rejoicing. He danced before the Lord with all his might. All the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and the sound of the horn. From 2 Samuel 6:12-19.* **Pope Francis:** *The deposit of the faith is one thing; the way it is expressed is another. The expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning. EG 41* **Pray:** *in thanksgiving for the gifts of beauty such as music, dance and art. Choose appropriate action.*

January 24. St Francis de Sales was a powerful church leader after the time of the Reformation and was able to help Catholics while also keeping a good relationship with the Protestants. He is a patron of some of religious orders who value him in particular as a doctor of the Church. He is also patron saint of writers and of journalists. One of his well-known writings is *INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE. He who unjustly takes away his neighbour's good name is guilty of sin, and is bound to make reparation, according to the nature of his evil speaking; since no man can enter into Heaven encumbered with stolen goods, and of all worldly possessions the most precious is a good name. Slander is a kind of murder; for we all have three lives—a spiritual life, which depends upon the Grace of God; a bodily life, depending on the soul; and a civil life, consisting in a good reputation. Sin deprives us of the first, death of the second, and slander of the third.*

Reflect, share. Scripture: *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Eph 3:8-12* **Pope Francis:** *Education in the use of forms of artificial intelligence should aim above all at promoting critical thinking. Users of all ages, but especially the young, need to develop a discerning approach to the use of data and content collected on the web or produced by artificial intelligence systems. Message for World Day of Peace. 2023. Artificial Intelligence and peace.* **Pray:** *For a correct and positive use of AI in the world. Choose appropriate action.*

January 25. Conversion of St Paul. Paul's letters in the New Testament were the first teaching documents of the Church, written before the gospels. His life story is of a man very committed to God, wanting to do what is right. He persecuted the early Christians until he had a conversion experience when he heard the voice of Jesus calling out to him. His response was to change his ways and he became the first great missionary. Read up his story in the book of Acts. Are we in our own families and beyond followers, missionaries or persecutors?

Reflect, share. Scripture: *As he journeyed he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' And he said, 'Who are you Lord,' and he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'" Acts 22:3-16.* **Pope Francis:** *Paul's words make us reflect on our lives and see God's mercy at work in changing, converting and reforming our hearts. MM 11. The grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else to perfect the couple's love. We can say that "even if I have faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I have, and deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1Cor 13) AL 89.* **Pray:** *For an increase in loving marriage relationships as expressed by St Paul. Choose appropriate action.*

January 26. At the Woman's meeting they shared, "I do believe in the statement 'power corrupts.' It is frightening how too often, after a time, really good leaders, men and women, are captured by selfishness and greed and lose their sense of ubuntu, justice and morality. Don't we often hear of immorality in high places?" "Actually not nearly enough I think. We too often let celebrities get away with it and forget the victims who are not treated with dignity and mercy." "What about us, who are we to point fingers?"

Reflect, share. Scripture: *David took Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah and she conceived. David wrote a letter to Joab saying "set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting that he may be struck down and die." 2 Samuel 11:1-17.* **Pope Francis:** *The rejection of distortions of sexuality and eroticism should never lead us to a disparagement or neglect of sexuality and eros in themselves. We must not forget that our human equilibrium is fragile; part of us resists real human growth, and any moment it can unleash the most primitive and selfish tendencies. AL 197.* **Pray:** *For responsible and moral behaviour to be modelled in our families. Choose appropriate action.*

January 27. The discussion about immorality and injustice in leaders continued at home. "Maybe the leaders have those weaknesses all along, like all of us in fact, but when they have power it is very hard to correct them. I admire people who own up to their mistakes. Maybe we all need stronger modern day prophets, people of integrity, in the Church and society, to own up and speak up in a just but a merciful way."

Reflect, share. Scripture: *The prophet Nathan said to David, "Because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord the child that is born to you shall die." David said, "I have sinned against the Lord." He prayed and fasted. 2 Samuel 12:1-17* **Pope Francis:** *Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through their joy-filled witness as domestic churches. Pastoral care for families needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person, a response to each one's dignity, fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. Missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems. AL200-1* **Pray:** *for greater support for the pastoral care for families and their needs. Choose appropriate action.*

January 28. Sunday 4B. When Fr Obed studied the readings for this day he was pleased to have a chance to focus on the contrasting ways of life that Paul was speaking about to the Corinthians. Paul told them that the married man and

woman are and should be concerned about worldly affairs and pleasing one another. Those living the consecrated life should be concerned about the affairs of the Lord. Fr Obed said, "I know there was a time in the Church that the consecrated life was considered by many as superior to married life. That is no longer the case. They are different and complementary. Each vocation is a calling to love and commitment to God in its own way. As parents do you consider which is best for your children or allow them the freedom to discern properly."

Reflect, share. Scripture: Brethren I want you to be free from anxieties about the married and the unmarried. I say this for your own benefit not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. 1 Cor 7:32-35. **Pope Francis:** Virginity is an eschatological sign of the risen Christ, marriage is a historical sign for us living in this world, a sign of the earthly Christ who chose to become one with us and gave himself up for us even to shedding his blood. Virginity and marriage are different ways of love. Man cannot live without love, his life is senseless if love is not revealed to him. AL 161. **Pray:** For a growing awareness of the vocation to love for everyone Choose appropriate action.

January 29. Many old people sit alone in retirement homes, sometimes with happy memories and at other times sadly thinking back over the years of their lives. "How often is there conflict within families?" "I can see now that I didn't always think about what I was doing to my children. I can see that I have been harsh and unfair and now my son has turned against me. I pray that God will show me a way to be reconciled before I die."

Reflect, share. Scripture: David said, "Behold, my own son seeks my life, how much more now may this Benjamite? Let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him." From 2 Samuel 15 and 16. **Pope Francis:** When children no longer feel that, for all their faults, they are important to their parents or that their parents are sincerely concerned about them this causes deep hurt and many difficulties along their path to maturity. AL263. **Pray:** During this month of beginnings pray that families will make an effort at reconciliation where it is needed. Choose appropriate action.

January 30. "If only." How often don't we say this to ourselves or to others? "If only I had found time to make peace with estranged family members, or friends." "If only I had the strength and courage to make peace with God and with the Church." One old man sat alone, thinking, but somehow he never found the courage to reach out to his son to make peace. He did sit alone day after day and no one came to advise and support him. When they brought the news that his son had died his grief was intense, but it was mixed with guilt. "If only.." he kept saying until a counsellor came, sat and listened and invited him to share his feelings – in the new synodal way - and so was gradually able to bring him peace and healing.

Reflect, share. Scripture: After Absalom's death a stranger came to inform David, the king. He said, "may the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil, be like that young man. (although his son had rebelled) the king was deeply moved and went and wept. "My son, Absalom, would that I had died instead of you." Read 2 Samuel 18- 19. **Pope Francis:** The Church will have to initiate everyone into the art of accompaniment which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. The pace must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and compassionate gaze which heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life. EG 169. **Pray:** For families to learn and practise conflict resolution skills and so avoid break-down and violence. Choose appropriate action.

January 31. St John Bosco was a saintly man responding to a calling for concern for youth, especially poor and street kids. He founded congregations of priests, brothers and sisters; the Salesians and Daughters of Mary to care for boys and girls and throughout the world there are many homes, schools and projects for youth. In a way he was adding to and creating a new, substitute, community family for them. The Salesian Green Alliance also focuses on the wider view of care for creation.

Reflect, share. Scripture: Whatever things are true, honourable, chaste, praiseworthy, think about these things. These you have learned and made your own and have heard and seen in me. Phil 4:4-9. **Pope Francis:** From the Document on Human Fraternity and World Peace. I reiterate the appeal for peace, justice and fraternity "In the name of the poor, the destitute, the marginalised and those most in need, whom God has commanded us to help as a duty required of all persons, especially the wealthy and those of means." FT285. **Pray:** As a family we can end this month with a focus on THE WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES bringing the needs of all human, animal and plant families into our way of thinking of creation. A good start can be on a note of thankfulness, thanking God for whatever experience of family life we do have. Thank God too for those who give of themselves to the care of those less privileged. Choose appropriate action.