



2024 OUR WORLD, FAMILY OF FAMILIES –

MARFAM THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY

DECEMBER – FAMILY IN CREATION – HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY downloadable from www.marfam.org.za, on facebook and X. info@marfam.org.za request for email

Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. LD – Laudate Deum AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG =Evangelii Gaudium. MV= The Face of Mercy.

MARFAM ECO-FAMILY FRIENDLY THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY for ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS by Toni Rowland. **with A CHILDREN’S PEACE PILGRIMAGE, a parable for our time,**

Introduction. 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 can and should address the challenges and fulfill the hope for a future filled with peace and joy.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM for no violence against women and children is commemorated as always from 25 November to 10 December.

COP29 the 2024 climate conference held in Azerbaijan from 11-22 November will already have ended when Advent begins, but the work and hopefully some positive outcomes should be implemented as this special season of the commemoration of the birth of Jesus begins. His pre-conference message Pope Francis included a call for a profound change in the industrial and economic landscape, and a focus on collective responsibility for the future of our world.

POPE FRANCIS FROM DILEXIT NOS:

From Dilexit Nos on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In a world where everything is bought and sold, people’s sense of their worth appears increasingly to depend on what they can accumulate with the power of money. We are constantly being pushed to keep buying, consuming and distracting ourselves, held captive to a demeaning system that prevents us from looking beyond our immediate and petty needs. The love of Christ has no place in this perverse mechanism, yet only that love can set us free from a mad pursuit that no longer has room for a gratuitous love. Christ’s love can give a heart to our world and revive love wherever we think that the ability to love has been definitively lost. The Church also needs that love, lest it be replaced with outdated structures and concerns, excessive attachment to our own ideas and opinions, and fanaticism in any number of forms. The gratuitous love of God liberates, enlivens, brings joy to the heart and builds communities. The wounded side of Christ continues to pour forth that stream which is never exhausted, never passes away, but offers itself time and time again to all those who wish to love as he did. For his love alone can bring about a newhumanity. I ask our Lord Jesus Christ to grant that his Sacred Heart may continue to pour forth the streams of living water that can heal the hurt we have caused, strengthen our ability to love and serve others, and inspire us to journey together towards a just, solidary and fraternal world.



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.*

SETTING THE SCENE for THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY. December is holiday season in the southern hemisphere and no doubt we all need and deserve some time out however we choose to use it. There are many important issues to consider in our own lives, as well as pray for an end to the wars that continue in parts of the world and affect people everywhere. May we “Put Christ back into Christmas,” “Arrive Alive” and not “shop till we drop.”

MARFAM ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS RESOURCES. For a range of activities visit and search www.marfam.org.za The THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY using the See-Judge-Act method, are based mainly on the daily scripture readings and include extracts from Pope Francis documents. In addition to special symbols used in the parish, families are encouraged to practice their own ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS activities e.g. an Advent wreath or a Jesse Tree. A Family Reconciliation, Prayer meal, Fast day. If using our own Advent wreath, spend a few moments daily to light candles, pray and share using the synodal “Conversation in the Spirit” dialogue and listening approach.

1 December. Advent 1C. World AIDS Day. Adam and Eve. The 1st Advent candle is lit as we share and pray. 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 my wife and I 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: *Jesus said, there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world, for the power of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Look up because your redemption is drawing near. But watch at all times praying to have strength to escape all these things and to stand before the Son of man. From Luke 21: 25-36.* **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 own lives and pray for conversion.

2 December. Abraham. In the context of the Israel-Hamas war some members of a faith sharing group attempted to explore 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 2023 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 often been done emotionally and simplistically 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 chosen by God to be the father of many descendants had a son with his slave woman Hagar, as his wife was childless. 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 with the coming of Jesus, the Christian religion.



Peace has reigned at times, but conflict has existed frequently between these three faiths. Extremist positions on both sides, as well as political power struggles exacerbate the situation. Fundamentalist, radical and extremist labels are often used. In a world where currently political and economic power dominates mainly in Christian west, resentment has grown at times into protests and violent extremism in lesser developed parts of the world. Interregional migration is dramatically changing the religious distribution around the world.

The group discussed and debated this explanation and eventually, following the request from Pope Francis, decided that as Christians their response should include prayer for peace and an end to war.

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 loss of biodiversity.

3 December. Elections and governance. Isaiah, judges and prophets. Many countries of the world held elections this year of national or local leadership, sometimes voting for specific individuals or for political parties. There were a good number of dramatic surprises. Whatever the outcomes and whatever form their government is taking there has been plenty of in-fighting,

criticism, vilification of opponents in the battle for power and also, as quite a new feature, disinformation and fake news. Eventually it is up to us, the people, to check how true they are to the values they expressed and the promises they made. In our country with its new GNU government there is little change, and corruption and extortion indicate crime has not yet been properly addressed. The most recent US election outcome was both surprising and significant, as Donald Trump will return to the White House and, as before, is likely to rule by his own will and decrees. In these elections one cannot but wonder if the people in general have taken seriously enough their role and responsibility of choosing for the common good and for ethical leaders. Was the synodal approach to discernment of reflection, sharing and dialogue well used?

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 aim to be good leaders in our own lives and pray for a good leadership for our country in the future.

4 December. “I’m glad that God is not only interested in fasting but also in feasting,” Luke announced. “In our confirmation class we were looking into that, and there is actually quite a lot about food, meals and banquets in the Bible.” “Like Jesus enjoyed meals with friends and even enemies. He used them as teaching experiences too.” “What about the wedding feast in the book of Revelation.” “What about Jesus joining us and sitting at our table?” Mom asked.

On that day the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, of choice wines. Is 25:6. After healing many people the Lord called his disciples and said to them, “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. How many loaves have you?” they answered “seven loaves and a few fish.” Having given thanks he gave them to the disciples to give to the crowds and they all ate. Matt 15:29-37. **Pope Francis:** *A family’s living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table. We cannot forget the image in the book of Revelation where the Lord says, “Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.” AL 15.* **Reflect, share, and pray:** Grace before meals: “Bless us, O Lord and these your gifts which we are about to receive from your goodness, and make us mindful of the needs of others.

5 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. Mom wondered, “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 do get warned, but do they listen?” **Scripture:** *Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine 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 marvelous concert of all God’s creatures., but today we are 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 that 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 and sustainable families and homes.

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 to one another 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:** *Message for the eighth World Day of the Poor 2024 theme is: “The prayer of the poor rises up to God.” Referring to the book of Sirach Pope Francis stated, “As a father, he takes care of those who are most in need: the poor, the marginalised, the suffering and the forgotten. No one is excluded from His heart, for in His eyes, we are all poor and needy”. He reminds all the faithful that God sees and cares for each one of them, whereas those who seek wealth, to the detriment of the most needy, are poor in His eyes.* **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, whether we are well-off ourselves or not?

7 December. Joseph. Driving along through the vast mealie 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 who was 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 quality he had was his ability to forgive his brothers who had done him such a 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 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 issues of concern in our day are as relevant as they were 3000 years ago. COP 29 focused on creation and the 16 Days of Activism on sexual abuse although its main focus is on women. Pray for commitment to make any necessary decisions.

8 December. Advent Sunday 2C. Repentance. Two candles are lit on the Advent wreath and we pray. Audrey and Josh had struggled with independence issues in their marriage which had become quite abusive, until they participated in a hurting marriage programme and learned and used a dialogue technique through which they were able to deal with the problems. Leading a small group they explained that a similar technique was introduced by Pope Francis through the recent Synodality gatherings in Rome which became known as "Conversations in the Spirit." Some their small group had experienced violence and sexual abuse. Josh shared how they had also benefited from being involved in the 16 Days of Activism for no violence against Women and Children. Audrey 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. The group discussion time that followed brought out that domestic violence is often a question of power and noted the importance of offering this type of dialogue resource in the community. "It has really brought back joy into our marriage," they agreed.

Scripture: *God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent. Phil 1:1-11. John went into all the regions of the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Luke 3:1-6.* **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 openness to examine the use of power and make the needed changes for a better world and society.



9 December. The Power of Forgiveness. Michael shared with Sharon, "You know that when we did training for marriage preparation I was quite challenged by the idea that couples through their Sacrament of Matrimony have the grace of forgiveness. It's not exactly 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 figuratively 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 and forgiven.

10 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 29, theft and ethical decay in general. Will there ever be genuine concern for the common good or only for self-interest, in every country and family too? 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 strong are our ethical standards for ourselves and our children?

11 December. Doris announced, "There has been quite a large focus on the COP 29 environmental conference but only a little on the biodiversity COP 16 which was held just a few weeks earlier. Maybe that one would be of greater interest to families because it deals with promotion of indigenous people and their knowledge about biodiversity. Far too many creatures become extinct every year, many we don't even know exist, but when there is talk of eagles and vultures becoming victims of the whole climate change chain of events it is likely to raise a response as everyone seems to value eagles. A year-end holiday Christmas gift to nature could be adoption of the campaign to become an eco-friendly family."

Scripture: *The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength. Youths shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Is 40:25-31.* **Pope Francis:** *Each year sees the disappearance of 1000s of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. They will no longer give glory to God by their very existence. LS 33* **Reflect, share, and pray:** Let us thank God for his gift of creation and all the 1000s of creatures, including ourselves who give glory to God by our lives. Who will win the greatest glory prize?

12 December. God provides through his mercy. Granny Mabel was getting ready to welcome all the family visitors while the children and grandchildren back home 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 frequently God nevertheless continues to sustain his world because of his concern and his mercy.

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 beings that accompany us along the way. LD* **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.

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 was angry and denounced her as being 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. The Church made her a patron saint for the blind. The name Lucy means light. Her feastday is during the time of the Hannukah, the Jewish Festival of Light. The little mascot that the Church for the 2025 Jubilee year is called "Luce."

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 also 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. MV22.* **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. Arrive alive. For 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," Mom had asked. "Probably all of them" was the answer but they agreed, "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 or dealing with fire injuries, 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, that they even make us cross. So much "snot and trane" (Afrikaans saying meaning "tears") could be avoided." **Scripture:** *Jesus said, "Elijah has already come and they did not know him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. Matt 17:10-13.* **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 act responsibly and pray to St Christopher for protection and that drivers will act responsibly for the safety of their passengers and other families on the road.”

December 15. Sunday Advent 3C. Live in Joy! Three candles are lit if you have an 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 greeted those staying behind and some 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. Last month we had the COP 29 climate conference, and the 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM against abuse of women and girls has just ended. Every day we are being faced with images and news of the wars and conflicts around the world. However the real purpose of the season 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 able to go away or meet 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 been speaking about when you spend a little prayer time together.” He paused, sighed and then concluded, “I will miss my own family but look forward to enjoying special time with some of you. Please invite me!”



Scripture: *The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior, who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.” Zeph. 3:14-18. **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 to do 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***

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 begins in our own country.

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 and the need for reconciliation and for peace, striving for unity while recognizing and valuing our diversity. Racism, still present, underlies the historical internal wars, won and lost by the different sides. Sexism and male domination are cultural, have roots too in the Bible, but in our day are now being rejected as the equal dignity of gender, of male and female, is recognized. There are religious, economic and political differences, some have historical roots, other differences are achieving progress through greater ingenuity, industriousness, or good fortune and solidarity, while other differences are being left behind maybe for lack of trying or resources. Peace is not based on the absence of conflict but on good will and compassionate management.

Differences and divisions are 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 have caused in the past and still do today and on our own 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. FT250. Reflect, share, and pray, for an increased willingness to work for peace through forgiving and accepting forgiveness.*

17 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Pilgrimage. 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 in the Holy Land, which had begun on October 7, 2023, with a surprise attack and which was still carrying on after more than a year.

The story was about pilgrimages. Pope Francis, after the important synod meeting in Rome in October 2024, 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. When I was there in 2005 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.*

18 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. War. 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 before and after Jesus 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 40,000 deaths including up to 20 000 . 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, all wars, 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, but other groups became involved as well, as they send rockets and missiles into one another's countries. 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.*

19 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Children and war. 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 the children 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 tiny bit like what is happening in Gaza 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 together with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in 2019 in Abu Dhabi: In the name of victims of wars, persecution and injustice we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue. FT 285. Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely. FT 258*

20 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Conversion. 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 had been 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: The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart. [Dilexit Nos 2] 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.*

21 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Sharing stories. 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.

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.*

22 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. 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.

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.

Scripture: *In those days Hannah took Samuel up with her and she brought him to the house of the Lord. She brought the child to Eili and said, "As you live my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence praying for this child and the Lord granted me my petition. I have lent him to the Lord. **Pope Francis:** We should not think of the mission of sharing Christ as something only between Jesus and me. Mission is experienced in fellowship with our communities and with the whole church.*

23 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Meeting of children. 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. The Peace Children's message from Jesus. The 2025 Jubilee Year with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope" begins today. If you have an Advent wreath light all four candles, then share the story 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. From Dilexit Nos 5: The heart is the place of sincerity, where deceit and disguise have no place. It usually indicates our true intentions, what we really think, believe and desire, the "secrets" that we tell no one: in a word, the naked truth about ourselves. It is the part of us that is neither appearance or illusion, but is instead authentic, real, entirely "who we are".*

25 December. Read, reflect, share, pray. Christmas Day. Love, peace, joy. 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. From Dilexit Nos 218: Christ's love can give a heart to our world and revive love wherever we think that the ability to love has been lost forever.*



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 29, 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. (Isaiah 40) LS 73P*

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. Countries' victory in the Rugby World Cup or other sporting competitions is sometimes celebrated with the song "The world in union." But apart from a few brief moments 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*



29 December. Holy Family Sunday. Read, reflect, share, pray. This special day, 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" that 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 "Conversations in the Spirit." We can call it family faith sharing, and it consists of reflection, sharing, listening 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*

30 December. Ancestors for today. Read, reflect, share, pray. What role do ancestors play in the Church and society today? Many families do continue to have a relationship with their own ancestors, honouring and communicating with them at particular family moments, but what expectations do ancestors have of them and their lifestyle and behaviour? What kind of role models were they to us?

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 and simple yardstick to measure with 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

The Church is exploring this more since the time of the 2nd Vatican Council, but with greater emphasis today, since the Synod on Synodality. There is a growing emphasis on the role of the laity, and now 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 our 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 to formal sainthood. At present a very devout lay couple from Johannesburg has been proposed for investigation. Domitilla, with her husband Danny. She 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.*

31 December. New Years Eve. JESUS. Read, reflect, share, pray. The name Jesus means Saviour, meaning something active, but it should also maybe be understood as gift. 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, the land and the creatures, 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. November 2024.*



The year 2024 ends today and leads us into 2025. It is a time to thank God for the gifts of life during the year and ask his blessing on the year ahead. The Jubilee year, dedicated to theme of "Pilgrims of Hope" already began formally on 24 December with the opening of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Jubilee year will be a time to renew hope and discover a vision to restore access to the earth's resources for everyone. It will also be a time to rediscover a spirituality that views people as "pilgrims on earth" rather than masters of the world." From Vatican News.



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. From Amoris Laetitia 325.*

The encyclicals and other writings of Pope Francis are helpful ways on the journey to 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. A new 2024 document *DILEXIT NOS – HE LOVED US* is specifically about the love of Jesus through his Sacred Heart.

These important documents from Pope Francis could well 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 and *Becoming Eco-Friendly Families* offers many suggestions to combat climate change.