

## Pope Francis reflects on TENDERNESS

### Pastoral Letter 2016

The manner in which the Bible is loved and read by so many people in the church in Africa has inspired me.

Against a backdrop of love, so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out, one often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. It is tenderness. In psalm 131 we see a delicate and tender intimacy between mother and child: the image is that of a babe sleeping in his mother's arms after being nursed. The infant is now fed and clings to the mother, who takes the child to her bosom. Drawing on this image, the Psalmist sings: "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast". We can also think of the touching words that the prophet Hosea puts on God's lips: "When Israel was a child, I loved him... I took him up in my arms... I led him with cords of compassion, with bands of love, and I bent down to him and fed him"

### Wisdom Statement.

The objective or purpose of Bible reading is not to know the Bible but to know that God is with us today.

Carlos Mesters.

### TEXT Luke 2:4-7

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the

**Q.** Pope Francis refers to tenderness as a forgotten value in life. What has been the experience of tenderness over your life time?

**QQ** The Christian story tells us of Mary as a mother, and in the Christian tradition we claim Mary to be our mother. We pause as we recall the tenderness of Mary in the life of Jesus.

**QQQ** How like a parent does God deal with his people Israel. What feelings comes to us when we nurse a child or attend to an older person in our

## Come to the Table—Advent 2017

It times past it seemed a 'mission impossible' for man to walk in space or land on the moon yet it has happened in our lifetime. The cosmonauts and astronauts who explored outer space came to see the world in shimmering blue hues and spoke of earth as a living planet.

Likewise we need to see the Bible as something alive – not in its pages but in the conversation that takes place around the Word of God, in particular our conversation about family life as we prepare for the gathering of families in The World Meeting Of Families (WMOF) in August 2018.

Pope Francis encourages us to reflect deeply on family in his letter of just a year ago, "**The Joy of Love**". We invite you to take his words and the words of Scripture and marry them to begin the conversation that leads to prayer and action. Pope Francis always has a chapter on Scripture when he approaches a topic.

Over the three weeks of Advent we invite you to gather as a family, as neighbours, or as a prayer or Lectio group and prepare for the festive season which is truly a family event. Set out a table with an open bible on it and a light along side. Pope Francis reminds us of the words of a poet, 'every home being a lamp stand', this echoes the Irish tradition of the light in the window at Christmas. A short prayer before we read the text will remind you of why you have gathered.

### The Gift of Love

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

### Pastoral Letter 2016

"Over the coming months, in the Archdiocese there will be opportunities for people to explore together through -reflection and prayer - the Scriptures that will lead not only to deepening the faith in a loving and merciful God but help us to read the events of our times in the light of the Bible and the rich understanding of human experience that it brings to the issues that we are confronted with daily".



Archdiocese of  
Cashel & Emly



*Lectio Divina is not an end in itself but is part of a process which allows the Word of God to change our thinking.*

*Lectio Divina was the normal way of reading Scripture for the first thousand years of Christianity.*

## Pope Francis reflects on *THE FAMILY*

The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises. This is true from its very first page, with the appearance of Adam and Eve's family with all its burden of violence but also its enduring strength (cf. Gen 4) to its very last page, where we behold the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9). Jesus' description of the two houses, one built on rock and the other on sand, symbolizes any number of family situations shaped by the exercise of their members' freedom, as the poet says, "every home is a lamp stand".

### TEXT Psalm 128:1- 6.

Blessed is the one who fears the Lord,  
who walks in his ways!  
You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your  
hands;  
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with  
you.  
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your  
house;  
your children will be like olive shoots round  
your table.  
Thus shall you be blessed, you who fear the  
Lord.  
The Lord bless you from Zion!  
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life!  
May you see your children's children!



#### Pastoral Letter 2016

...we will aim to place the Sacred Scriptures at the centre of our lives, at home, in the parish, at school and in the wider world where we live and work.

#### Wisdom Statement.

People listen more with their eyes than with their ears.

**Notes:** This psalm is a prayer blessing in three stages: a general 'feel-good' comment; a family 'photo' from a different culture; a blessing from God for a long life. It is used at Christian and Jewish weddings.

The use of the word 'Israel' denotes the people God has chosen to be his own people. There are many blessed days in the family's history: boy meets girl, the promise of love for ever, the birth of a child, the house that is home and the continuation of the family into

Peace be upon Israel!

**Q.** Count your blessings one by one we are told. What blessings have you received from your family – as a child and now as an adult—and that makes life worth while?

**QQ.** Gathering around the family table is an expression of family life. What is your

## Pope Francis reflects on *CHILDREN*

The Bible presents the family as the place where children are brought up in the faith. This is evident from the description of the Passover celebration. The family is the place where parents become their children's first teachers in the faith. Children, for their part, are called to accept and practice the commandment: "Honour your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12). Here the verb "to honour" has to do with the fulfilment of family and social commitments.

The Gospel reminds us that children are not the property of a family, but have their own lives to lead. Jesus goes so far as to present them as teachers, on account of their simple trust and spontaneity towards others.



'Emmaus' by Richard King - Longford Cathedral

### TEXT Psalm 78:3-6 (RSV)

<sup>3</sup> Things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.  
<sup>4</sup> We will not hide from our children,  
but tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his  
might,  
and the wonders which he has  
wrought.  
<sup>5</sup> He established a testimony in Jacob,  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our fathers  
to teach to their children;  
<sup>6</sup> that the next generation might know  
them,  
- the children yet unborn -

**Note.** The Passover meal was a family gathering to remember the escape from Egypt of the Jewish people. During the meal it was the children who asked the questions about the customs linked to the meal. This led to the parents telling the story and thus passing on the faith to the next

**Q.** The Bible can be described as a story book as it relies on story to pass on its message about a God of love and compassion. In the Fiddler on the Roof Tevye sings about Tradition, Tradition, Tradition. What are the traditions that give strength to you family in times of joy and in times of sorrow?

**QQ.** 'Honour your father and mother'. Taking the comment by Pope Francis that 'honour' is fulfilling family and social commitments, how have you seen this lived out over your lifetime?

**QQQ.** Pope Francis reminds us that passing on faith is the task of parents and guardians. Does this spark any memory for you as you grew in faith and love before God and man-

#### Wisdom Statement.

Table fellowship deepens the bonds between

#### Pastoral Letter 2016

I am aware of the various groups who gather for Lectio Divina (a way of reading and praying the Scriptures in a group context) and groups who gather to reflect on the Sun-