



Diocese of Port Pirie

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Pastoral Letter to the Young People of the Diocese of Port Pirie

Advent 2014

"What Builds Family?"

Dear Young People

All of us are situated in a family. They are the group of people who are the closest to us on this earth, even when there are times of arguments and stand-offs. That doesn't take away the fact that our parents and brothers and sisters are basic to our identity. The same blood flows through each member of the family, in a certain sense. And the saying has it, "blood is thicker than water".

How do we build family? As a diocese this year beginning in Advent we are making what we call "The Year of the Family", so that prayers to strengthen the family might be said at Mass right through until the Feast of Christ the King next year. Parents love their children into life, and nurture them, and the love of a parent is often sacrificial. Once a woman becomes a mother or a man becomes a father, it is a vocation for life. They remain the mother and the father til the day they die. They will sacrifice anything for you, until the day they die. You will face the same vocation yourself at some stage. True love will involve sacrifices, as the life of Jesus shows us so powerfully.

What feeds the family, what makes it grow in strength? It is the shared life. There is a sharing of love and life and laughter, a sharing of times together, of meals, of special sacred occasions. These occasions might be the birth and baptism of a baby brother or sister, or the spell in hospital of mum and dad, or the joy of an older brother or sister getting married, or the sadness and grief at the death of a grandparent. These are the times when we hold each other. It is love that binds us.

Meal times are very special times for families, and it is a pity in today's society that so often meal times are fragmented. Some people will just go through their text messages, and others might just sit in front of a television set. It is most important that the family eats together, to share the day. That is how we grow into one another, by sharing. It is no accident that Christ chose the form of his abiding presence to be that of a meal. When he left us he did a number of acts, such as the washing of the feet of his disciples, telling us that he was setting an example. What a person does when they are about to die is highly significant, like that act of the washing of the feet, an act of humble service. The other thing Jesus chose to do at such a special time was to offer bread and wine, telling us that this was his Body and this was his Blood, and he said "do this in memory of me". If we love him, we will do it. And it will feed us. If we celebrate the Mass together as a family, it strengthens us further. Each of us would hear the Word of God, pray together, hear the homily, have the sacred moment of Holy Communion – what a deeper way of sharing. Afterwards, you can dissect the homily, and give a rating!

Last year I quoted Pope Francis, whose example still inspires us all. He said to the young people in Rio de Janeiro, "I want you to make yourselves heard in your dioceses, I want the noise to go out, I want the Church to go out onto the streets, I want us to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable..." He is not disguising the fact that being a Christian has its challenges, sometimes to go against the crowd, and march by our own drum. For that you need strength, and the strength comes from the Bread of Life.

May the Year of the Family be a special one for you and your loved ones, and may the Bread of Life strengthen you all.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ', written in a cursive style.

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

30th November 2014