

Pastoral Letter, December 29, 2024
at the Opening Mass of the Jubilee Year

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today, on the Feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate the beginning of the Church's Jubilee Year in our Diocese. In the coming year 2025, we will also commemorate the First Council of Nicaea, held 1700 years ago, which profoundly strengthened our Christian faith by defending the mystery of Christ: He is true God and true man. The Liturgy of the Word we have just heard invites us to reflect on a central dimension of this mystery: it is Jesus himself, God who became man, who chose to be born into and live within a family. This truth illuminates us especially today, at a time when we increasingly need families and marriages faithful to Christ, generous and open to life, ready to welcome the gift of children.

The Message of the Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea, held in the year 325, was decisive in clarifying our faith in the divinity of Jesus. The council affirmed that the Son is "of the same essence as the Father," meaning that he has the same divine nature. This is not merely a distant theological truth but has very concrete implications for our lives.

When we confess that Jesus is God, we adore Him, praise Him, thank Him, ask for His forgiveness, pray to Him, and receive from Him sacramental grace. He is our Lord and Savior, to whom we turn when we need comfort and strength, for He is almighty, and all good comes from Him.

At the same time, we believe that Jesus is also human and that as a human, He is an example we can follow in our daily lives and someone with whom we can identify. Even as a human, Jesus inspires in us deep trust: He knows how challenging human life can be. He has experienced injustice, suffering, and human struggles. His humanity makes us feel close to Him, someone who truly understands us because He lived as we do.

The Value of a Family's Sanctity

Jesus, though true God, chose to share fully in our humanity, though without sin. As we heard in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus lived as a child in Nazareth with His parents, was obedient to them, and advanced in wisdom, age, and favour before God and men (Luke 2:51-52). God did not remain distant in His divine majesty but wanted to be one of us, to live in a family, to experience daily life, serving others, studying, working, and forming human relationships.

This message is particularly important for our families. Jesus shows us that the path to holiness is not reserved only for those who withdraw from the world but can be lived within the family, in the simplicity of everyday life. St. Paul exhorts us in his Letter to the Colossians to clothe ourselves with "heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" in our family relationships (Col. 3:12). These are not merely moral rules but a call to live out God's love in our families, for it was in a family that Jesus himself chose to dwell and sanctify them.

The first reading from the Book of Sirach reminds us of the respect owed to our parents, especially in their old age. This underscores the importance of family life as a place of mutual care, respect, and unconditional love. In a world that sometimes devalues sacrifice and avoids commitment, the Christian family is called to be a living testimony of faithfulness and generosity.

Children – A Hope and Blessing for Society

Dear Christians! We need more faithful marriages, more fathers and mothers who are not afraid to welcome the gift of children. We need more children in our families, for they strengthen the bond between spouses and among siblings. Our Finnish society also needs more children, who will one day build this nation and assume responsibility for it – also economically and as part of the workforce.

Today's Psalm states: "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your home; your children like young olive plants around your table" (Ps. 128:3). This image of the fruitfulness of families is a blessing for those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways. Children are God's blessing for the whole society. Pope Francis urges us to be generous and open to life. In a speech in Rome this past May (10.5.2024), he noted: "The birth rate is the first indicator of a nation's hope. Without children and youth, a nation loses its passion for the future. Welcome children, many children."

There are couples who, despite their wishes, do not have children. To such couples, I want to say that I am near you with love and support. This situation can encourage you to love one another to a greater extent and more deeply and to find other dimensions of parenthood, for example, through adoption or by being more willing to serve those in need.

The Jubilee Year beginning today is an opportunity to renew our commitment to Christ and to our own families. Our holiness is not separate from our daily lives. Just as Jesus grew up in a family, we too are called to grow in holiness through our family life, our work, our studies, and our service to one another. Every family is called to be a small "domestic church," where the love of Christ becomes present and where children can grow in faith.

The Jubilee Year – A Pilgrimage of Hope

Pope Francis calls us, during this Jubilee Year, to embark on the path of hope. Hope is not merely an expectation of a better future but a trust in God's love and presence in our lives, regardless of the challenges we face. We Christians are "pilgrims of hope."

The Jubilee Year is, above all, a call to conversion and spiritual renewal. This process is like a journey – a pilgrimage to Rome and other holy places, as a testimony of faith, hope, and love. When we step through the church door, we have the possibility to pause and assess our lives and our relationship with God and with others, especially through the Sacrament of Penance, Confession. The Pope encourages us to live in solidarity and to help the poor and marginalized as a sign of Christian love. The Holy Father also emphasizes the importance of peace, the care for creation, and dialogue. In this way, the Jubilee Year can become a time of grace and renewal for all humanity.

Perhaps our conversion could manifest itself especially in learning to be more generous and kind, first toward God, and then, through this, extending the same generosity in our relationships with others. This transformation can begin with small acts of love and care within our families and close circles. When we open our hearts to God's love, it gives us strength and courage to live out grace and compassion for all those around us.

May this festive Jubilee Year lead us deeper into the mystery of Christ, who is true God and true man. May Jesus, who chose to live in a family, inspire us to live generously and lovingly, open to life and God's will. Let us pray for faithful marriages, united families, and the gift of children, who bring so much joy to our homes and churches. May the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, Jesus' parents, intercede for us and help us to live as joyful Christian families, with Jesus among us, as witnesses of His love in the world. Amen.

+ Raimo Goyarrola
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