

“Over all these clothes...put on love”.

Today's feast is not an easy one to fathom. If we misunderstand it, then it can become an impossible burden and that is certainly not what is intended. No, what is intended when we think about and reflect upon this feast day is exactly the same as that which we reflect upon when we celebrate any other feast day – that in the person of Jesus, our God has taken on our human condition and lives with us. This is the key which unlocks the door for us. Because the Word became flesh and lived amongst us, everything about our humanity, including the structures and staging posts of our lives, has been and continues to be visited by God.

Family life then, is the entry into society for every child, and Jesus is therefore no different. He will have experienced his own ups and downs, good days and bad days, happy times and sad ones, and all of those emotions and feelings will have left their mark on him. No doubt too his parents will have been frustrated and confused, worried and concerned both by him and for him and as well as for each other, as they sought to survive and make ends meet in the harsh economic circumstances in which they lived. But in bringing him up and educating him, they taught him how to pray, they schooled him to understand the difference between good and bad, right and wrong and that how in his life and in theirs, God was present.

Such are the challenges that face every family, however large or small and in rising to meet these challenges we are called to put on love and it is by coming to live under the mantle of this love, that the presence of God in our families is felt, and yet such a sentiment is met with ridicule and derision by a society that sees the gospel as some sort of sugar coated pill that creates false illusions. But think for a moment about the reality of Jesus' life and you'll find no illusion there. Instead you'll discover a person whose understanding of himself and his mission was forged in the workshop of the family home and who took those ideals shaped by parental love, into the mystery that lay at the heart of his own relationship with God. Out of this poured a love that was transformative, and able to overcome the ridicule and derision that was ultimately heaped upon him. It was from the cross that this love bore its fruit.

When Jesus, from the cross says to his mother *behold you son* and to the beloved disciple *behold your mother* another family is formed; the Church, and the Church should never forget from where it was born. It was born from flesh and blood, but also from blood and water. The Church is family born in reality and sacrament; the reality of peoples' lives and sacrament of God's mystery at work in these lives, so that when we quarrel and bicker and fall out as we do, the presence of God doesn't disappear and leave us unloved, but through reconciliation and forgiveness gently seeks to draw us together again in love.

So what are we to learn from all of this? Well primarily that we need each other and that we need God's love as mediated to us in Jesus, at work in us, and the vehicle through which this happens is the family. Yes, it has its shaky moments and sometimes the wheels come off, but it was into a family that the Word was made flesh and from which the love of the Father was begotten and it was into the family of the Church that the Spirit was given and continues to breathe its life giving breath, clothing us all in its love.

