

To my dear and loving son, Jesus,

I'm not sure if I have told you how proud I am of you. I know we haven't really had an opportunity to sit and talk about all of these things but I wanted to let you know that I love you and I am proud of who you are.

It wasn't easy you know, when you were born. In fact I didn't know if you were going to make it, your mother went onto labour and there was no one there to help us bring you in to the world. And when it was time to go home, we couldn't because it wasn't safe. Yet somehow we managed and you were such a good baby.

Now don't get me wrong, we had our moments! You were forever getting lost. You always had a way with words and people were drawn to your wonderful stories. Even though your mother and I would get cross with you for wandering off we could never stay cross with you, you always had a warmth and a charm about you that was hard not to admire and to love.

I loved to see you coming into the workshop to help out. I love my work and I would feel so grateful when you would work alongside me. We made some beautiful furniture together that I know will last the test of time. I have always admired your dedication and your willingness to take direction. You have learned the craft well and your eagerness to hear what others say will stand you in good stead in the future.

I know that I am a man of few words but I love you deeply and your mother too of course. I see how you are with her too. You take care of her son and she in turn has given you the freedom to be yourself. All I ever wanted was to be a good example to you, to be a good husband and a good father. I hope I have done that.

*Fold the "letter".*

The holy family has always been presented to us as Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They were an ordinary and extraordinary family both at the same time.

For the first 30 years they lived a quiet, ordinary life. Joseph worked away as a carpenter and like most dads then, his son followed in his footsteps, learning his father's trade. We often hear of St Joseph, the worker - a man who worked hard to provide for his family. Also though a man that we can take example from in terms of work ethic. If something is worth it, it's worth working for. However St Joseph was extraordinary too as a family man because of the very family he had and the faith he lived that gave him the perseverance he needed to stay committed to this extraordinary family.

Living in our world in our time I have no doubt that each of us can identify extraordinary families too. And what does that mean - to be an extraordinary family? If we look to St Joseph and his family we see a family who trust one another greatly. What was being asked by God would be difficult for all of them yet they trusted each other and God that all was as it should be. We see a family who gave permission to each other to have their own voices heard and more importantly felt that they were listened to. We only have to look to the Wedding Feast at Cana to see this "Do whatever he tells you". So what extraordinary contribution are we making in the families we belong to? Is trust a key feature of our family? Are our voices heard?

When I was growing up we learned about two types of family - the extended and the nuclear family. Today family is better considered by its characteristics as well as the people who make it up. Once more we can look to the example of St Joseph for this with characteristics such as providing safety, security, being a person of

love, faith, respect and pride. Fr Frank Fahey also describes family as the place where you feel most loved, wanted and accepted. What a wonderful world we would all live in if we all belonged to families where we felt loved, wanted and accepted.

So, as we celebrate St Joseph and the family this evening, let us all think about how we can be God's family. How do we model St Joseph in our role as members of God's family. Do we do all we can to make others feel loved, wanted and accepted by what we say and what we do? Dare I say there might be room for improvement!

And my final thoughts ... There is a lovely connection between Joseph and Jesus regarding family and sacrifice. Joseph used his skill as a carpenter to earn a living that would sustain his family. That same wood was used in a different way so that Jesus could offer himself as a living sacrifice for all of us - his family then and now. The wood that was so central to Joseph's life in sustaining his family is symbolised now in the wood of the cross that sustains all of us in our faith now.

So to conclude I would like to light two candles on this cross, made by a student in St Louis Community School, one for all of us gathered here in the Basilica and one for all of you who are tuned in to the Triduum to St Joseph from across the globe asking God to grant us the grace to be a good family to one another in both ordinary and extraordinary times through the intercession of St Joseph.