

# SUNDAY PLUS

Cherish the family

A Year of the Word

## In danger of their lives

by Denise Cottrell-Boyce

Joseph was a nice young man with a good trade and a lovely fiancée. A pleasant, unremarkable life rippled out before him. But this life was turned upside down when his beloved fiancée told him she was pregnant. The shadow of a shameful death by stoning darkened their dreams. Guided by an angel, Joseph trusted God and trusted Mary. With great courage he faced down the wagging tongues, the family shock and anger. Now that same angel was

telling him that this new little family were in danger of their lives, that he could only protect them by fleeing to a foreign land.

Even if they had been welcomed with open arms in Egypt (perhaps through a national shortage of carpenters!), living in a strange country with a newborn baby must have been very frightening: not knowing anyone to turn to for help; everyone seeming to stare at their funny food, clothes and religion; not understanding what anyone was saying; being engulfed by the overwhelming and constant ache of homesickness.

The towns and cities of post-industrial Britain are being topped

up by people like Jesus, Mary and Joseph – people fleeing war zones, terror and oppression. Behind the front doors of houses that used to be boarded up, and charity shops that are turning into Kurdish barbers and African food stores, are people who have – nearly always – thrown themselves on God’s mercy and trusted God to take them to a place of safety. Their faith and testimonies are becoming part of the fabric of our parishes, shoring up our own faith against the moment when our lives too might be turned upside down.

Denise Cottrell-Boyce is a theology graduate and mother of seven children.



**“It is not easy to raise children. Today children are quicker than we are! In the virtual world, they know more about it than we do. But it is important to educate them about community, educate them about family life. Teach them about making sacrifices for one another. It is not easy to raise children. The difficulties are major. And you, who love the family, can help other families so much in this regard. The family is an adventure, a beautiful adventure!”**

Pope Francis

### Special bonds

by Daniel Kearney

When I was a child – and I understood things as a child – families in my sheltered world came in one variety only: father, mother and child or children – just like the Holy Family! Now of course, older, perhaps wiser and more experienced, I can see things are not so blindingly black and white. Families exist in many forms. There is still the traditional family set-up, but there is, increasingly, the one-parent family and the extended family. There are separated

families; re-constituted or blended families; families with two mums; families with two dads; families with grandparents as carers; families with foster parents. But, nevertheless, we continue to use the word “family” to describe them all. We do so because what is important is the quality and strength of the bonds which bring and hold people together in a family and not necessarily how it is described or defined.

Daniel Kearney is the author of *Adult Bullying and Childhood Bullying: caring for yourself and others*, available from Redemptorist Publications, [www.rpbooks.co.uk](http://www.rpbooks.co.uk)

### Foster the family

by Des Kelly

In the family we have the opportunity of helping and healing one another. But we also have the possibility of hindering and hurting one another. Sometimes people keep their best behaviour for outside the home and their worst for inside the home. They are house “devils” and street “angels”.

Peace and harmony in the family can be achieved only by the practice of the virtues St Paul talks about: kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, mutual forgiveness and above all, love (see today’s second reading). These are the virtues

which build and foster families and community. But they are not easy virtues to practise all the time.

In our society the family is under pressure. It is not that we no longer value the family. It is that we are not prepared to put in the effort to make it work. Yet no one was ever heard to say as they were dying, “I spent too much time with my family and too little time at work”.

Des Kelly, a retired headteacher, now works to develop leadership in Catholic schools and parishes.

**Loving Lord, families come in all shapes and sizes. Even Mary and Joseph found life tough at times – and they had Jesus really and truly in their home. Be with all families in their ups and downs, joys and sorrows, successes and failures. Let them grow closer to you and to one another + Amen.**

Today: Ecclesiasticus 3:2-6, 12-14  
Colossians 3:12-21  
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Monday: 1 John 2:12-17  
Luke 2:36-40

Tuesday: 1 John 2:18-21  
John 1:1-18

Wednesday: Numbers 6:22-27  
Galatians 4:4-7  
Luke 2:16-21

Thursday: 1 John 2:22-28  
John 1:19-28

Friday: 1 John 2:29 – 3:6  
John 1:29-34

Saturday: 1 John 3:7-10  
John 1:35-42

Next Sunday: Isaiah 60:1-6  
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6  
Matthew 2:1-12