

My parents were quite strict, and they definitely knew the difference between right and wrong. But, as a child, I always knew that however bad I had been, however wrong I had been, I would always find, within my family, love and acceptance. I might get a telling-off later on, but that would be a telling-off within that love and forgiveness. My family was a safe place for me to be me. This is how the Church should be, a safe place where we will always find love and acceptance, where we can always be true to ourselves.

I can also identify with the gospel reading, so often the cocky adolescent who thought he knew better than his parents, who thought he had a personal hotline to God, who liked to go off and do his own thing regardless of everybody else. The redeeming feature of the gospel reading, of course, is that Jesus then went down with his family and came to Nazareth and *lived under their authority*. That living under their authority was, of course, the bit I found difficult, and I suppose I still find difficult. Still that cocky adolescent at heart.

There was a very interesting article in the press a couple of weeks ago about the rather dysfunctional family life of Blessed John Henry Newman. For a large part of his life, he was estranged from several of his siblings. And this was the cause of great pain for him. I found that very reassuring. For one of my spiritual heroes to have fallen out with his own brothers and sisters, that must mean that I am not quite such a bad family member as I might at first have thought.

It would be a mistake to think of the Holy Family as the perfect family, the model family, the family without any problems or conflicts. Holiness is not the same as moral perfection. Holiness is about living in and from the mercy of God. This is what the Holy Family does. The Holy Family is totally open to the Spirit. The Holy Family is able to take risks. The Holy Family is able to have disagreements. But everything in that family life will always be referred back to the mercy of God.

The ultimate holy family is the family that we joined at our baptism. *My dear people, we are already children of God...* Whatever we ask him, we shall receive. Membership of this family is not dependent on living by the rules, abiding by Canon Law, or by living unimpeachable lives. The only commandments we have to keep are that we believe in Jesus and that we really do love one another.

I will always fail, forever the cocky adolescent, forever falling out with brothers and sisters, for ever having disagreements, forever failing in love. In this Jubilee Year, let us emulate Jesus, Mary and Joseph in total openness to the mercy of God. Through prayer, may we truly live in God and may we allow God to live in us.

*They are happy who dwell in your house, O Lord.*