



BISHOP'S MONTHLY REFLECTION

January 2025 (Homily- Feast of the Holy Family)

INAUGURATION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025

Pilgrims of Hope
Feast of the Holy Family 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Throughout the recent season of Advent, the Church, traditionally, does not sing the Gloria, but now during the Christmas Season we once again welcome the song of the angels to the Shepherds of Bethlehem, rejoicing, as we sing:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth, peace to people of goodwill.

We *praise* you,
we *bless* you,
we *adore* you,
we *glorify* you,
we give you thanks for your great glory...

As we remember and give glory to God the Father for sending his Son, Jesus, to us during this beautiful liturgical Season of Christmas, we, now, prepare to welcome the New Year 2025 which Pope Francis has designated as a Year of Jubilee! A jubilee year is a rich tradition within the Church that is celebrated every twenty-five years. The theme for this special year is: "Pilgrims of Hope." In a world that is assaulted with darkness and disillusionment, we, as members of the body of Christ, the Church, are called, in this Jubilee Year, to be bearers of hope, proclaimers of the Good News!

Throughout the Jubilee Year, we are called to imitate Jesus. By participating in the Liturgy, praying, reflecting on the Word of God, and our willingness to serve the poor and marginalized, we will discover ourselves growing in holiness and imitating the Lord in the New Year. As we are sent forth as pilgrims filled with hope - we are reminded that it is a *hope* that is to be cherished and shared!

Today, with the celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family, we usher in the Jubilee Year 2025. It is on this Christmas feast that we hear the story of Mary and Joseph finding Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem conversing with the teachers of the Law. His parents express their worry, and Jesus replies to them: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). These words of Jesus touched Mary's and Joseph's hearts as they pondered them as they journeyed back to Nazareth as a family.

Focusing on the Holy Family, reflecting on the important role of the family, is a good way to begin the New Year and to understand how the family, as the “domestic church” is a sign of hope and a place where hope is to be nourished and encouraged. A hopeful home is a home that welcomes Jesus who is Hope, Incarnate! All of us realize there are many challenges within married and family life that attempt to deprive couples, parents and families from experiencing hope. The following words help to express this reality:

“It’s not easy to love and understand the people in your family - and it’s not easy to keep trusting God in the confusing times. But take heart: he is with your family! You have received the same Holy Spirit that lived in Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. That Spirit can give all of you gifts of understanding and love, of patience and forbearance. You may not be the perfect family, but you can become a *holy* family as you grow ‘in wisdom and age and favor.’” (Luke 2:52) -The Word Among Us.
Be it within the family, or outside the family, we need to be people who speak: “encouraging words in discouraging times.”

Also, within the home, families will undoubtedly encounter the presence of the cross - the sufferings and challenges of life. Pope Francis has designated the cross to serve as the *anchoring* symbol, a door, so to speak, of the Jubilee Year.

In reference to the Cross of Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI expressed the mystery of its presence in our lives in the following words: “The Cross is indeed his (Jesus’) instrument of torture, suffering, and defeat, but at the same time it expresses the complete transformation, the definitive reversal of these evils, that is what makes it the most eloquent symbol of hope that the world has ever seen. It speaks to all who suffer - the oppressed, the sick, the poor, the outcast, the victims of violence- and it offers them hope that God can transform their suffering into joy, their isolation into communion, defeat into life. It offers unlimited hope to our fallen world.”

May the *domestic church*, consisting of our Christian families throughout our Diocese of Stockton, support one another in a *spirit of hope*. May we be instrumental in evangelizing and empowering our brothers and sisters as *pilgrims of hope*.

Throughout the New Year, this Year of Jubilee, let us reach out to those who have lost hope: their hope in God, in the Church and the hope they have lost within their hearts! Let us truly be: Pilgrims of Hope!

Glory to God in the highest!

We **praise** you!

We **bless** you!

We **adore** you!

We **glorify** you!

Mother of God, Our Lady of Hope, pray for us!

Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us!

A Blessed and Hopeful Jubilee Year to all!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bishop Cotta", with a small cross symbol to the left.

Bishop Cotta