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## PASTORAL LETTER

*To be read in all churches and chapels of the Archdiocese of Liverpool on  
Sunday, 27 December 2009, the Feast of the Holy Family.*

My dear People,

Jesus went down with Mary and Joseph and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority; he was obedient to them. And in the Carol 'Once in Royal David's City', many of us will have sung in recent days: 'Christian children all must be mild, obedient, good as he'.

But obedience is a tricky thing.

Watch very carefully today's story about Jesus, Mary and Joseph for this Feast of the Holy Family. We must not rush to obedient Jesus as if he justifies a parental demand: 'do it because I tell you to'. The Mary to whom Jesus is obedient, the Mary under whose authority he lived, is the Mary who 'stored up all these things in her heart'. Always she is the woman who ponders, searches, learns; her relationship to her Son is always in heart and mind and body. And today we are reminded that she ponders this: a Passover feast; the city of Jerusalem; Jesus, lost for three days; and lost to her because he was accomplishing the will of his Father. This is Mary opening her heart to a Passover Feast she will later face; it will again be in Jerusalem but this time on Calvary's hill, lost to her for three days because by dying he accomplished his Father's saving will. And Jesus lives under this woman's authority. He is attentive, obedient, and learns from those who are open to the pain of giving him all the space he needs to accomplish his life's work and purpose: to die in selfless love and so rise again. This is why we also receive today the story of Hannah and the child she longed for; she gives him all the space in the world: she makes him over to the Lord for his whole life. He is made over to the Lord. And Samuel would accomplish wonderful things.

This all makes me begin to wonder: we proclaim God is holy; but every line in the New Testament has one purpose: to enable us to know, love and follow the God who is love. And I begin to see: Holiness and love mean exactly the same: for God who is Holy, at peace, with no desires to manipulate or dominate or control; the Holy One untouched by envy or pride, is precisely the God who is love; love rejoices in the greatness and uniqueness of others; love creates space to breathe and learn and grow. I find it helps me to describe the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this way: each one rejoices to give the others space to be ever more creative in showing love and mercy to sinners. They love each other; they are love, so space is their secret and this is the way of holiness.

And we rejoice on this day in Christmastide because the child of God became the child of Mary that we might all become the holy, loving children of God. We are able to be holy; we are able to reject the temptation to dominate, control, manipulate, to reject envy and pride; instead to be holy means this loving is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit: a love that rejoices to create space.

Because you are keeping this feast today I am certain: spacious love will be the blessing you will bring to this New Year. I ask you now to receive words often proclaimed at a wedding, well-known words of Saint Paul about love; today receive them as about being holy and about being those who create space:

'Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, hopes all things endures all things.'

This is a good day to give you advance notice of our annual celebration of Marriage and Family life at the Cathedral at three o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday 14 February. Archbishop Vincent Nichols will be leading our prayer this year. We will celebrate the holiness, love, space that is the heart beat of affectionate, secure, joyful Family Life. This year it is the children who will have pride of place and of course we will rejoice with those celebrating significant anniversaries of married life. More of that nearer the day.

But for now: 'Christian children all must be mild, obedient, good as he'. Yes, obedient indeed, because their parents learn from Mary and Joseph and Hannah to offer them the space and opportunity that is God's plan for them.

Because today you are here to receive as your bread of life him who is holy, who is love, with confidence I wish you and those dear to you a joyful, blessed New Year.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrick Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

**Archbishop of Liverpool**

**Ends**  
**27 December 2009**