10th September 2026

Family

"God made all the creatures, and gave them our love and our fear,
To give sign we and they are his children, one family here."
Robert Browning, *'Saul', Dramatic Resources and Lyrics (1845)*

I received a message from a friend following my reflection on "preaching" a few weeks ago. She unfolded a heart-rending story of a preacher whose sermon was on the theme of "the ideal family" which was, as he'd described it, "a man, a woman, 2 children, a dog, a cat, 2 cars in the drive, man working, woman at home, church on Sundays, good works and annual holidays." When she, "a recently divorced woman with a child, sad, scared, financially insecure, unsure of the future, simply clinging to Christ", challenged him (brave lady!) about where she would "fit" in his "perfect" family, he replied, "You would probably fit well in the kitchen." Ouch!

When I was a parish minister, we decided to have a "welcome family" each Sunday, to greet people coming to church and offer a different image from the dark-suited, somewhat austere, Presbyterian men who normally fulfilled that role. Mum, dad, kids – no dogs or cats – a comfortable image of family life. But several people were unhappy with this – a single mum, a gay man, a widow, a divorcee, a single woman. "Where do I fit?" they asked. I *didn't* say, "In the kitchen." But I *did* reconsider our decision, and, in time, we had "welcome teams", where everyone could play their part.

An elderly couple in my parish had a son and a daughter. Their daughter was married but was unable to have children. Their son was gay, and he once told me that, even if he was fortunate to find a life-partner, he had no desire to have kids. Over the years, the childlessness of these two people was like a bereavement for their parents. "I always wanted to be a granny," the lady told me, through tears. She and her husband had an image of extended family life that her children – and these were her words – had "taken away" from her.

Family life shouldn't ever have a set pattern. To do so is to create an environment in which some people feel cast aside, some feel they have little worth, and some feel hurt. Where goodness dwells, *there* is a family under God. No numbers, sexuality, cats, dogs, cars, holidays, church, should ever define the worth and value of any of God's precious children.

A prayer for today

Family matters! We're all children of God … regardless!

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