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A new Shrine of the Holy Family in Melbourne

The parish church of St Mary Star of the Sea West Melbourne has recently been dedicated as an Archdiocesan Shrine of the Holy Family

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At the recent dedication of St Mary Star of the Sea West Melbourne as an Archdiocesan Shrine of the Holy Family, Melbourne's Archbishop Denis Hart said it was important to

remember that the family is the “domestic church” and that God has given parents a very special call “to be the first and best teachers of your young people in the ways of faith.”

In an exciting new development for the Archdiocese of Melbourne, a Shrine of the Holy Family has been established at the historic St Mary Star of the Sea Church in West Melbourne: <https://www.stmaryswestmelbourne.org/>. Since 2001, the administration of this parish has been entrusted to priests of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

The Shrine was opened on Saturday, 25 August at 2pm, by Archbishop Denis Hart with a Mass attended by about 300 people, including many young families. Among the celebrants were Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne Bishop Peter Elliott, Episcopal Vicar for Justice Fr Tony Kerin, the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei

for Australia and New Zealand Msgr Victor Martinez, Fr Bill Jordan, former assistant priest at St Mary's, Fr Nicholas Dillon, Fr Algirdas Simkus, representing the Lithuanian community and Fr Paul Kierce MSSP, representing the Maltese community, and parish priest Fr Max Polak.

In his homily, Archbishop Hart pointed out that Jesus had lived for 30 of his 33 years in a normal family situation. He said we can look at the Holy Family in terms of their mission, but we must never forget that that mission is enshrined in what Jesus, Mary and Joseph did every day.

“The Holy Family is not there merely as a model, or not merely as the commencement of the mission of Jesus,” Archbishop Hart said. “The Holy Family is a gift to the whole of humanity and from their family life, they reach out to our family life. We

can turn to them, and from them take inspiration in our moments of struggle.”

“I foresee that this Shrine of the Holy Family will be a shrine where the values of family, the values of mothers, fathers, and children, will be taught ... that this will be a place of teaching. But also it will be a place of prayer.”

“So let's remember, and thank God for the establishment of this Shrine;” he said, “that it will be a place of outreach to God, that it will be a place of teaching, it will be a place of welcome to families, and of preparation for and sustainment of marriages.”

In the sanctuary, close to the lectern, a large reproduction of the famous painting by 17th century Spanish painter Esteban Bartolome Murillo, depicting both the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity, served as a focus for

the church's dedication as an Archdiocesan Shrine of the Holy Family.

Parish priest Fr Max Polak said: “St Mary’s has long been a spiritual and religious reference point for Melbournians from further afield than its own parish boundaries. The Shrine will be a place of prayer, worship and formation where married couples and families will find spiritual, moral and intellectual affirmation.

“It will be a place where Catholic Christians and others who acknowledge God can bring their concerns and intentions centred on their own families or come away encouraged and enlightened regarding their responsibilities as members of a family.”

Fr Polak said it was evident that many societies are witnessing a rapid cultural shift “away from moral and

social values usually described as ‘traditional’ or as ‘Christian’.

“At the beginning of the 21st century,” he said, “there are new signs of organised and aggressive political-cultural movements seeking firmly to institutionalise such practices as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, contraception, artificial conception, same-sex unions and adoption by same-sex couples or unmarried women or men.”

“Such practices are a seriously harmful contradiction not only to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but the fundamental demands of the natural law which, however imperfectly or incompletely, were defended even in pre-Christian times.”

Fr Polak said that every effort should be made to overcome peacefully and persuasively these “false and disturbing tendencies”.

*(Photography by Richard Timbury,
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