



Message from Monsignor *“The Year of Saint Joseph”*

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis announced the beginning of a year dedicated to Saint Joseph, husband of Mary and guardian of Our Lord. December 8th marked the 150th anniversary of the formal declaration of Saint Joseph as “Patron of the Universal Church” by Blessed Pope Pius IX in 1870. The year-long celebration will conclude on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception next year, December 8, 2021.

The Holy Father’s announcement was accompanied by a letter to all Catholics entitled, *Patris Corde* (With a Father’s Heart). Its aim, the Pope states, “is to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and zeal.”

Pope Francis begins his letter by offering Saint Joseph as a particularly apt model for this time of pandemic. “Our lives,” he writes, “are woven together and sustained” in these days “by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show—doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers,” to name just a few. “Joseph, the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence [...] reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.”

The Pope goes on to consider Saint Joseph under seven aspects.

He was a “*beloved father.*” By accepting the role of father to the Messiah, Joseph, like Mary, was a vital instrument in God’s plan of salvation. And he faithfully undertook the essential responsibilities of fatherhood: devoting “himself completely” to his family through “his life and work” (St. Paul VI).

He was a “*tender and loving father.*” As an observant Jew, Joseph would have been very familiar with the Psalms, which repeatedly tell of God’s tender mercy compassion for “*all he has made*” (Ps 145:9). “In Joseph,” the Holy Father writes, the young Jesus would have learned “the tender love of God.” In Joseph’s humanity, his son would have understood—as we should understand—that God “can work even through our fears, our frailties, our weaknesses.” Thus, “amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.”

Saint Joseph was an “*obedient father.*” Four times in the Gospel According to Matthew, Joseph is called into action by God—to take Mary, who is with child, as his wife; to take Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod; to return with his family to Israel; to settle in the region of Galilee—and each time he does what God asks of him without hesitation. “During the hidden years in Nazareth,” writes Pope Francis, “Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father.”

Saint Joseph was an “*accepting father.*” “Often in life,” the Pope writes, “things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion.” Joseph set aside what must certainly have been very different expectations for his life and seems to have done so quite willingly. He was not a hostage to past regrets. The Holy Father says, “Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow [...] only as a result of this acceptance can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a

deeper meaning [to our lives].” How is this done? It happens by seeking the Spirit’s gift of fortitude and by living lives “in accordance with the Gospel.” Pope Francis quotes St. Paul, “*We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God*” (Rom 8:28).

Saint Joseph was a “*creatively courageous father.*” Sometimes our spiritual and moral struggles endure because we expect the Lord to fix them with no effort on our part. “God always finds a way to save us,” the Holy Father writes, “provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth [...] If at times God seems not to help us, surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions ourselves.” The Pope also uses as an example of *cooperators* with God’s grace those who lower their paralytic friend through the roof of the house where Jesus is teaching in order that their friend can be healed (Lk 5:17-26).

Mary trusted Joseph in her vulnerability in part because of his courage. It is appropriate, then, that Joseph is proclaimed “Patron” or “Protector” of the Church, and we honor him most authentically when *we* seek to be protectors of society’s poor and neglected. “Every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is ‘the child’ whom Joseph continues to protect.”

Saint Joseph was a “*working father.*” As a carpenter whose labor provided for his family’s fundamental needs, Joseph appreciated “the value, the dignity, and the joy” of honest work. “God himself, in becoming man,” Pope Francis points out, “did not disdain work.” “A family without work,” Pope Francis continues, “is particularly vulnerable to difficulties, tensions, estrangement and even break-up.” All nations, therefore, must strive to “ensure that everyone is able to earn a decent living.”

Finally, Saint Joseph was a “*father in the shadows.*” He was a father in shadows both because of the general silence about him in the Gospels, and because, just as we cannot detach ourselves from our shadow, Joseph never separated himself from the responsibilities of fatherhood. “A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world,” says the Pope, “but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child,” by giving “the gift of oneself.” This does not mean being “overprotective or possessive,” but helping one’s children become “capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying freedom and exploring new possibilities.” “Every child is the bearer of a unique mystery that can only be brought to light with the help of a father who respects that child’s freedom.

Patris Corde concludes with an invocation to Saint Joseph we might wish to pray frequently, if not daily, throughout this special year:

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.

Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.

There are many more beautiful insights to ponder in this letter, which can be found at www.vatican.va and by opening the link “Apostolic Letters.”

Blessed Feast of the Holy Family. My prayerful good wishes for a safe and grace-filled New Year.

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