

DOCUMENTS ON ST.JOSEPH

- 1.Quamquam Pluries 1889*
- 2.Redemptoris Custos 1989*
- 3.Patris Corde 2020*

QUAMQUAM PLURIES
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII
ON DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH

*To Our Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primates,
Archbishops, and other Ordinaries, in Peace and Union with Holy See.*

Although We have already many times ordered special prayers to be offered up in the whole world, that the interests of Catholicism might be insistently recommended to God, none will deem it matter for surprise that We consider the present moment an opportune one for again inculcating the same duty. During periods of stress and trial - chiefly when every lawlessness of act seems permitted to the powers of darkness - it has been the custom in the Church to plead with special fervour and perseverance to God, her author and protector, by recourse to the intercession of the saints - and chiefly of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God - whose patronage has ever been the most efficacious. The fruit of these pious prayers and of the confidence reposed in the Divine goodness, has always, sooner or later, been made apparent. Now, Venerable Brethren, you know the times in which we live; they are scarcely less deplorable for the Christian religion than the worst days, which in time past were most full of misery to the Church. We see faith, the root of all the Christian virtues, lessening in many souls; we see charity growing cold; the young generation daily growing in depravity of morals and views; the Church of Jesus Christ attacked on every side by open force or by craft; a relentless war waged against the Sovereign Pontiff; and the very foundations of religion undermined with a boldness which waxes daily in intensity. These things are, indeed, so much a matter of notoriety that it is needless for Us to expatiate on the depths to which society has sunk in these days, or on the designs which now agitate the minds of men. In circumstances so unhappy and troublous, human remedies are insufficient, and it becomes necessary, as a sole resource, to beg for assistance from the Divine power.

2. This is the reason why We have considered it necessary to turn to the Christian people and urge them to implore, with increased zeal and constancy, the aid of Almighty God. At this proximity of the month of October, which We have already consecrated to the Virgin Mary, under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary, We earnestly exhort the faithful to perform the exercises of this month with, if possible, even more piety and constancy than heretofore. We know that there is sure help in the maternal goodness of the Virgin, and We are very certain that We shall never vainly place Our trust in her. If, on innumerable occasions, she has displayed her power in aid of the Christian world, why should We doubt that she will now renew the assistance of her power and favour, if humble and constant prayers are offered up on all sides to her? Nay, We rather believe that her intervention will be the more marvellous as she has permitted Us to pray to her, for so long a time, with special appeals. But We entertain another object, which, according to your wont, Venerable Brethren, you will advance with fervour. That God may be more favourable to Our prayers, and that He may come with bounty and promptitude to the aid of His Church, We judge it of deep utility for the Christian people, continually to invoke with great piety and trust, together with the Virgin-Mother of God, her chaste Spouse, the Blessed Joseph; and We regard it as most certain that this will be most pleasing to the Virgin herself. On the subject of this devotion, of which We speak publicly for the first time to-day, We know without doubt that not only is the people inclined to it, but that it is already established, and is advancing to full growth. We have seen the devotion to St. Joseph, which in past times the Roman Pontiffs have developed and gradually increased, grow into greater proportions in Our time, particularly after Pius IX., of happy memory, Our predecessor, proclaimed, yielding to the request of a large number of bishops, this holy patriarch the patron of the Catholic Church. And as, moreover, it is of high importance that the devotion to St. Joseph should engraft

itself upon the daily pious practices of Catholics, We desire that the Christian people should be urged to it above all by Our words and authority.

3. The special motives for which St. Joseph has been proclaimed Patron of the Church, and from which the Church looks for singular benefit from his patronage and protection, are that Joseph was the spouse of Mary and that he was reputed the Father of Jesus Christ. From these sources have sprung his dignity, his holiness, his glory. In truth, the dignity of the Mother of God is so lofty that naught created can rank above it. But as Joseph has been united to the Blessed Virgin by the ties of marriage, it may not be doubted that he approached nearer than any to the eminent dignity by which the Mother of God surpasses so nobly all created natures. For marriage is the most intimate of all unions which from its essence imparts a community of gifts between those that by it are joined together. Thus in giving Joseph the Blessed Virgin as spouse, God appointed him to be not only her life's companion, the witness of her maidenhood, the protector of her honour, but also, by virtue of the conjugal tie, a participator in her sublime dignity. And Joseph shines among all mankind by the most august dignity, since by divine will, he was the guardian of the Son of God and reputed as His father among men. Hence it came about that the Word of God was humbly subject to Joseph, that He obeyed him, and that He rendered to him all those offices that children are bound to render to their parents. From this two-fold dignity flowed the obligation which nature lays upon the head of families, so that Joseph became the guardian, the administrator, and the legal defender of the divine house whose chief he was. And during the whole course of his life he fulfilled those charges and those duties. He set himself to protect with a mighty love and a daily solicitude his spouse and the Divine Infant; regularly by his work he earned what was necessary for the one and the other for nourishment and clothing; he guarded from death the Child threatened by a monarch's jealousy, and found for Him a refuge; in the miseries of the journey and in the bitternesses of exile he was ever the companion, the assistance, and the upholder of the Virgin and of Jesus. Now the divine house which Joseph ruled with the authority of a father, contained within its limits the scarce-born Church. From the same fact that the most holy Virgin is the mother of Jesus Christ is she the mother of all Christians whom she bore on Mount Calvary amid the supreme throes of the Redemption; Jesus Christ is, in a manner, the first-born of Christians, who by the adoption and Redemption are his brothers. And for such reasons the Blessed Patriarch looks upon the multitude of Christians who make up the Church as confided specially to his trust - this limitless family spread over the earth, over which, because he is the spouse of Mary and the Father of Jesus Christ he holds, as it were, a paternal authority. It is, then, natural and worthy that as the Blessed Joseph ministered to all the needs of the family at Nazareth and girt it about with his protection, he should now cover with the cloak of his heavenly patronage and defend the Church of Jesus Christ.

4. You well understand, Venerable Brethren, that these considerations are confirmed by the opinion held by a large number of the Fathers, to which the sacred liturgy gives its sanction, that the Joseph of ancient times, son of the patriarch Jacob, was the type of St. Joseph, and the former by his glory prefigured the greatness of the future guardian of the Holy Family. And in truth, beyond the fact that the same name - a point the significance of which has never been denied - was given to each, you well know the points of likeness that exist between them; namely, that the first Joseph won the favour and especial goodwill of his master, and that through Joseph's administration his household came to prosperity and wealth; that (still more important) he presided over the kingdom with great power, and, in a time when the harvests failed, he provided for all the needs of the Egyptians with so much wisdom that the King decreed to him the title "Saviour of the world." Thus it is that We may prefigure the new in the old patriarch. And as the first caused the prosperity of his master's domestic interests and at the same time rendered great services to the whole kingdom, so the second, destined to be the guardian of the Christian religion, should be regarded as the protector and defender of the Church, which is truly the house of the Lord and the kingdom of God on earth. These are the reasons why men of every rank and country should fly to the trust and guard of the blessed Joseph. Fathers of families find in Joseph the best personification of paternal solicitude and vigilance; spouses a perfect example of love, of peace, and of conjugal fidelity; virgins at the same time

find in him the model and protector of virginal integrity. The noble of birth will learn of Joseph how to guard their dignity even in misfortune; the rich will understand, by his lessons, what are the goods most to be desired and won at the price of their labour. As to workmen, artisans, and persons of lesser degree, their recourse to Joseph is a special right, and his example is for their particular imitation. For Joseph, of royal blood, united by marriage to the greatest and holiest of women, reputed the father of the Son of God, passed his life in labour, and won by the toil of the artisan the needful support of his family. It is, then, true that the condition of the lowly has nothing shameful in it, and the work of the labourer is not only not dishonouring, but can, if virtue be joined to it, be singularly ennobled. Joseph, content with his slight possessions, bore the trials consequent on a fortune so slender, with greatness of soul, in imitation of his Son, who having put on the form of a slave, being the Lord of life, subjected himself of his own free-will to the spoliation and loss of everything.

5. Through these considerations, the poor and those who live by the labour of their hands should be of good heart and learn to be just. If they win the right of emerging from poverty and obtaining a better rank by lawful means, reason and justice uphold them in changing the order established, in the first instance, for them by the Providence of God. But recourse to force and struggles by seditious paths to obtain such ends are madnesses which only aggravate the evil which they aim to suppress. Let the poor, then, if they would be wise, trust not to the promises of seditious men, but rather to the example and patronage of the Blessed Joseph, and to the maternal charity of the Church, which each day takes an increasing compassion on their lot.

6. This is the reason why - trusting much to your zeal and episcopal authority, Venerable Brethren, and not doubting that the good and pious faithful will run beyond the mere letter of the law - We prescribe that during the whole month of October, at the recitation of the Rosary, for which We have already legislated, a prayer to St. Joseph be added, the formula of which will be sent with this letter, and that this custom should be repeated every year. To those who recite this prayer, We grant for each time an indulgence of seven years and seven Lents. It is a salutary practice and very praiseworthy, already established in some countries, to consecrate the month of March to the honour of the holy Patriarch by daily exercises of piety. Where this custom cannot be easily established, it is as least desirable, that before the feast-day, in the principal church of each parish, a *triduo* of prayer be celebrated. In those lands where the 19th of March - the Feast of St. Joseph - is not a Festival of Obligation, We exhort the faithful to sanctify it as far as possible by private pious practices, in honour of their heavenly patron, as though it were a day of Obligation.

7. And in token of heavenly favours, and in witness of Our good-will, We grant most lovingly in the Lord, to you, Venerable Brethren, to your clergy and to your people, the Apostolic blessing.

Given from the Vatican, August 15th, 1889, the 11th year of Our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

Prayer to Saint Joseph

To thee, O blessed Joseph, we have recourse in our affliction, and having implored the help of thy thrice holy Spouse, we now, with hearts filled with confidence, earnestly beg thee also to take us under thy protection. By that charity wherewith thou wert united to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and by

that fatherly love with which thou didst cherish the Child Jesus, we beseech thee and we humbly pray that thou wilt look down with gracious eye upon that inheritance which Jesus Christ purchased by His blood, and wilt succor us in our need by thy power and strength.

Defend, O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family, the chosen off-spring of Jesus Christ. Keep from us, O most loving Father, all blight of error and corruption. Aid us from on high, most valiant defender, in this conflict with the powers of darkness. And even as of old thou didst rescue the Child Jesus from the peril of His life, so now defend God's Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity. Shield us ever under thy patronage, that, following thine example and strengthened by thy help, we may live a holy life, die a happy death, and attain to everlasting bliss in Heaven. Amen.

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APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
REDEMPTORIS CUSTOS
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF
JOHN PAUL II
ON THE PERSON AND MISSION OF
SAINT JOSEPH
IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND OF THE CHURCH

*To Bishops
To Priests and Deacons
To Men and Women Religious
And to all the Lay Faithful*

INTRODUCTION

1. "Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife" (cf. *Mt* 1 :24).

Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries stressed that just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ's upbringing,(1) he likewise watches over and protects Christ's Mystical Body, that is, the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model.

On the occasion of the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam Pluries*,(2) and in line with the veneration given to St. Joseph over the centuries, I wish to offer for your consideration, dear brothers, and sisters, some reflections concerning him "into whose custody God entrusted his most precious treasures."(3) I gladly fulfill this pastoral duty so that all may grow in devotion to the Patron of the Universal Church and in love for the Savior whom he served in such an exemplary manner.

In this way the whole Christian people not only will turn to St. Joseph with greater fervor and invoke his patronage with trust, but also will always keep before their eyes his humble, mature way of serving and of "taking part" in the plan of salvation.(4)

I am convinced that by reflection upon the way that Mary's spouse shared in the divine mystery, the Church - on the road towards the future with all of humanity - will be enabled to discover ever anew her own identity within this redemptive plan, which is founded on the mystery of the Incarnation.

This is precisely the mystery in which Joseph of Nazareth "shared" like no other human being except Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word. He shared in it with her; he was involved in the same salvific event; he was the guardian of the same love, through the power of which the eternal Father "destined us to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (*Eph* 1:5).

I

THE GOSPEL PORTRAIT

Marriage to Mary

2. "Joseph, Son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:20-21).

In these words we find the core of biblical truth about St. Joseph; they refer to that moment in his life to which the Fathers of the Church make special reference.

The Evangelist Matthew explains the significance of this moment while also describing how Joseph lived it. However, in order to understand fully both its content and context, it is important to keep in mind the parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke. In Matthew we read: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:18). However, the origin of Mary's pregnancy "of the Holy Spirit" is described more fully and explicitly in what Luke tells us about the annunciation of Jesus' birth: "The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary" (Lk 1:26-27). The angel's greeting: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28) created an inner turmoil in Mary and also moved her to reflect. Then the messenger reassured the Virgin and at the same time revealed God's special plan for her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" (Lk 1:30-32).

A little earlier the Gospel writer had stated that at the moment of the Annunciation, Mary was "betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David." The nature of this "marriage" is explained indirectly when Mary, after hearing what the messenger says about the birth of the child, asks, "How can this be, since I do not know man?" (Lk 1:34) The angel responds: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Although Mary is already "wedded" to Joseph, she will remain a virgin, because the child conceived in her at the Annunciation was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At this point Luke's text coincides with Matthew 1:18 and serves to explain what we read there. If, after her marriage to Joseph, Mary is found to be with child of the Holy Spirit," this fact corresponds to all that the Annunciation means, in particular to Mary's final words: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). In response to what is clearly the plan of God, with the passing of days and weeks Mary's "pregnancy" is visible to the people and to Joseph; she appears before them as one who must give birth and carry within herself the mystery of motherhood.

3. In these circumstances, "her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to send her away quietly" (Mt 1:19). He did not know how to deal with Mary's "astonishing" motherhood. He certainly sought an answer to this unsettling question, but above all he sought a way out of what was for him a difficult situation. "But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'" (Mt 1:20-21).

There is a strict parallel between the "annunciation" in Matthew's text and the one in Luke. The divine messenger introduces Joseph to the mystery of Mary's motherhood. While remaining a virgin, she who by law is his "spouse" has become a mother through the power of the Holy Spirit. And when the Son in Mary's womb comes into the world, he must receive the name Jesus. This was a name known among the Israelites and sometimes given to their sons. In this case, however, it is the Son who, in accordance with

the divine promise, will bring to perfect fulfillment the meaning of the name Jesus-Yehos ua' - which means "God saves."

Joseph is visited by the messenger as "Mary's spouse," as the one who in due time must give this name to the Son to be born of the Virgin of Nazareth who is married to him. It is to Joseph, then, that the messenger turns, entrusting to him the responsibilities of an earthly father with regard to Mary's Son.

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife" (cf. Mt 1:24). He took her in all the mystery of her motherhood. He took her together with the Son who had come into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way he showed a readiness of will like Mary's with regard to what God asked of him through the angel.

II

THE GUARDIAN OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD

4. When, soon after the Annunciation, Mary went to the house of Zechariah to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth, even as she offered her greeting she heard the words of Elizabeth, who was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 1:41). Besides offering a salutation which recalled that of the angel at the Annunciation, Elizabeth also said: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). These words were the guiding thought of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, in which I sought to deepen the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which stated the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the cross,"(5) "preceding"(6) all those who follow Christ by faith.

Now at the beginning of this pilgrimage, the faith of Mary meets the faith of Joseph. If Elizabeth said of the Redeemer's Mother, "blessed is she who believed," in a certain sense this blessedness can be referred to Joseph as well, since he responded positively to the word of God when it was communicated to him at the decisive moment. While it is true that Joseph did not respond to the angel's "announcement" in the same way as Mary, he "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife." What he did is the clearest "obedience of faith" (cf. Rom 1:5; 16:26; 2 Cor 10:5-6).

One can say that what Joseph did united him in an altogether special way to the faith of Mary. He accepted as truth coming from God the very thing that she had already accepted at the Annunciation. The Council teaches: "'The obedience of faith' must be given to God as he reveals himself. By this obedience of faith man freely commits himself entirely to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals,' and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him."(7) This statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth.

5. Therefore he became a unique guardian of the mystery "hidden for ages in God" (Eph 3:9), as did Mary, in that decisive moment which St. Paul calls "the fullness of time," when "God sent forth his Son, born of woman...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). In the words of the Council: "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1 4)."(8)

Together with Mary, Joseph is the first guardian of this divine mystery. Together with Mary, and in relation to Mary, he shares in this final phase of God's self-revelation in Christ and he does so from the very beginning. Looking at the gospel texts of both Matthew and Luke, one can also say that Joseph is the

first to share in the faith of the Mother of God and that in doing so he supports his spouse in the faith of the divine annunciation. He is also the first to be placed by God on the path of Mary's "pilgrimage of faith." It is a path along which - especially at the time of Calvary and Pentecost - Mary will precede in a perfect way.(9)

6. The path that was Joseph's-his pilgrimage of faith - ended first, that is to say, before Mary stood at the foot of the cross on Golgotha, and before the time after Christ returned to the Father, when she was present in the upper room on Pentecost, the day the Church was manifested to the world, having been born in the power of the Spirit of truth. Nevertheless, Joseph's way of faith moved in the same direction: it was totally determined by the same mystery, of which he, together with Mary, had been the first guardian. The Incarnation and Redemption constitute an organic and indissoluble unity, in which "the plan of revelation is realized by words and deeds which are intrinsically bound up with each other."(10) Precisely because of this unity, Pope John XXIII, who had a great devotion to St. Joseph, directed that Joseph's name be inserted in the Roman Canon of the Mass-which is the perpetual memorial of redemption - after the name of Mary and before the apostles, popes and martyrs.(11)

The Service of Fatherhood

7. As can be deduced from the gospel texts, Joseph's marriage to Mary is the juridical basis of his fatherhood. It was to assure fatherly protection for Jesus that God chose Joseph to be Mary's spouse. It follows that Joseph's fatherhood - a relationship that places him as close as possible to Christ, to whom every election and predestination is ordered (cf. Rom 8:28-29) - comes to pass through marriage to Mary, that is, through the family.

While clearly affirming that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that virginity remained intact in the marriage (cf. Mt 1:18-25; Lk 1:26-38), the evangelists refer to Joseph as Mary's husband and to Mary as his wife (cf. Mt 1:16, 18-20, 24; Lk 1:27; 2:5).

And while it is important for the Church to profess the virginal conception of Jesus, it is no less important to uphold Mary's marriage to Joseph, because juridically Joseph's fatherhood depends on it. Thus one understands why the generations are listed according to the genealogy of Joseph: "Why," St. Augustine asks, "should they not be according to Joseph? Was he not Mary's husband?... Scripture states, through the authority of an angel, that he was her husband. Do not fear, says the angel, to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was told to name the child, although not born from his seed. She will bear a son, the angel says, and you will call him Jesus. Scripture recognizes that Jesus is not born of Joseph's seed, since in his concern about the origin of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph is told that it is of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, he is not deprived of his fatherly authority from the moment that he is told to name the child. Finally, even the Virgin Mary, well aware that she has not conceived Christ as a result of conjugal relations with Joseph, still calls him Christ's father."(12)

The Son of Mary is also Joseph's Son by virtue of the marriage bond that unites them: "By reason of their faithful marriage both of them deserve to be called Christ's parents, not only his mother, but also his father, who was a parent in the same way that he was the mother's spouse: in mind, not in the flesh."(13) In this marriage none of the requisites of marriage were lacking: "In Christ's parents all the goods of marriage were realized-offspring, fidelity, the sacrament: the offspring being the Lord Jesus himself; fidelity, since there was no adultery: the sacrament, since there was no divorce."(14)

Analyzing the nature of marriage, both St. Augustine and St. Thomas always identify it with an "indivisible union of souls," a "union of hearts," with "consent."(15) These elements are found in an exemplary manner in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. At the culmination of the history of salvation,

when God reveals his love for humanity through the gift of the Word, it is precisely the marriage of Mary and Joseph that brings to realization in full "freedom" the "spousal gift of self" in receiving and expressing such a love.(16) "In this great undertaking which is the renewal of all things in Christ, marriage-it too purified and renewed-becomes a new reality, a sacrament of the New Covenant. We see that at the beginning of the New Testament, as at the beginning of the Old, there is a married couple. But whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth. The Savior began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union, wherein is manifested his all-powerful will to purify and sanctify the family - that sanctuary of love and cradle of life."(17)

How much the family of today can learn from this! "The essence and role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his bride."(18) This being the case, it is in the Holy Family, the original "Church in miniature (Ecclesia domestica),"(19) that every Christian family must be reflected. "Through God's mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families."(20)

8. St. Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood. It is precisely in this way that, as the Church's Liturgy teaches, he "cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation" and is truly a "minister of salvation."(21) His fatherhood is expressed concretely "in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a total gift of self, of his life and work; in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house."(22)

In recalling that "the beginnings of our redemption" were entrusted "to the faithful care of Joseph,"(23) the Liturgy specifies that "God placed him at the head of his family, as a faithful and prudent servant, so that with fatherly care he might watch over his only begotten Son."(24) Leo XIII emphasized the sublime nature of this mission: "He among all stands out in his august dignity, since by divine disposition he was guardian, and according to human opinion, father of God's Son. Whence it followed that the Word of God was subjected to Joseph, he obeyed him and rendered to him that honor and reverence that children owe to their father."(25)

Since it is inconceivable that such a sublime task would not be matched by the necessary qualities to adequately fulfill it, we must recognize that Joseph showed Jesus "by a special gift from heaven, all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father's heart can know."(26)

Besides fatherly authority over Jesus, God also gave Joseph a share in the corresponding love, the love that has its origin in the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:15).

The Gospels clearly describe the fatherly responsibility of Joseph toward Jesus. For salvation-which comes through the humanity of Jesus-is realized in actions which are an everyday part of family life, in keeping with that "condescension" which is inherent in the economy of the Incarnation. The gospel writers carefully show how in the life of Jesus nothing was left to chance, but how everything took place according to God's predetermined plan. The oft-repeated formula, "This happened, so that there might be fulfilled...," in reference to a particular event in the Old Testament serves to emphasize the unity and continuity of the plan which is fulfilled in Christ.

With the Incarnation, the "promises" and "figures" of the Old Testament become "reality": places, persons, events and rites interrelate according to precise divine commands communicated by angels and received by creatures who are particularly sensitive to the voice of God. Mary is the Lord's humble servant, prepared from eternity for the task of being the Mother of God. Joseph is the one whom God chose to be the "overseer of the Lord's birth,"(27) the one who has the responsibility to look after the Son of God's "ordained" entry into the world, in accordance with divine dispositions and human laws. All of the so-called "private" or "hidden" life of Jesus is entrusted to Joseph's guardianship.

The Census

9. Journeying to Bethlehem for the census in obedience to the orders of legitimate authority, Joseph fulfilled for the child the significant task of officially inserting the name "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth" (cf. Jn 1:45) in the registry of the Roman Empire. This registration clearly shows that Jesus belongs to the human race as a man among men, a citizen of this world, subject to laws and civil institutions, but also "savior of the world." Origen gives a good description of the theological significance, by no means marginal, of this historical fact: "Since the first census of the whole world took place under Caesar Augustus, and among all the others Joseph too went to register together with Mary his wife, who was with child, and since Jesus was born before the census was completed: to the person who makes a careful examination it will appear that a kind of mystery is expressed in the fact that at the time when all people in the world presented themselves to be counted, Christ too should be counted. By being registered with everyone, he could sanctify everyone; inscribed with the whole world in the census, he offered to the world communion with himself, and after presenting himself he wrote all the people of the world in the book of the living, so that as many as believed in him could then be written in heaven with the saints of God, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever, Amen."(28)

The Birth at Bethlehem

10. As guardian of the mystery "hidden for ages in the mind of God," which begins to unfold before his eyes "in the fullness of time," Joseph, together with Mary, is a privileged witness to the birth of the Son of God into the world on Christmas night in Bethlehem. Luke writes: "And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:6-7).

Joseph was an eyewitness to this birth, which took place in conditions that, humanly speaking, were embarrassing—a first announcement of that "self-emptying" (cf. Phil 2:5-8) which Christ freely accepted for the forgiveness of sins. Joseph also witnessed the adoration of the shepherds who arrived at Jesus' birthplace after the angel had brought them the great and happy news (cf. Lk 2:15-16). Later he also witnessed the homage of the magi who came from the East (cf. Mt 2:11).

The Circumcision

11. A son's circumcision was the first religious obligation of a father, and with this ceremony (cf. Lk 2:21) Joseph exercised his right and duty with regard to Jesus.

The principle which holds that all the rites of the Old Testament are a shadow of the reality (cf. Heb 9:9f; 10:1) serves to explain why Jesus would accept them. As with all the other rites, circumcision too is "fulfilled" in Jesus. God's covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the sign (cf. Gn 17:13), reaches its full effect and perfect realization in Jesus, who is the "yes" of all the ancient promises (cf. 2 Cor 1:20).

Conferral of the Name

12. At the circumcision Joseph names the child "Jesus." This is the only name in which there is salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). Its significance had been revealed to Joseph at the moment of his "annunciation": "You shall call the child Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (cf. Mt 1:21). In conferring the name, Joseph declares his own legal fatherhood over Jesus, and in speaking the name he proclaims the child's mission as Savior.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

13. This rite, to which Luke refers (2:22ff.), includes the ransom of the first-born and sheds light on the subsequent stay of Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve.

The ransoming of the first-born is another obligation of the father, and it is fulfilled by Joseph. Represented in the first-born is the people of the covenant, ransomed from slavery in order to belong to God. Here too, Jesus - who is the true "price" of ransom (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pt 1:19) - not only "fulfills" the Old Testament rite, but at the same time transcends it, since he is not a subject to be redeemed, but the very author of redemption.

The gospel writer notes that "his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him" (Lk 2:23), in particular at what Simeon said in his canticle to God, when he referred to Jesus as the "salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" and as a "sign that is spoken against" (cf. Lk 2:30-34).

The Flight into Egypt

14. After the presentation in the Temple the Evangelist Luke notes: "And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Lk 2:39-40).

But according to Matthew's text, a very important event took place before the return to Galilee, an event in which divine providence once again had recourse to Joseph. We read: "Now when [the magi] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him'" (Mt 2:13). Herod learned from the magi who came from the East about the birth of the "king of the Jews" (Mt 2:2). And when the magi departed, he "sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under" (Mt 2:16). By killing them all, he wished to kill the new-born "king of the Jews" whom he had heard about. And so, Joseph, having been warned in a dream, "took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'" (Mt 2:14-15; cf. Hos 11:1).

And so Jesus' way back to Nazareth from Bethlehem passed through Egypt. Just as Israel had followed the path of the exodus "from the condition of slavery" in order to begin the Old Covenant, so Joseph, guardian and cooperator in the providential mystery of God, even in exile watched over the one who brings about the New Covenant.

Jesus' Stay in the Temple

15. From the time of the Annunciation, both Joseph and Mary found themselves, in a certain sense, at the heart of the mystery hidden for ages in the mind of God, a mystery which had taken on flesh: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). He dwelt among men, within the surroundings of the Holy Family of Nazareth-one of many families in this small town in Galilee, one of the many families of the land of Israel. There Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Lk 2:40). The Gospels summarize in a few words the long period of the "hidden" life, during which Jesus prepared himself for his messianic mission. Only one episode from this "hidden time" is described in the Gospel of Luke: the Passover in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. Together with Mary and Joseph, Jesus took part in the feast as a young pilgrim. "And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it" (Lk 2:43). After a day's journey, they noticed his absence and began to search "among their kinsfolk and acquaintances." "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Lk 2:47). Mary asked: "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Lk 2:48). The answer Jesus gave was such that "they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them." He had said, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49-50)

Joseph, of whom Mary had just used the words "your father," heard this answer. That, after all, is what all the people said and thought: Jesus was the son (as was supposed) or Joseph" (Lk 3:23). Nonetheless, the reply of Jesus in the Temple brought once again to the mind of his "presumed father" what he had heard on that night twelve years earlier: "Joseph...do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." From that time onwards he knew that he was a guardian of the mystery of God, and it was precisely this mystery that the twelve- year-old Jesus brought to mind: "I must be in my Father's house."

The Support and Education of Jesus of Nazareth

16. The growth of Jesus "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2:52) took place within the Holy Family under the eyes of Joseph, who had the important task of "raising" Jesus, that is, feeding, clothing and educating him in the Law and in a trade, in keeping with the duties of a father.

In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Church venerates the memory of Mary the ever Virgin Mother of God and the memory of St. Joseph,(29) because "he fed him whom the faithful must eat as the bread of eternal life."(30)

For his part, Jesus "was obedient to them" (Lk 2:51), respectfully returning the affection of his "parents." In this way he wished to sanctify the obligations of the family and of work, which he performed at the side of Joseph.

III

A JUST MAN A HUSBAND

17. In the course of that pilgrimage of faith which was his life, Joseph, like Mary, remained faithful to God's call until the end. While Mary's life was the bringing to fullness of that fiat first spoken at the Annunciation, at the moment of Joseph's own "annunciation" he said nothing; instead he simply "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (Mt 1:24). And this first "doing" became the beginning of "Joseph's way." The Gospels do not record any word ever spoken by Joseph along that way. But the

silence of Joseph has its own special eloquence, for thanks to that silence we can understand the truth of the Gospel's judgment that he was "a just man" (Mt 1:19).

One must come to understand this truth, for it contains one of the most important testimonies concerning man and his vocation. Through many generations the Church has read this testimony with ever greater attention and with deeper understanding, drawing, as it were, "what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52) from the storehouse of the noble figure of Joseph.

18. Above all, the "just" man of Nazareth possesses the clear characteristics of a husband. Luke refers to Mary as "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph" (Lk 1:27). Even before the "mystery hidden for ages" (Eph 3:9) began to be fulfilled, the Gospels set before us the image of husband and wife. According to Jewish custom, marriage took place in two stages: first, the legal, or true marriage was celebrated, and then, only after a certain period of time, the husband brought the wife into his own house. Thus, before he lived with Mary, Joseph was already her "husband." Mary, however, preserved her deep desire to give herself exclusively to God. One may well ask how this desire of Mary's could be reconciled with a "wedding." The answer can only come from the saving events as they unfold, from the special action of God himself. From the moment of the Annunciation, Mary knew that she was to fulfill her virginal desire to give herself exclusively and fully to God precisely by becoming the Mother of God's Son. Becoming a Mother by the power of the Holy Spirit was the form taken by her gift of self: a form which God himself expected of the Virgin Mary, who was "betrothed" to Joseph. Mary uttered her fiat. The fact that Mary was "betrothed" to Joseph was part of the very plan of God. This is pointed out by Luke and especially by Matthew. The words spoken to Joseph are very significant: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:20). These words explain the mystery of Joseph's wife: In her motherhood Mary is a virgin. In her, "the Son of the Most High" assumed a human body and became "the Son of Man."

Addressing Joseph through the words of the angel, God speaks to him as the husband of the Virgin of Nazareth. What took place in her through the power of the Holy Spirit also confirmed in a special way the marriage bond which already existed between Joseph and Mary. God's messenger was clear in what he said to Joseph: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife into your home." Hence, what had taken place earlier, namely, Joseph's marriage to Mary, happened in accord with God's will and was meant to endure. In her divine motherhood Mary had to continue to live as "a virgin, the wife of her husband" (cf. Lk 1:27).

19. In the words of the "annunciation" by night, Joseph not only heard the divine truth concerning his wife's indescribable vocation; he also heard once again the truth about his own vocation. This "just" man, who, in the spirit of the noblest traditions of the Chosen People, loved the Virgin of Nazareth and was bound to her by a husband's love, was once again called by God to this love.

"Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife" into his home (Mt 1:24); what was conceived in Mary was "of the Holy Spirit." From expressions such as these are we not to suppose that his love as a man was also given new birth by the Holy Spirit? Are we not to think that the love of God which has been poured forth into the human heart through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 5:5) molds every human love to perfection? This love of God also molds-in a completely unique way-the love of husband and wife, deepening within it everything of human worth and beauty, everything that bespeaks an exclusive gift of self, a covenant between persons, and an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity.

"Joseph. . .took his wife; but he knew her not, until she had borne a son" (Mt 1:24-25). These words indicate another kind of closeness in marriage. The deep spiritual closeness arising from marital union and the interpersonal contact between man and woman have their definitive origin in the Spirit, the Giver

of Life (cf. Jn 6:63). Joseph, in obedience to the Spirit, found in the Spirit the source of love, the conjugal love which he experienced as a man. And this love proved to be greater than this "just man" could ever have expected within the limits of his human heart.

20. In the Liturgy, Mary is celebrated as "united to Joseph, the just man, by a bond of marital and virginal love."(31) There are really two kinds of love here, both of which together represent the mystery of the Church - virgin and spouse - as symbolized in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. "Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes and confirms it. Marriage and virginity are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the Covenant of God with his people."(32) the Covenant which is a communion of love between God and human beings.

Through his complete self-sacrifice, Joseph expressed his generous love for the Mother of God, and gave her a husband's "gift of self." Even though he decided to draw back so as not to interfere in the plan of God which was coming to pass in Mary, Joseph obeyed the explicit command of the angel and took Mary into his home, while respecting the fact that she belonged exclusively to God.

On the other hand, it was from his marriage to Mary that Joseph derived his singular dignity and his rights in regard to Jesus. "It is certain that the dignity of the Mother of God is so exalted that nothing could be more sublime; yet because Mary was united to Joseph by the bond of marriage, there can be no doubt but that Joseph approached as no other person ever could that eminent dignity whereby the Mother of God towers above all creatures. Since marriage is the highest degree of association and friendship involving by its very nature a communion of goods, it follows that God, by giving Joseph to the Virgin, did not give him to her only as a companion for life, a witness of her virginity and protector of her honor: he also gave Joseph to Mary in order that he might share, through the marriage pact, in her own sublime greatness."(33)

21. This bond of charity was the core of the Holy Family's life, first in the poverty of Bethlehem, then in their exile in Egypt, and later in the house of Nazareth. The Church deeply venerates this Family, and proposes it as the model of all families. Inserted directly in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Family of Nazareth has its own special mystery. And in this mystery, as in the Incarnation, one finds a true fatherhood: the human form of the family of the Son of God, a true human family, formed by the divine mystery. In this family, Joseph is the father: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an "apparent" or merely "substitute" fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family. This is a consequence of the hypostatic union: humanity taken up into the unity of the Divine Person of the Word-Son, Jesus Christ. Together with human nature, all that is human, and especially the family - as the first dimension of man's existence in the world - is also taken up in Christ. Within this context, Joseph's human fatherhood was also "taken up" in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation.

On the basis of this principle, the words which Mary spoke to the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple take on their full significance: "Your father and I...have been looking for you." This is no conventional phrase: Mary's words to Jesus show the complete reality of the Incarnation present in the mystery of the Family of Nazareth. From the beginning, Joseph accepted with the "obedience of faith" his human fatherhood over Jesus. And thus, following the light of the Holy Spirit who gives himself to human beings through faith, he certainly came to discover ever more fully the indescribable gift that was his human fatherhood.

WORK AS AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

22. Work was the daily expression of love in the life of the Family of Nazareth. The Gospel specifies the kind of work Joseph did in order to support his family: he was a carpenter. This simple word sums up Joseph's entire life. For Jesus, these were hidden years, the years to which Luke refers after recounting the episode that occurred in the Temple: "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Lk 2:51). This "submission" or obedience of Jesus in the house of Nazareth should be understood as a sharing in the work of Joseph. Having learned the work of his presumed father, he was known as "the carpenter's son." If the Family of Nazareth is an example and model for human families, in the order of salvation and holiness, so too, by analogy, is Jesus' work at the side of Joseph the carpenter. In our own day, the Church has emphasized this by instituting the liturgical memorial of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1. Human work, and especially manual labor, receive special prominence in the Gospel. Along with the humanity of the Son of God, work too has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation, and has also been redeemed in a special way. At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption.

23. In the human growth of Jesus "in wisdom, age and grace," the virtue of industriousness played a notable role, since "work is a human good" which "transforms nature" and makes man "in a sense, more human."(34)

The importance of work in human life demands that its meaning be known and assimilated in order to "help all people to come closer to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world, and to deepen...friendship with Christ in their lives, by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King."(35)

24. What is crucially important here is the sanctification of daily life, a sanctification which each person must acquire according to his or her own state, and one which can be promoted according to a model accessible to all people: "St. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies;...he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things-it is enough to have the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic."(36)

V

THE PRIMACY OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

25. The same aura of silence that envelops everything else about Joseph also shrouds his work as a carpenter in the house of Nazareth. It is, however, a silence that reveals in a special way the inner portrait of the man. The Gospels speak exclusively of what Joseph "did." Still, they allow us to discover in his "actions" - shrouded in silence as they are - an aura of deep contemplation. Joseph was in daily contact with the mystery "hidden from ages past," and which "dwelt" under his roof. This explains, for example, why St. Teresa of Jesus, the great reformer of the Carmelites, promoted the renewal of veneration to St. Joseph in Western Christianity.

26. The total sacrifice, whereby Joseph surrendered his whole existence to the demands of the Messiah's coming into his home, becomes understandable only in the light of his profound interior life. It was from this interior life that "very singular commands and consolations came, bringing him also the logic and strength that belong to simple and clear souls, and giving him the power of making great decisions-such as the decision to put his liberty immediately at the disposition of the divine designs, to make over to them also his legitimate human calling, his conjugal happiness, to accept the conditions, the responsibility

and the burden of a family, but, through an incomparable virginal love, to renounce that natural conjugal love that is the foundation and nourishment of the family.(37)

This submission to God, this readiness of will to dedicate oneself to all that serves him, is really nothing less than that exercise of devotion which constitutes one expression of the virtue of religion.(38)

27. The communion of life between Joseph and Jesus leads us to consider once again the mystery of the Incarnation, precisely in reference to the humanity of Jesus as the efficacious instrument of his divinity for the purpose of sanctifying man: "By virtue of his divinity, Christ's human actions were salvific for us, causing grace within us, either by merit or by a certain efficacy."(39)

Among those actions, the gospel writers highlight those which have to do with the Paschal Mystery, but they also underscore the importance of physical contact with Jesus for healing (cf. for example, Mk 1:41), and the influence Jesus exercised upon John the Baptist when they were both in their mothers' wombs (cf. Lk 1:41-44).

As we have seen, the apostolic witness did not neglect the story of Jesus' birth, his circumcision, his presentation in the Temple, his flight into Egypt and his hidden life in Nazareth. It recognized the "mystery" of grace present in each of these saving "acts," inasmuch as they all share the same source of love: the divinity of Christ. If through Christ's humanity this love shone on all mankind, the first beneficiaries were undoubtedly those whom the divine will had most intimately associated with itself: Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and Joseph, his presumed father.(40)

Why should the "fatherly" love of Joseph not have had an influence upon the "filial" love of Jesus? And vice versa why should the "filial" love of Jesus not have had an influence upon the "fatherly" love of Joseph, thus leading to a further deepening of their unique relationship? Those souls most sensitive to the impulses of divine love have rightly seen in Joseph a brilliant example of the interior life.

Furthermore, in Joseph, the apparent tension between the active and the contemplative life finds an ideal harmony that is only possible for those who possess the perfection of charity. Following St. Augustine's well-known distinction between the love of the truth (*caritas veritatis*) and the practical demands of love (*necessitas caritatis*),(41) we can say that Joseph experienced both love of the truth-that pure contemplative love of the divine Truth which radiated from the humanity of Christ-and the demands of love-that equally pure and selfless love required for his vocation to safeguard and develop the humanity of Jesus, which was inseparably linked to his divinity.

VI

PATRON OF THE CHURCH IN OUR DAY

28. At a difficult time in the Church's history, Pope Pius IX, wishing to place her under the powerful patronage of the holy patriarch Joseph, declared him "Patron of the Catholic Church."(42) For Pius IX this was no idle gesture, since by virtue of the sublime dignity which God has granted to his most faithful servant Joseph, "the Church, after the Blessed Virgin, his spouse, has always held him in great honor and showered him with praise, having recourse to him amid tribulations."(43)

What are the reasons for such great confidence? Leo XIII explained it in this way: "The reasons why St. Joseph must be considered the special patron of the Church, and the Church in turn draws exceeding hope from his care and patronage, chiefly arise from his having been the husband of Mary and the presumed father of Jesus..., Joseph was in his day the lawful and natural guardian, head and defender of the Holy

Family.... It is thus fitting and most worthy of Joseph's dignity that, in the same way that he once kept unceasing holy watch over the family of Nazareth, so now does he protect and defend with his heavenly patronage the Church of Christ."(44)

29. This patronage must be invoked as ever necessary for the Church, not only as a defense against all dangers, but also, and indeed primarily, as an impetus for her renewed commitment to evangelization in the world and to re-evangelization in those lands and nations where-as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christideles Laici* - "religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and...are now put to a hard test."(45) In order to bring the first proclamation of Christ, or to bring it anew wherever it has been neglected or forgotten, the Church has need of special "power from on high" (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8): a gift of the Spirit of the Lord, a gift which is not unrelated to the intercession and example of his saints.

30. Besides trusting in Joseph's sure protection, the Church also trusts in his noble example, which transcends all individual states of life and serves as a model for the entire Christian community, whatever the condition and duties of each of its members may be.

As the Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council has said, the basic attitude of the entire Church must be that of "hearing the word of God with reverence,"(46) an absolute readiness to serve faithfully God's salvific will revealed in Jesus. Already at the beginning of human redemption, after Mary, we find the model of obedience made incarnate in St. Joseph, the man known for having faithfully carried out God's commands.

Pope Paul VI invited us to invoke Joseph's patronage "as the Church has been wont to do in these recent times, for herself in the first place, with a spontaneous theological reflection on the marriage of divine and human action in the great economy of the Redemption, in which economy the first-the divine one-is wholly sufficient unto itself, while the second-the human action which is ours-though capable of nothing (cf. Jn 15:5), is never dispensed from a humble but conditional and ennobling collaboration. The Church also calls upon Joseph as her protector because of a profound and ever present desire to reinvigorate her ancient life with true evangelical virtues, such as shine forth in St. Joseph."(47)

31. The Church transforms these needs into prayer. Recalling that God wished to entrust the beginnings of our redemption to the faithful care of St. Joseph, she asks God to grant that she may faithfully cooperate in the work of salvation; that she may receive the same faithfulness and purity of heart that inspired Joseph in serving the Incarnate Word; and that she may walk before God in the ways of holiness and justice, following Joseph's example and through his intercession.(48)

One hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII had already exhorted the Catholic world to pray for the protection of St. Joseph, Patron of the whole Church. The Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam Pluries* appealed to Joseph's "fatherly love...for the child Jesus" and commended to him, as "the provident guardian of the divine Family," "the beloved inheritance which Jesus Christ purchased by his blood." Since that time-as I recalled at the beginning of this Exhortation-the Church has implored the protection of St. Joseph on the basis of "that sacred bond of charity which united him to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God," and the Church has commended to Joseph all of her cares, including those dangers which threaten the human family.

Even today we have many reasons to pray in a similar way: "Most beloved father, dispel the evil of falsehood and sin...graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness...and just as once you saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend God's holy Church from the snares

of her enemies and from all adversity."(49) Today we still have good reason to commend everyone to St. Joseph.

32. It is my heartfelt wish that these reflections on the person of St. Joseph will renew in us the prayerful devotion which my Predecessor called for a century ago. Our prayers and the very person of Joseph have renewed significance for the Church in our day in light of the Third Christian Millennium.

The Second Vatican Council made all of us sensitive once again to the "great things which God has done," and to that "economy of salvation" of which St. Joseph was a special minister. Commending ourselves, then, to the protection of him to whose custody God "entrusted his greatest and most precious treasures,"(50) let us at the same time learn from him how to be servants of the "economy of salvation." May St. Joseph become for all of us an exceptional teacher in the service of Christ's saving mission, a mission which is the responsibility of each and every member of the Church: husbands and wives, parents, those who live by the work of their hands or by any other kind of work, those called to the contemplative life and those called to the apostolate.

This just man, who bore within himself the entire heritage of the Old Covenant, was also brought into the "beginning" of the New and Eternal Covenant in Jesus Christ. May he show us the paths of this saving Covenant as we stand at the threshold of the next millennium, in which there must be a continuation and further development of the "fullness of time" that belongs the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word.

May St. Joseph obtain for the Church and for the world, as well as for each of us, the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Given at Rome, in St. Peter's, on August 15 - the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary - in the year 1989, the eleventh of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, IV, 23, 1: S. Ch. 100/2, pp. 692-694.
2. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, IX (1890), pp. 175-182.
3. *Sacror. Rituum Congreg.*, Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (December 8, 1870): *Pii IX P.M. Acta*, pars I, vol. V, p. 282; Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Inclytum Patriarcham* (July 7, 1871): loc. cit., pp. 331-335.
4. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *In Matth. Hom.* V, 3: PG 57, 57f. The Fathers of the Church and the Popes, on the basis of their common name, also saw in Joseph of Egypt a prototype of Joseph of Nazareth, inasmuch as the former foreshadowed in some way the ministry and greatness of the latter, who was guardian of God the Father's most precious treasures-the Incarnate Word and his most holy Mother: cf., for example, St. Bernard, *Super "Missus est," Hom.* II, 16: *S. Bernardi*

Opera, Ed. Cist., IV, 33f.; Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., p. 179.

5. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

6. Cf. *ibid.*, 63.

7. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 5.

8. *Ibid.*, 2.

9. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

10. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 2.

11. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Decree *Novis hisce temporibus* (November 13, 1962): AAS 54 (1962), p. 873.

12. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 51, 10, 16: PL 38, 342.

13. St. Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, I, 11, 12: PL 44, 421; cf. *De consensu evangelistarum*, II, 1, 2: PL 34, 1071; *Contra Faustum*, III, 2: PL 42, 214.

14. St. Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, I, 11, 13: PL 44, 421; cf. *Contra Iulianum*, V, 12, 46: PL 44, 810.

15. Cf. St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XXIII, 8: PL 42, 470f.; *De consensu evangelistarum*, II, 1, 3: PL 34, 1072; *Sermo*, 51, 13, 21: PL 38, 344f.; St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 29, a. 2 in conclus.

16. Cf. Discourses of January 9, 16, February 20, 1980: *Insegnamenti*, III/I (1980), pp. 88-92; 148-152; 428-431.

17. Paul VI, Discourse to the "Equipes Notre-Dame" Movement (May 4, 1970), n. 7: AAS 62 (1970), p. 431. Similar praise of the Family of Nazareth as a perfect example of domestic life can be found, for example, in Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter *Neminem fugit* (June 14, 1892); Leonis XIII PM. *Acta*, XII (1892), p. 149f.; Benedict XV, *Motu Proprio Bonum sane* (July 25, 1920): AAS 12 (1920), pp. 313- 317.

18. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 17: AAS 74 (1982), p. 100.

19. Ibid., 49: loc. cit., p. 140; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Genium*, 11; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.
20. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 85: loc. cit., pp. 189f.
21. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, In *Matth. Hom. V*, 3: PG 57, 57f.
22. Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1966): *Insegnamenti*, IV (1966), p. 110.
23. Cf. Roman Missal, Collect for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
24. Cf. *ibid.*, Preface for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
25. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., p. 178.
26. Pius XII, Radio Message to Catholic School Students in the United States of America (February 19, 1958): AAS 50 (1958), p.174.
27. Origen, *Hom. XIII in Lucam*, 7: S. Ch. 87, pp 214f.
28. Origen, *Hom. XI in Lucam*, 6: S. Ch. 87, pp. 196f.
29. Cf. Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I.
30. *Sacror. Rituum Congreg.*, *Decr. Quemadmodum Deus* (December 8 1870): loc. cit., p. 282.
31. *Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, 1, "Sancta Maria de Nazareth," Praefatio.
32. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 16:106. cit., p. 98.
33. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., pp. 177f.
34. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), 9: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 599f.
35. *Ibid.*, 24: loc. cit., p. 638. The Popes in recent times have constantly presented St. Joseph as the "model" of workers and laborers; Cf., for example, Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., p. 180; Benedict XV, *Motu proprio Bonum sane* (July 25, 1920): loc. cit., pp. 314-316; Pius XII, Discourse (March 11, 1945), 4: AAS 37 (1945), p. 72: Discourse (May 1, 1955): AAS 47 (1955), p. 406; John XXIII, Radio Address (May 1, 1960): AAS 52 (1960), p. 398.
36. Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1969): *Insegnamenti*, VII (1969), p. 1268.
37. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., p. 1267.

38. Cf. St. Thomas, Summa Theol. II-IIae, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.
39. Ibid., III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1.
40. Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter Haurietis aquas (May 15, 1956), III: AAS 48 (1956), pp. 329f.
41. Cf. St. Thomas, Summa Theol. II-IIae, q. 182, a. 1, ad 3.
42. Cf. Sacror. Rituum Congreg., Decr. Quemadmodum Deus (December 8, 1870): loc. cit., p.283.
43. Ibid.: loc. cit., pp. 282f.
44. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle Quamquam pluries (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., pp. 177-179.
45. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifidele Laici (December 30, 1988), 34: AAS 81 (1989), p. 456.
46. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, 1.
47. Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1969): Insegnamenti, VII (1969) p. 1269.
48. Cf. Roman Missal, Collect, Prayer over the Gifts for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Prayer after Communion from the Votive Mass of St. Joseph.
49. Cf. Leo XIII, "Oratio ad Sanctum Iosephum," contained immediately after the text of the Encyclical Epistle Quamquam pluries (August 15, 1889)-Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, IX (1890), p. 183.
50. Sacror Rituum Congreg., Decr. Quemadmodum Deus (December 8 1870): loc. cit., p. 282.

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APOSTOLIC LETTER

PATRIS CORDE

OF THE HOLY FATHER
FRANCIS

ON THE 150th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE PROCLAMATION OF SAINT JOSEPH
AS PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

WITH A FATHER’S HEART: that is how Joseph loved Jesus, whom all four Gospels refer to as “*the son of Joseph*”.[1]

Matthew and Luke, the two Evangelists who speak most of Joseph, tell us very little, yet enough for us to appreciate what sort of father he was, and the mission entrusted to him by God’s providence.

We know that Joseph was a lowly carpenter (cf. *Mt* 13:55), betrothed to Mary (cf. *Mt* 1:18; *Lk* 1:27). He was a “just man” (*Mt* 1:19), ever ready to carry out God’s will as revealed to him in the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:22.27.39) and through four dreams (cf. *Mt* 1:20; 2:13.19.22). After a long and tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, he beheld the birth of the Messiah in a stable, since “there was no place for them” elsewhere (cf. *Lk* 2:7). He witnessed the adoration of the shepherds (cf. *Lk* 2:8-20) and the Magi (cf. *Mt* 2:1-12), who represented respectively the people of Israel and the pagan peoples.

Joseph had the courage to become the legal father of Jesus, to whom he gave the name revealed by the angel: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (*Mt* 1:21). As we know, for ancient peoples, to give a name to a person or to a thing, as Adam did in the account in the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:19-20), was to establish a relationship.

In the Temple, forty days after Jesus’ birth, Joseph and Mary offered their child to the Lord and listened with amazement to Simeon’s prophecy concerning Jesus and his Mother (cf. *Lk* 2:22-35). To protect Jesus from Herod, Joseph dwelt as a foreigner in Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-18). After returning to his own country, he led a hidden life in the tiny and obscure village of Nazareth in Galilee, far from Bethlehem, his ancestral town, and from Jerusalem and the Temple. Of Nazareth it was said, “No prophet is to rise” (cf. *Jn* 7:52) and indeed, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (cf. *Jn* 1:46). When, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary lost track of the twelve-year-old Jesus, they anxiously sought him out and they found him in the Temple, in discussion with the doctors of the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:41-50).

After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse. My Predecessors reflected on the message contained in the limited information handed down by the Gospels in order to appreciate more fully his central role in the history of salvation. Blessed Pius IX declared him “Patron of the Catholic Church”,^[2] Venerable Pius XII proposed him as “Patron of Workers”^[3] and Saint John Paul II as “Guardian of the Redeemer”.^[4] Saint Joseph is universally invoked as the “patron of a happy death”.^[5]

Now, one hundred and fifty years after his proclamation as *Patron of the Catholic Church* by Blessed Pius IX (8 December 1870), I would like to share some personal reflections on this extraordinary

figure, so close to our own human experience. For, as Jesus says, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (*Mt* 12:34). My desire to do so increased during these months of pandemic, when we experienced, amid the crisis, how “our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show, yet in these very days are surely shaping the decisive events of our history. Doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests, men and women religious, and so very many others. They understood that no one is saved alone... How many people daily exercise patience and offer hope, taking care to spread not panic, but shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday ways, how to accept and deal with a crisis by adjusting their routines, looking ahead and encouraging the practice of prayer. How many are praying, making sacrifices and interceding for the good of all”.^[6] Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all.

1. *A beloved father*

The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus. In this way, he placed himself, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, “at the service of the entire plan of salvation”.^[7]

Saint Paul VI pointed out that Joseph concretely expressed his fatherhood “by making his life a sacrificial service to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose. He employed his legal authority over the Holy Family to devote himself completely to them in his life and work. He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home”.^[8]

Thanks to his role in salvation history, Saint Joseph has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people. This is shown by the countless churches dedicated to him worldwide, the numerous religious Institutes, Confraternities and ecclesial groups inspired by his spirituality and bearing his name, and the many traditional expressions of piety in his honour. Innumerable holy men and women were passionately devoted to him. Among them was Teresa of Avila, who chose him as her advocate and intercessor, had frequent recourse to him and received whatever graces she asked of him. Encouraged by her own experience, Teresa persuaded others to cultivate devotion to Joseph.^[9]

Every prayer book contains prayers to Saint Joseph. Special prayers are offered to him each Wednesday and especially during the month of March, which is traditionally dedicated to him.^[10]

Popular trust in Saint Joseph is seen in the expression “*Go to Joseph*”, which evokes the famine in Egypt, when the Egyptians begged Pharaoh for bread. He in turn replied: “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do” (*Gen* 41:55). Pharaoh was referring to Joseph the son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery because of the jealousy of his brothers (cf. *Gen* 37:11-28) and who – according to the biblical account – subsequently became viceroy of Egypt (cf. *Gen* 41:41-44).

As a descendant of David (cf. *Mt* 1:16-20), from whose stock Jesus was to spring according to the promise made to David by the prophet Nathan (cf. *2 Sam* 7), and as the spouse of Mary of Nazareth, Saint Joseph stands at the crossroads between the Old and New Testaments.

2. *A tender and loving father*

Joseph saw Jesus grow daily “in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favour” (*Lk* 2:52). As the Lord had done with Israel, so Joseph did with Jesus: he taught him to walk, taking him by the hand; he was for him like a father who raises an infant to his cheeks, bending down to him and feeding him (cf. *Hos* 11:3-4).

In Joseph, Jesus saw the tender love of God: “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him” (*Ps* 103:13).

In the synagogue, during the praying of the Psalms, Joseph would surely have heard again and again that the God of Israel is a God of tender love,^[11] who is good to all, whose “compassion is over all that he has made” (*Ps* 145:9).

The history of salvation is worked out “in hope against hope” (*Rom* 4:18), through our weaknesses. All too often, we think that God works only through our better parts, yet most of his plans are realized in and despite our frailty. Thus Saint Paul could say: “To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (*2 Cor* 12:7-9).

Since this is part of the entire economy of salvation, we must learn to look upon our weaknesses with tender mercy.^[12]

The evil one makes us see and condemn our frailty, whereas the Spirit brings it to light with tender love. Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us. Pointing fingers and judging others are frequently signs of an inability to accept our own weaknesses, our own frailty. Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser (cf. *Rev* 12:10). That is why it is so important to encounter God’s mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience his truth and tenderness. Paradoxically, the evil one can also speak the truth to us, yet he does so only to condemn us. We know that God’s truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us. That truth always presents itself to us like the merciful father in Jesus’ parable (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). It comes out to meet us, restores our dignity, sets us back on our feet and rejoices for us, for, as the father says: “This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (v. 24).

Even through Joseph’s fears, God’s will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that 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.

3. *An obedient father*

As he had done with Mary, God revealed his saving plan to Joseph. He did so by using dreams, which in the Bible and among all ancient peoples, were considered a way for him to make his will known.^[13]

Joseph was deeply troubled by Mary’s mysterious pregnancy. He did not want to “expose her to public disgrace”,^[14] so he decided to “dismiss her quietly” (*Mt* 1:19).

In the first dream, an angel helps him resolve his grave dilemma: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (*Mt* 1:20-21). Joseph’s response was immediate: “When

Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (*Mt* 1:24). Obedience made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary.

In the second dream, the angel tells Joseph: “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him” (*Mt* 2:13). Joseph did not hesitate to obey, regardless of the hardship involved: “He got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod” (*Mt* 2:14-15).

In Egypt, Joseph awaited with patient trust the angel’s notice that he could safely return home. In a third dream, the angel told him that those who sought to kill the child were dead and ordered him to rise, take the child and his mother, and return to the land of Israel (cf. *Mt* 2:19-20). Once again, Joseph promptly obeyed. “He got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel” (*Mt* 2:21).

During the return journey, “when Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. After being warned in a dream” – now for the fourth time – “he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth” (*Mt* 2:22-23).

The evangelist Luke, for his part, tells us that Joseph undertook the long and difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered in his family’s town of origin in the census of the Emperor Caesar Augustus. There Jesus was born (cf. *Lk* 2:7) and his birth, like that of every other child, was recorded in the registry of the Empire. Saint Luke is especially concerned to tell us that Jesus’ parents observed all the prescriptions of the Law: the rites of the circumcision of Jesus, the purification of Mary after childbirth, the offering of the firstborn to God (cf. 2:21-24).^[15]

In every situation, Joseph declared his own “fiat”, like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In his role as the head of a family, Joseph taught Jesus to be obedient to his parents (cf. *Lk* 2:51), in accordance with God’s command (cf. *Ex* 20:12).

During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father. That will was to be his daily food (cf. *Jn* 4:34). Even at the most difficult moment of his life, in Gethsemane, Jesus chose to do the Father’s will rather than his own,^[16] becoming “obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (*Phil* 2:8). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews thus concludes that Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8).

All this makes it clear that “Saint Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood” and that in this way, “he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation.”^[17]

4. *An accepting father*

Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally. He trusted in the angel’s words. “The nobility of Joseph’s heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity. Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary’s good name, her dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment.”^[18]

Often in life, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. 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.

The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that *explains*, but *accepts*. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning. We can almost hear an echo of the impassioned reply of Job to his wife, who had urged him to rebel against the evil he endured: “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (*Job* 2:10).

Joseph is certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit’s gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.

Jesus’ appearance in our midst is a gift from the Father, which makes it possible for each of us to be reconciled to the flesh of our own history, even when we fail to understand it completely.

Just as God told Joseph: “Son of David, do not be afraid!” (*Mt* 1:20), so he seems to tell us: “Do not be afraid!” We need to set aside all anger and disappointment, and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish. Not with mere resignation but with hope and courage. In this way, we become open to a deeper meaning. Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from stony ground. Even if our heart condemns us, “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (*1 Jn* 3:20).

Here, once again, we encounter that Christian realism which rejects nothing that exists. Reality, in its mysterious and irreducible complexity, is the bearer of existential meaning, with all its lights and shadows. Thus, the Apostle Paul can say: “We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God” (*Rom* 8:28). To which Saint Augustine adds, “even that which is called evil (*etiam illud quod malum dicitur*)”.[19] In this greater perspective, faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad.

Nor should we ever think that believing means finding facile and comforting solutions. The faith Christ taught us is what we see in Saint Joseph. He did not look for shortcuts, but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it.

Joseph’s attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak, for God chooses what is weak (cf. *1 Cor* 1:27). He is the “Father of orphans and protector of widows” (*Ps* 68:6), who commands us to love the stranger in our midst.[20] I like to think that it was from Saint Joseph that Jesus drew inspiration for the parable of the prodigal son and the merciful father (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32).

5. *A creatively courageous father*

If the first stage of all true interior healing is to accept our personal history and embrace even the things in life that we did not choose, we must now add another important element: creative courage. This emerges especially in the way we deal with difficulties. In the face of difficulty, we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even think we had.

As we read the infancy narratives, we may often wonder why God did not act in a more direct and clear way. Yet God acts through events and people. Joseph was the man chosen by God to guide the beginnings of the history of redemption. He was the true “miracle” by which God saves the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph’s creative courage. Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging where Mary could give birth, Joseph took a stable and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God come into the world (cf. *Lk 2:6-7*). Faced with imminent danger from Herod, who wanted to kill the child, Joseph was warned once again in a dream to protect the child, and rose in the middle of the night to prepare the flight into Egypt (cf. *Mt 2:13-14*).

A superficial reading of these stories can often give the impression that the world is at the mercy of the strong and mighty, but the “good news” of the Gospel consists in showing that, for all the arrogance and violence of worldly powers, God always finds a way to carry out his saving plan. So too, our lives may at times seem to be at the mercy of the powerful, but the Gospel shows us what counts. God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence.

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.

That kind of creative courage was shown by the friends of the paralytic, who lowered him from the roof in order to bring him to Jesus (cf. *Lk 5:17-26*). Difficulties did not stand in the way of those friends’ boldness and persistence. They were convinced that Jesus could heal the man, and “finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you’” (vv. 19-20). Jesus recognized the creative faith with which they sought to bring their sick friend to him.

The Gospel does not tell us how long Mary, Joseph and the child remained in Egypt. Yet they certainly needed to eat, to find a home and employment. It does not take much imagination to fill in those details. The Holy Family had to face concrete problems like every other family, like so many of our migrant brothers and sisters who, today too, risk their lives to escape misfortune and hunger. In this regard, I consider Saint Joseph the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty.

At the end of every account in which Joseph plays a role, the Gospel tells us that he gets up, takes the child and his mother, and does what God commanded him (cf. *Mt 1:24; 2:14.21*). Indeed, Jesus and Mary his Mother are the most precious treasure of our faith.[\[21\]](#)

In the divine plan of salvation, the Son is inseparable from his Mother, from Mary, who “advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son until she stood at the cross”.[\[22\]](#)

We should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping. The Son of the Almighty came into our world in a state of great vulnerability. He needed to be defended, protected, cared for and raised by Joseph. God trusted Joseph, as did Mary, who found in him someone who would not only save her life, but would always provide for her and her child. In this sense, Saint Joseph could not be other than the Guardian of the Church, for the Church is the continuation of the Body of Christ in history, even as Mary’s motherhood is reflected in the motherhood of the Church.[\[23\]](#) In his continued protection of the Church, Joseph continues to protect *the child and his mother*, and we too, by our love for the Church, continue to love *the child and his mother*.

That child would go on to say: “As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Consequently, every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is “the child” whom Joseph continues to protect. For this reason, Saint Joseph is invoked as protector of the unfortunate, the needy, exiles, the afflicted, the poor and the dying. Consequently, the Church cannot fail to show a special love for the least of our brothers and sisters, for Jesus showed a particular concern for them and personally identified with them. From Saint Joseph, we must learn that same care and responsibility. We must learn to love the child and his mother, to love the sacraments and charity, to love the Church and the poor. Each of these realities is always *the child and his mother*.

6. *A working father*

An aspect of Saint Joseph that has been emphasized from the time of the first social Encyclical, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, is his relation to work. Saint Joseph was a carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family. From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one's own labour.

In our own day, when employment has once more become a burning social issue, and unemployment at times reaches record levels even in nations that for decades have enjoyed a certain degree of prosperity, there is a renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which Saint Joseph is an exemplary patron.

Work is a means of participating in the work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom, to develop our talents and abilities, and to put them at the service of society and fraternal communion. It becomes an opportunity for the fulfilment not only of oneself, but also of that primary cell of society which is the family. A family without work is particularly vulnerable to difficulties, tensions, estrangement and even break-up. How can we speak of human dignity without working to ensure that everyone is able to earn a decent living?

Working persons, whatever their job may be, are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us. The crisis of our time, which is economic, social, cultural and spiritual, can serve as a summons for all of us to rediscover the value, the importance and necessity of work for bringing about a new “normal” from which no one is excluded. Saint Joseph's work reminds us that God himself, in becoming man, did not disdain work. The loss of employment that affects so many of our brothers and sisters, and has increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, should serve as a summons to review our priorities. Let us implore Saint Joseph the Worker to help us find ways to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work!

7. *A father in the shadows*

The Polish writer Jan Dobraczyński, in his book *The Shadow of the Father*,^[24] tells the story of Saint Joseph's life in the form of a novel. He uses the evocative image of a shadow to define Joseph. In his relationship to Jesus, Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father: he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way. We can think of Moses' words to Israel: “In the wilderness... you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you travelled” (*Deut* 1:31). In a similar way, Joseph acted as a father for his whole life.^[25]

Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person.

Children today often seem orphans, lacking fathers. The Church too needs fathers. Saint Paul's words to the Corinthians remain timely: "Though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers" (*1 Cor* 4:15). Every priest or bishop should be able to add, with the Apostle: "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (*ibid.*). Paul likewise calls the Galatians: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (4:19).

Being a father entails introducing children to life and reality. Not holding them back, being overprotective or possessive, but rather making them capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying freedom and exploring new possibilities. Perhaps for this reason, Joseph is traditionally called a "most chaste" father. That title is not simply a sign of affection, but the summation of an attitude that is the opposite of possessiveness. Chastity is freedom from possessiveness in every sphere of one's life. Only when love is chaste, is it truly love. A possessive love ultimately becomes dangerous: it imprisons, constricts and makes for misery. God himself loved humanity with a chaste love; he left us free even to go astray and set ourselves against him. The logic of love is always the logic of freedom, and Joseph knew how to love with extraordinary freedom. He never made himself the centre of things. He did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus.

Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust. Our world today needs fathers. It has no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs. It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction. Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. The priesthood and consecrated life likewise require this kind of maturity. Whatever our vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self will not come to fulfilment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case, instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness and frustration.

When fathers refuse to live the lives of their children for them, new and unexpected vistas open up. 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. A father who realizes that he is most a father and educator at the point when he becomes "useless", when he sees that his child has become independent and can walk the paths of life unaccompanied. When he becomes like Joseph, who always knew that his child was not his own but had merely been entrusted to his care. In the end, this is what Jesus would have us understand when he says: "Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (*Mt* 23:9).

In every exercise of our fatherhood, we should always keep in mind that it has nothing to do with possession, but is rather a "sign" pointing to a greater fatherhood. In a way, we are all like Joseph: a shadow of the heavenly Father, who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (*Mt* 5:45). And a shadow that follows his Son.

* * *

"Get up, take the child and his mother" (*Mt* 2:13), God told Saint Joseph.

The aim of this Apostolic Letter is to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal.

Indeed, the proper mission of the saints is not only to obtain miracles and graces, but to intercede for us before God, like Abraham^[26] and Moses^[27], and like Jesus, the "one mediator" (*1 Tim* 2:5), who is our

“advocate” with the Father (*1 Jn 2:1*) and who “always lives to make intercession for [us]” (*Heb 7:25*; cf. *Rom 8:34*).

The saints help all the faithful “to strive for the holiness and the perfection of their particular state of life”.^[28] Their lives are concrete proof that it is possible to put the Gospel into practice.

Jesus told us: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (*Mt 11:29*). The lives of the saints too are examples to be imitated. Saint Paul explicitly says this: “Be imitators of me!” (*1 Cor 4:16*).^[29] By his eloquent silence, Saint Joseph says the same.

Before the example of so many holy men and women, Saint Augustine asked himself: “What they could do, can you not also do?” And so he drew closer to his definitive conversion, when he could exclaim: “Late have I loved you, Beauty ever ancient, ever new!”^[30]

We need only ask Saint Joseph for the grace of graces: our conversion.

Let us now make our prayer to him:

*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.*

Given in Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 8 December, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year 2020, the eighth of my Pontificate.

Franciscus

[1] *Lk 4:22; Jn 6:42*; cf. *Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3*.

[2] S. RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Quemadmodum Deus* (8 December 1870): ASS 6 (1870-71), 194.

[3] Cf. *Address to ACLI on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph the Worker* (1 May 1955): AAS 47 (1955), 406.

[4] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989): AAS 82 (1990), 5-34.

[5] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1014.

[6] *Meditation in the Time of Pandemic* (27 March 2020): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 March 2020, p. 10.

[7] *In Matthaicum Homiliae*, V, 3: PG 57, 58.

[8] *Homily* (19 March 1966): *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, IV (1966), 110.

[9] Cf. *Autobiography*, 6, 6-8.

[10] Every day, for over forty years, following Lauds I have recited a prayer to Saint Joseph taken from a nineteenth-century French prayer book of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary. It expresses devotion and trust, and even poses a certain challenge to Saint Joseph: “Glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph, whose power makes the impossible possible, come to my aid in these times of anguish and difficulty. Take under your protection the serious and troubling situations that I commend to you, that they may have a happy outcome. My beloved father, all my trust is in you. Let it not be said that I invoked you in vain, and since you can do everything with Jesus and Mary, show me that your goodness is as great as your power. Amen.”

[11] Cf. *Deut* 4:31; *Ps* 69:16; 78:38; 86:5; 111:4; 116:5; *Jer* 31:20.

[12] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 88, 288: AAS 105 (2013), 1057, 1136-1137.

[13] Cf. *Gen* 20:3; 28:12; 31:11.24; 40:8; 41:1-32; *Num* 12:6; *I Sam* 3:3-10; *Dan* 2, 4; *Job* 33:15.

[14] In such cases, provisions were made even for stoning (cf. *Deut* 22:20-21).

[15] Cf. *Lev* 12:1-8; *Ex* 13:2.

[16] Cf. *Mt* 26:39; *Mk* 14:36; *Lk* 22:42.

[17] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989), 8: AAS 82 (1990), 14.

[18] *Homily at Mass and Beatifications, Villavicencio, Colombia* (8 September 2017): AAS 109 (2017), 1061.

[19] *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*, 3.11: PL 40, 236.

[20] Cf. *Deut* 10:19; *Ex* 22:20-22; *Lk* 10:29-37.

[21] Cf. S. RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Quemadmodum Deus* (8 December 1870): ASS 6 (1870-1871), 193; BLESSED PIUS IX, Apostolic Letter *Inclytum Patriarcham* (7 July 1871): l.c., 324-327.

[22] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

[23] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 963-970.

[24] Original edition: *Cień Ojca*, Warsaw, 1977.

[25] Cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, 7-8: AAS 82 (1990), 12-16.

[26] Cf. *Gen* 18:23-32.

[27] Cf. *Ex* 17:8-13; 32:30-35.

[28] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

[29] Cf. *1 Cor* 11:1; *Phil* 3:17; *1 Thess* 1:6.

[30] *Confessions*, VIII, 11, 27: PL 32, 761; X, 27, 38: PL 32, 795.

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