

## SAINT JOSEPH, PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception last year, Pope Francis not only wanted to remember the Blessed Virgin Mary, but also **St. Joseph**, her husband, through an Apostolic Letter ***"PATRIS CORDE"***, which marked the 150th anniversary of the **declaration of St. Joseph as patron of the Universal Church**.

For Catholics and for us as servants of people living in poverty, the example of St. Joseph is invaluable. The "yes" with which he took on both known and unknown consequences encourages us not to be afraid of our commitment to Jesus Christ and to serve with love and creativity our brothers and sisters who suffer from material as well as spiritual and emotional deprivation.

We can admire St. Joseph's humility, obedience, discretion and silence, the simplicity of his life, his unceasing work to give the Holy Family all that was necessary, and the list goes on. In short, he had so many qualities that it is worth knowing and loving him. May his life enlighten ours and may we see in him a model to follow.

In the Apostolic Letter "Patris Corde", Pope Francis explores seven concrete aspects of St. Joseph's fatherhood:

#### 1. A beloved father

"The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus." Saint Joseph's fatherhood was about **"making his life a sacrificial service, ... to devote himself completely to them in his life and work. He turned his human vocation to domestic love ... [with] his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home"**.

#### 2. A tending and loving father

In this regard, the Holy Father explains that "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)".

He adds that **"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,**” highlights the Pope. The first dream came as he was troubled by Mary’s mysterious pregnancy, and after the second, he obeyed and took Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

Pope Francis emphasizes that “in every situation, **Joseph declared his own “fiat”, like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane**” and that “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** ... Even at the most difficult moment of his life, in Gethsemane, Jesus chose to do the Father’s will rather than his own, becoming “obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (*Phil 2:8*)”.

### 4. An accepting father

“**Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally.** He trusted in the angel’s words. “The nobility of Joseph’s heart is [an example]. ... 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. ... God helped him by enlightening his judgment”.

“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”.

“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” and to do the Will of the Father.

### 5. A creatively courageous father

This “creative courageousness” that the Pope talks about comes out “especially in the way we deal with difficulties”. He explains that “**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*)”.

The Holy Father also notes in this letter that “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**”. This is why Saint Joseph is a model for families.



## 6. A working father

**“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,” notes Pope Francis.

He goes on to highlight that **“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?”.

## 7. A father in the shadows

**For Jesus, Joseph is “the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father: he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way”.** “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.** ... 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”.

This is why **“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”.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION IN GROUPS:

1. List what you think were the reasons for naming St. Joseph: Patron of the Church, Patron of Families, intercessor for a happy death.
2. Which of St. Joseph’s virtues do you think we should have in our Vincentian services? Which virtues do you think we should have in our families?

### Bibliography:

- [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap\\_20201208\\_patris-corde.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html)
- <https://famvin.org/en/2021/04/19/pope-francis-invites-us-to-reflect-on-st-josephs-heritage-during-the-world-day-of-prayer-for-vocations/>



## PRAYER



*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.*

