

The Year of St. Joseph

8th December 2020 – 8th December 2021

Part 4



In his Apostolic Letter *‘Patris corde’* (“With a Father’s Heart”), to mark the Year of St. Joseph, Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

A Father who Teaches the Value, Dignity and Joy of Work

“A carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family,” is how Pope Francis describes St Joseph, who also teaches us “the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labour.” This aspect of St. Joseph’s character provides Pope Francis the opportunity to praise those who work for a living, to take care of their families. Pope Francis speaks of every person having the right to dignified work. Work, the Pope says, “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.” Those who work, he explains, “are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us.”

A Father “in the Shadows,” Centred on Mary and Jesus

Pope Francis describes St. Joseph’s fatherhood of Jesus as “the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father.” “Fathers are not born, but made,” says Pope Francis. “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.” Pope Francis describes a good father as raising his children to be “capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying freedom and exploring new possibilities.”

This is the sense in which St Joseph is described as a “most chaste” father, because he knew how to love which never made him the centre of things. He did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus. Happiness for St. Joseph involved a true gift of self: “In him, we never see frustration, but only trust,” writes Pope Francis. In this sense, says Pope Francis, a father realizes that “he is most a father and an 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.” Being a father, the Pope emphasises, “has nothing to do with possession, but is rather a ‘sign’ pointing to a greater fatherhood”: that of the “heavenly Father”.

A Prayer to St Joseph

Pope Francis concludes his Letter with a prayer to St Joseph, which he encourages all to pray

*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.*