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WHAT THE BIBLES SAYS ABOUT ST. JOSEPH

Fr. Cyril Uduak, OCD¹

Abstract

This article aims at exploring what the Bible says about the person of St. Joseph. It argues that Joseph is (a) a just man, (b) a “son of David”, (c) the legal father of Jesus, (d) the head his family, (e) a carpenter, and (d) Joseph carried out the will of God as revealed to him. This work shows that St. Joseph listened to God and carried out many things as a result of the divine communications. Although the words spoken to St. Joseph are few, the things he did are numerous. The author exposes some of Joseph’s main roles and actions.

Introduction

The Sacred Scripture, which is the source and soul of any good theology, sings the praises of St. Joseph, even though it is often said: “we know nothing about St. Joseph because he did not say anything.” The Sacred Scripture, especially St. Matthew and St. Luke, gives us the privilege of know many things about St. Joseph.

In this article, we will examine some the revelations and the insights that the Sacred Scriptures give us about the life of St. Joseph.

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a. Joseph is a just man: *dikaios*

The Bible defines St. Joseph with a single word, as: *a just man*. (Mt. 1:19). The adjective *just* is from Greek *dikaios*, which also means upright, righteous, innocent, honest, law-abiding, and fair. In the Greco-Roman world, *dikaios* was used for model citizens. This immediately implies that Joseph was not only a just man, but that he was a role model, a man that many could imitate, a man that many could look up to for inspiration and direction.

According to the interpretation of the Doctors of the Church, the title of *just* signifies that Joseph was a man who possessed every virtue to an eminent degree, and like Mary, he was the living copy of Jesus. Therefore, he was *just* towards God and full of faith, submission, confidence, and love of His Divine majesty. He was *just* towards his family (Mary and Jesus) and neighbours. Finally, he was *just* to himself. He did not neglect anything that would unite him to God and preserve him from evil.

The just and righteous Joseph (Mt. 1:19) is ranked among great figures like the righteous Abraham (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:9), the just and blameless Job (Job 12:4), the just Abel (Mt. 23:35), the just and devout Simeon (Lk. 2:25), and the righteous and holy John the Baptist (Mk. 6:20).

The just and righteous Joseph (Mt. 1:19) is ranked among great figures like the righteous Abraham (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:9), the just and blameless Job (Job 12:4), the just Abel (Mt. 23:35), the just and devout Simeon, always looking for the consolation of Israel, and upon whom the Holy Spirit was (Lk. 2:25), the righteous and holy John the Baptist (Mk. 6:20), Zechariah and Elizabeth, who were not only righteous before God, but were also walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless (Lk. 1:6).

One thing about the righteous men of God is that their prayer and intercession for people are very efficacious before the throne of God. Joseph's righteousness, then, forms part of

the reasons why his intercessory prayer for those who invoke him is very powerful.

The just and righteous God prepared Joseph to be the father of the “advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1), who is also the righteous judge (2 Tim. 4:8), Jesus Christ.

b. Joseph is a “son of David”: *huios dauid*

In the Annunciation to Joseph, God addressed him as a “son of David” (Mt 1:20), to show that Joseph is not an illegitimate child (cf. Heb 12:8) or an adopted son,² but a genuine “son” or descendant of David, whose family was favoured and chosen to give the Messiah to the world.

Both St. Matthew and St. Luke call St. Joseph a descendant of king David. In St. Matthew’s gospel, it was when the just man, St. Joseph was considering sending Mary away that the angel revealed to him the mystery of the Incarnation: “But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:20)

In the Lukan gospel, it was during the Annunciation: “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Lk 1:26-27).

But why did the angel choose to address Joseph as “son of David” when he was contemplating putting away Mary as a result of her pregnancy? God was actually revealing to Joseph the mystery of Incarnation and, at the same time, making him understand, that he was a son³ (of David), meaning that he

² The daughter of Pharaoh took Moses as her adopted son (cf. Acts 7:21) but we that when Moses grew up, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter (Heb 11:24).

³ In the Scripture, sons enjoy the favours, blessings and riches of their fathers. In the OT, Jacob bought the coat of many colours for the OT Joseph, as the child of

would enjoy the favours and blessings of King David who was chosen and consecrated for majestic royalty. With this, Joseph probably understood that he would be the one to pass the royal and kingly line of David to Jesus. Then, he took Mary home as his wife and accepted to be the father of Jesus. Hence, “once the mystery of Incarnation was effected and explained to Joseph (cf. Mt 1:18-23), the solemn nuptials were celebrated and they lived together under the same roof, but without ever having any marital contact (cf. Mt 1:24-25).”⁴

Here, Joseph showed that he was a just man. He obeyed God and took Mary as his wife. He made it possible for Jesus to become both the son of David and to be accepted as Messiah who was to be born of the Virgin (cf. Isa 7:14; Mt 1:25). The purple colour traditionally associated with St. Joseph,⁵ being a colour of royalty and kinship, represents the royal and kingly line of David which St. Joseph passed to Jesus showing that it is “because of Joseph, *that* Jesus was considered an heir to the eternal, messianic Kingdom. This is the meaning and importance of the genealogy of Joseph who was married to Mary who gave birth to Christ”⁶

c. Joseph is the husband of Mary, the Mother of God

The Sacred Scripture tells us that St. Joseph was spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary: “and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” (Mt 1:16); “When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with

his love (cf Gen 37:3), as a sign of his love for him. Isaac pronounced the two-fold blessing of prosperity in Genesis 27:29 on Jacob which was actually fulfilled in Joseph. Jacob himself blessed his twelve sons with an appropriate blessing (Genesis 49:28). In the NT, the favours of the Father rest on His Son and we who are redeemed by the Son are therefore blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ” (cf Eph 1:3).

⁴ Boniface Llamera, *Saint. Joseph*, Binghamton, N.Y., 1962, 32

⁵ The other traditional colours are: white, green, and gold.

⁶ Secretariatius Generalis Pro Monialibus, *St. Joseph, Father and Founder of the Teresian Carmel*, Casa Generalizia Carmelitani Scalzi, Roma, 1998, 5

child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly” (Mt 1:18-19).

Mary’s statement to Jesus at the temple shows that Mary accepted to be the wife of St. Joseph: “And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.” (Lk 2:48).

In his homily at the Mass of the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Monday, 19 March 2001, the then Holy Father John Paul II, analysed this family conversation between Mother and Son: “Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously”.... “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” (Lk. 2:48-49). This analysis sheds more light on the marriage between Mary and Joseph:

- i. Mary’s words: “Your father and I have been looking for you anxiously” reveal that Joseph and Mary were truly husband and wife.’
- ii. The words also reveal that they were the human parents and guardians of Jesus.
- iii. The marriage shows the characteristics of Joseph's holiness, which correspond to God's plan for him, which he, being the just man that he was, would fulfil with marvellous fidelity.
- iv. Jesus’ words: “I must be in my Father's house” help us to understand the mystery of Joseph's fatherhood and the primacy of the One whom he called "my Father."
- v. In this, Jesus is revealing the truth about Joseph's role as husband and father. It is totally subordinate to that of God.
- vi. Like Mary, the first disciple of Jesus, Joseph of Nazareth is called to become one of Jesus' disciples by dedicating his life to serving the only-begotten Son of the Father and of his Virgin Mother, Mary.

In God's plan of salvation, St. Joseph's marriage to Mary helped him play an indispensable role. The Saviour of the world was to come according to the way God planned it. He was going to be born of a virgin. Isaiah foretold this, "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14), and God fulfilled it through the Virgin Mary: "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). He was also supposed to be born in a particular country and place and to a certain tribe. When St. Joseph said 'Yes' to God to become the husband of Mary when God sought his 'consent:' "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 1:20), the indispensable Joseph, who himself is a son of David, made it possible for Jesus to be born a Son of David and at Bethlehem.

For the reason that St. Joseph would play a part in the salvation of mankind, the Holy Spirit sanctified and prepared him to be the worthy husband of the Mother of God, especially as this marriage had to protect the good name of Mary in her divine motherhood. In other words, God prepared and planned for this marriage. Just as He planned for the redemption of the world, He also planned how it would come about. He knew this marriage was essential. That is why He directly intervened to bring it about and to keep it holy. Mary had to be virgin but married, and Jesus had to be born in a virginal way into a real family. And since in any good marriage, there is a certain equality between the partners, but even more so in this marriage made by God Himself, St. Joseph had to be like Mary a virgin and young when he married her. As St. Bernard explains, God gave him a soul similar to hers. The marriage between Mary and Joseph made them share in a deep spiritual closeness between the two of them.

d. Joseph is the father of Jesus

The Sacred Scripture does not only present St. Joseph as the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, but also as the legal father of Jesus, the Mediator between God and Man (cf. 1 Tim 2:5). The holy Patriarch exercised his authority by having the new-born baby circumcised, incorporating God's son legally into the dynasty of David: "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Lk 2:21).

The mandate and the duty to bestow the name to Jesus was given to St. Joseph by God: "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). As a writer said:

It was then the glorious Patriarch who had the signal privilege of giving to the Incarnate Word this blessed name and of being the first to pronounce the name of Jesus, which expresses all our hopes. From that very moment, he had the consolation of repeating this holy name many times in the day during the space of thirty years that he conversed with the Son of God.⁷

With this singular act, St. Joseph established a relationship with Jesus. "For ancient peoples, to give a name to a person or to a thing, as Adam did in the account of the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:19-20), was to establish a relationship."⁸

As Son of St. Joseph, Jesus lived in obedience to, and under the care of, St. Joseph: "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart" (Lk 2:51). People came to know that Jesus was the Son of Joseph: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph" (Lk 3:23). Others identified him with Joseph's trade: "Is

⁷ *Saint Joseph, Most Chaste Shepherd of the Last Times*, 38.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 1

not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?" (Mt 13:55), or simply, as a Carpenter: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?" (Mk 6:3). The Apostle Philip introduced Jesus to Nathanael as the "the Son of Joseph:" "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (Jn 1:45).

Pope Benedict XVI, speaking of the devotion of St. Joseph to his Son, Jesus, explains what it means to be a father:

To be a father means above all to be at the service of life and growth. St. Joseph, in this sense, gave proof of great devotion. For the sake of Christ he experienced persecution, exile and the poverty which this entails. He had to settle far from his native town. His only reward was to be with Christ. Joseph teaches us that it is possible to love without possessing. In contemplating Joseph, all men and women can, by God's grace, come to experience healing from their emotional wounds, if only they embrace the plan that God has begun to bring about in those close to him, just as Joseph entered into the work of redemption through Mary and as a result of what God had already done in her. The life of Saint Joseph, lived in obedience to God's word, is an eloquent sign for all the disciples of Jesus who seek the unity of the Church. His example helps us to understand that it is only by complete submission to the will of God that we become effective workers in the service of his plan to gather together all mankind into one family, one assembly, one 'ecclesia.'" ⁹

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, Extract from Homily on 18 March, 2009.

e. St. Joseph was the head his family

St. Joseph showed that he was a caring and good husband and father right from the moment he took Mary home as his wife. The Sacred Scripture testifies and shows how St. Joseph exercised the duties and rights of the father of a family as “the wise and trustworthy servant whom the master placed over his household to give them their food at the proper time” (Mt 24:45).

St. Joseph went with Mary, his spouse, to Bethlehem to be registered: “And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child” (Luke 2:4-5); he witnessed the birth of the Child Jesus when Mary gave “birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7); he was there when the shepherds came to adore the new born King: “So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.” (Lk 2:11). He was probably also there when the Magi visited the Jesus (cf. Mt. 2:11).

In the Old testament, when something went wrong in the house of Adam, that is, when Eve fell to the temptation of the serpent, ate the fruit and also gave it to Adam to eat, God did not speak to Eve about it. Rather, He called and spoke to Adam, the head of the family: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9); “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen 3:11). Likewise, in the New Testament, when something went wrong in the holy family, that is, when the life of Jesus was threatened by Herod, God did not call the Blessed Virgin to talk to her. It was St. Joseph, the head of the family of Nazareth, that God called and spoke to: “An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘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). And immediately, the glorious head of the family took

Jesus and his wife, Mary, and fled to Egypt for safety: “So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt” (Mt 2:14). When Herod died, he returned to Israel: “When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’” (Mt 2:19-20).

Apart from providing material needs as well as protection and safety needs to his family, St. Joseph also showed that he was the spiritual head of his family. He was there at the presentation of Jesus to the temple (cf. Lk 2:22-38). On that occasion, he, “the child’s father, and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Lk 2:33-35). Again, St. Joseph used to lead his family to Jerusalem for Jewish celebrations: “Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover” (Lk 2:41).

f. St. Joseph was a carpenter: tekton

Apart from being given the greatest work on earth, that of being the spouse of the Mother of God and the father of the Son of God, St. Joseph had another work, an occupation. The Sacred Scripture reveals that Joseph was a carpenter. In other words, he was an industrious and a hardworking man. He worked assiduously to provide for Jesus and Mary his mother and to teach Jesus the skills of carpentry.

In biblical times, the noun, *tekton*, which translates carpenter, also meant ‘woodworker’ and ‘builder’ and was used to describe a person seen to be skilled in the use of wood and stone and possibly even metal. It seems unlikely that Joseph and Jesus would have worked exclusively in wood. Stone was

surely plentiful and so it may be that Joseph also worked with stone as well as wood in his work.

Joseph introduced his Son to the carpentry work. That is why, as we have seen already, people recognised Jesus the son of Joseph (cf. Lk 3:23, Mt 13:55), or simply the carpenter (cf. Mk 6:3). Jesus, then, would have been very familiar with wood.

In the Carpentry workshop, Joseph taught Jesus how to be disciplined and fearless. Even when the Jews regarded shepherds and carpenters as insignificant people in the society, Joseph taught Jesus that being a carpenter was not humiliating and degrading but noble. Jesus used the skills and virtues, like diligence, commitment, patience, meekness, that he developed as a carpenter in his mission as a shepherd and teacher.

Wood plays an important part in biblical history and in our salvation history, beginning with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, in the book of Genesis. This is followed by the wood of Noah's Ark, and the Staff of Moses, also in the OT. In the NT, we are told about the wood of the Sycamore Tree on which Zacchaeus climbed in order to catch a glimpse of Christ. At the appointed time, Jesus Christ himself had to mount the ultimate wood, the wood of the Cross, for the salvation of the world: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Col. 1:19-20).

g. Joseph carried out the will of God as revealed to him

(i) in the law of Moses (Lk 2:22.27.39)

St. Luke is concerned about telling us that Joseph 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. Lk 2: 21-24).¹⁰ That is to say that by obeying the Law, St. Joseph was listening to God's divine

¹⁰ *Patris Corde*, No 3, 5

communication. He obeyed God while presenting Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem: “When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Lk 2:22). This was the custom, meaning that “the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law” (Lk 2:27). And “When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth” (Lk 2:39).

(ii) and through dreams.

In the Sacred Scripture, dreams are a means through which the biblical God made divine communications and revelations to some people. The OT Joseph, often called ‘Joseph, the dreamer,’ prefigures Joseph, the husband of Mary, in receiving divine communications from God through dreams. He had a dream that his brothers would bow to him. In Genesis 37:6-7, he said to his brothers, “Hear this dream which I have dreamed: behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose and stood upright; and behold, your sheaves gathered round it, and bowed down to my sheaf.” This dream came to fruition, when he was governor, in Genesis 42:6: “Joseph’s brothers came, and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.”

Like his prototype, the NT Joseph also received important communications and revelations from God as he listened to Him in dreams. In the Carmelite spirituality, Joseph’s dreams are interpreted as his prayer and interiority,¹¹ through which he sought divine interventions in his life.

The first dream was when Mary was mysteriously pregnant, that is, without his knowledge. He was deeply troubled, disturbed and distressed. But being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace which could mean stoning her to death, according to the Jewish law (cf. Dt 22: 20-

¹¹ *St. Joseph, Patron of Carmel*, 11.

21), Joseph planned to dismiss her quietly (cf. Mt 1:19). Then God intervened and sent an angel to help him resolve this dilemma:

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, 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).

With this divine communication, Joseph understood that he was called to be the husband of the Virgin Mother of God and the father of the Saviour of the world and that Mary’s pregnancy was the work of the Holy Spirit and not of any human person. Accordingly, his response was immediate because he now understood God’s plan: “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus” Mt 1:24-25).

The second dream came when Herod was searching for the Son of Joseph to kill out of his hatred for the new born king. In this divine communication, God revealed to Joseph Herod’s evil desires and asked him to take the Child and Mother, God’s greatest treasures, according to St. Bernadine of Siena, and flee to Egypt for safety: “An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘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’” (M 2:13).

Like he did after the first dream, Joseph’s response after the second dream was immediate and prompt: “Then Joseph 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).

While remaining there in Egypt, “Joseph waited with patient trust the angels’ notice that he could safely return

home”¹² So, in the third dream, the angel informed Joseph that those who wanted to kill the Child had died and instructed him to return to the land of Israel: “When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead’” (Mt 2:19-20).

As is characteristic of Joseph, his response was immediate: “Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel” (Mt 2:21).

During the return journey to Israel, “when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there” (Mt 2:22). Archelaus might want to carry out the evil plans of his father. God, once more, intervened and made a fourth revelation to Joseph in the dream: “And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth” (Mt 2:22-23).

Conclusion

We have seen that the Sacred Scripture has made many affirmations about Joseph, the son of David. It has revealed that St. Joseph listened to God and carried out many things as a result of the divine communications. Obviously, the words spoken to St. Joseph are few but the things he did are so numerous.

¹² *Patris Corde*, No 3, 5

SAINT JOSEPH IN THE ACTIONS AND TEACHINGS OF THE PAPAL MAGISTERIUM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Abstract

“Saint Joseph in the Actions and Teachings of the Papal Magisterium” is a voyage of what Popes in the two thousand years of Christianity have written or done on Saint Joseph with their infallible authority. Of the two hundred and sixty six Popes from Saint Peter to Pope Francis, twenty-eight of them revealed the insurmountable virtues of Saint Joseph as well as according him ecclesiastical honours. The two Popes titled “great” in history, Popes Leo the Great and Gregory the Great of the first millennium led the way, followed nine hundred years later in the second millennium with the first act of Pope Sixtus IV, which arguably challenged succeeding Popes. They established devotions, composed and indulgenced Saint Joseph prayers, introduced feast days, made grandiose and indeed superlative description of the virtues of this man of silence and silent obedience to whom God gave His most precious beings to guide, guard and care for. We learn from them how Saint Joseph earned the virtues of being the most chaste, most faithful, most obedient, most valiant, most prudent, the illustrious son of David, the light of Patriarchs, the chaste guardian of Jesus Christ and His mother Mary, Protector and Patron of the Catholic Church, as well as being introduced into the Eucharistic Prayers, even when modern day saints have had their names entrenched in the Canon. Saint Joseph enjoyed three dedicated encyclicals and some motu proprio. Papal guidance on the usefulness of Saint Joseph to Christianity was not lacking, rather Bishops and Priests have not helped much to percolate his virtues to the lay faithful. ‘The Year of Saint Joseph’ could be the beginning of reforming the seminary formation to give the necessary emphasis similar to that of his holy Spouse.

1. Introduction

St. Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the foster and non-biological father of our Lord Jesus Christ, seems for many to have been lost or hidden, not only in the Scriptures but also

in the context of historical narration. Yet, by his roles and mission, he looms large in Christendom. This is not because of his words but by his deeds, by his ways, by his reactions and above all, by his silence. Although, he began in silence, his deeds did not end in silence, courtesy of the Popes over the ages, particularly at the times heroism was marked by martyrdom and the Church had the task of establishing the divinity of our Saviour. The place, position, relevance and importance of St. Joseph in the salvation scheme and as the man who prepared the wheat of all Eucharistic celebrations for all ages, enjoyed among many, the meditation and discourse of those who speaking *ex-cathedra*, are infallible. It certainly requires extra grace to decipher the shades behind his virtues and these men did not lack such grace. The Popes by their writings, devotions and honours, lit the candle light to see St. Joseph where otherwise there was darkness. This paper is therefore about the actions and teachings of the papal magisterium on St. Joseph. In this search, a little over ten percent, precisely twenty-eight (28) Popes in the array of two hundred and sixty-six (266) Popes from Saint Peter to Pope Francis, by their teachings variously beamed their thoughts on and enlightened the world about the man who is today regarded as the illustrious son of David, spouse of the Mother of God, chaste guardian of Christ, diligent protector of Christ and head of the holy family. By virtue, this man Joseph is most just, most chaste, most prudent, most valiant, most obedient, most faithful. He is not only the model of workmen, and the glory of home life, he is also the guardian of virgins, pillar of families, solace of the afflicted, hope of the sick, patron of the dying, terror of demons and protector of the Holy Church.

2. The journey to attaining these insurmountable and exemplary accolades began with the efforts of **Pope Leo the Great** (440 - 461AD) and **Pope Gregory the Great** (590 - 640AD), both of the first millennium but lived about one

hundred and fifty years apart. Pope Leo the Great, while explaining the genealogy of Christ through David to the mother's husband, Joseph, admonished that "to speak of our Lord, Son of the Blessed Virgin as a true and perfect man, is of no value, if we do not believe that he descended from the line of ancestors set out" ^[1], that is the lineage which terminates in St. Joseph. St. Joseph anchored this line and was used to introduce the mother of Christ in the Genealogy accounts. Pope Leo, who believed in the perpetual Virginity of Mary added that St. Joseph cooperated in the will of the Almighty. He also asserted that at the birth of Christ, Mary, Joseph, the Magi and the Shepherds 'could only adore' when they saw the "true God" who is "true man". His interpretation that "the massacre of the Holy Innocents and the flight of St. Joseph with Mary and Jesus to Egypt provided the Egyptians the *truth* and removed the *famine* in their minds" is considered genial and clear-sighted.

3. Pope Gregory the Great (590 - 640) who followed the trail, about one hundred and fifty (150) years later, while battling with Eutychius on "the intangibility and impalpability of the resurrected body" saw the "Blessed Mother of Christ and *undoubtedly* with St. Joseph, in their glorified bodies in the kingdom of our Father. "Found among the listing in the sacramentary of Pope Gregory the Great, was the "Festival of St. Joseph", who he described as the "nursing father of the Lord" ^[2]. Although such a feast has disappeared from the Church calendar, it does imply that the early Church did not totally sideline St. Joseph but recognized him enough to assign him a feast in the first five hundred (500) years. Also credited to St. Gregory the Great as with other theologians of his age and beyond, was his interpretation of "Ezekiel 44:3" as referring to Mary's perpetual virginity, wherein St. Joseph held back and respected God's will. Indeed Pope Gregory the Great found the

virgin birth not just a miracle but one only comparable to the Resurrection of the dead. He concluded emphatically that St. Joseph is the “guardian and protector of Mary’s inviolate virginity” [3].

4. To assume that no other Pope made mention of St. Joseph in the next nine hundred years before **Pope Sixtus IV** (1471 - 1484AD), would be presumptuous but suffice to say that no major papal action or pronouncements was recorded until Pope Sixtus IV. Following the sudden surge of devotion to St. Joseph, he established the liturgical feast day of 19th March in 1479AD. By this act and his inclusion of the day in the Roman Breviary, he established himself as the pioneer Pope in the recognition and roll of honour bestowed on St. Joseph [4]. His immediate successor, **Pope Innocent VIII** (1484 - 1492AD) raised the celebration of this feast to a “double rite” [5]. About twenty years later, Giovanni di Lorenzo de Medici was crowned **Pope Leo X** on St. Joseph’s feast day 19th March 1513AD and it was this Pope who granted the feast of the “*Espousal of Mary to Joseph*” to the Nuns of the Annunciation, with the first celebration on 29th August 1517AD [6]. Pope Leo X also granted indulgences to pilgrims to Cotignac (France) where St. Joseph appeared together with our Lady and the Child Jesus, St. Michael the archangel and St. Bernard on 10th August 1519AD [7]. St. Joseph is said to have appeared there again on 7th June 1660AD. **Pope Paul III** (1534 - 1549AD) gave further bite to the feast of the *Espousals of Mary and Joseph*, when he granted it to the Franciscans on 21st August 1537AD, setting the date for March 7th as double major. The Servites and some other Religious Orders and individual Dioceses obtained the feast for March 8th [8].

5. Pope Gregory XIII (1572 - 1585AD), the Pope who reformed the Julian calendar, extended the feast of St. Joseph of 19th March to the whole catholic world ^[9] as well as declaring it a Holy day of obligation. Just over thirty years later, **Pope Gregory XV (1621 - 1623AD)** enhanced this by declaring the St. Joseph feast day of 19th March, a holy day of obligation, obligatory attendance at Mass and abstention from servile work ^[10]. **Pope Urban VIII (1623 - 1644AD)** who succeeded Pope Gregory XV, regularized and unified in 1642AD the holy days of obligation in the universal Church and limited their jurisdiction to the Holy See by reducing them to just thirty-six (36) but he did not tamper with the feast of Joseph ^[11].

6. Pope Clement X (1670 - 1676AD), a few months into his pontificate, raised the feast of St. Joseph to the rank of double of the second class on 6th December 1670AD. The following year 1671AD, he composed, approved and introduced into the Breviary three hymns - *Te Joseph celebrent*; *Caelitium Joseph decus*, and *Iste quem laeti* ^[12]. In the hymn titled, *Te Joseph celebrent*, Pope Clement saw Saint Joseph as anxious and amazed by the pregnancy of Mary, to whom he was joined in a chaste wedlock but when he was enlightened and taught by the breath of the divine spirit, he embraced the new born child and the mother. Joseph took them to Egypt in time of danger, just as he did, mixing tears and joys, when he found twelve year old Jesus in Jerusalem after three days. For Pope Clement X, Joseph, when he lived on earth was like the saints above, for he was blessed by God more than others. In *Caelitium Joseph decus*, Pope Clement X saw St. Joseph as “a certain hope of eternal life; a man chosen by the Creator to be called the father of the Lord; the Patriarch at the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, and the father of the holy family ^[13]. In *Iste quem Laeti*, Pope Clement X, saw St. Joseph as a man who

“the faithful joyously honour and praise with devout affection; a man blessed beyond others and exceedingly blissful; a man who enjoyed the presence of Mary and Jesus by his death bed and therefore conquered death”. Above all, he saw St. Joseph “as the true servant that the Trinity has crowned forever” [14]. His immediate successor **Pope Innocent XI (1676 - 1689AD)** permitted the feast of the *Espousal of Mary and Joseph* in the empire of Leopold I and later in Spain [15]. In both France and Canada, the feast was observed on January 22nd while Polish confraternities, celebrated it on 23rd January.

7. The 18th century began with the efforts of **Pope Clement XI (1700 - 1721AD)** who indulgenced the “*Novena before the St. Joseph’s feast of 19th March*” by briefs of February 10th and March 4th of 1713AD. This was said to be the very first indulgenced Novena of any sort in Rome [16]. He also reaffirmed the hymns approved by his predecessor Pope Clement X as well as composing not only a special Office for the feast of St. Joseph but rewrote the entire Office of St. Joseph. Pope Clement XI also granted the request of the guild of Carpenters for the feast of the *Patronage of St. Joseph* to be celebrated on the 19th of March. Pope Clement XI, whose pontificate lasted more than twenty (20) years coincidentally died on the feast day of St. Joseph, 19th March 1721AD at the age of seventy-one (71) years.

8. Pope Benedict XIII (1724 - 1730AD), now a *Servant of God*, did not only extend the celebration of the *Feast of the Espousal of Mary and Joseph* to the Papal States in 1725AD, setting the date for 23rd January but took the first giant step, following numerous petitions, by adding St. Joseph’s name to the *Litany of Saints* [17] on 19th December 1726AD. He placed the name after Mary, the angels and John the Baptist but before all the

other saints. Ten years later, **Pope Benedict XIV (1740 - 1758AD)**, inspired by St. Augustine's work, stated that "St. Joseph belongs to the Saints of the New Testament while John the Baptist on the other belongs to those of the Old Testament where he ends the list. Mary and Joseph begin the series of Saints of the New Testament" [18]. It was also his position that the Fathers of the Carmels were the first to import from the East into the West, the laudable practice of giving the fullest cultus to St. Joseph. **Pope Pius VI (1775 - 1799AD)** now *venerable*, added his contribution in the last quarter of the 18th century when on 31st May 1783AD, he had a *miraculous painting*, which had been attracting pilgrims since the 1670s crowned in Kalisz Poland [19]. The painting was an imposing representation of the Holy Family, invoked by the name *Saint Joseph of Kalisz*. It was three fold actions of recognizing, crowning and naming. It is interesting to note that a Polish born Pope, Pope Saint John Paul II, two hundred years later, repeated the crowning ceremony in 1985AD.

9. The 19th century was ushered in by **Pope Pius VII (1800 - 1823AD)** now *Servant of God*, He added a different coloration to devotions to St. Joseph by his numerous indulgenced Prayers. On 23rd of September 1802AD, he granted an "indulgence of one year to priests, secular or regular for the prayer to St. Joseph, *Virginum Custos*" [20], just as he did to the entire Catholic world, if when one prayed the *Responsorium Quicumque* in honour of St. Joseph to implore his efficacious protection in life and in death. On 26th June 1809AD, (Pope Pius VII) he granted indulgences of seven years and seven quarantines every time one prayed the Psalms of ST JOSEF(ph) (Italia) respectively in Latin (Ps.99, 46, 128, 80, 86) - meaning that Psalms 99 represents J, 46 represents O, 128 represents S, 80 represents E and F(ph) is represented by Psalm 86 [18]. He

further enhanced this on 13th June 18915AD with plenary indulgence when said daily for one month and when said at the feast of the *Patronage of St. Joseph* (3rd Sunday after Easter). Pope Pius VII also added the name of St. Joseph to the prayer ***A Cunctis***. Late in his pontificate, on the 9th of December 1819AD, the Pope indulgenced in four parts, “the Seven Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph” [21]. **Pope Gregory XVI (1831 - 1846AD)**, did not only grant further indulgences on 22nd January 1836AD to the “Seven Sundays of St. Joseph, in honour of the Seven Sorrows and Seven Joys of St. Joseph but granted plenary indulgence on the seventh Sunday after Confession, Communion and prayers for the Sovereign Pontiff [22]. Indeed the 19th century was one of the richest centuries in the papal actions on St. Joseph. From **Pope Gregory XVI (1831 - 1846AD)**, all the Popes after him to date, enriched their papacy by associating with and honouring St. Joseph.

10. Pope Pius IX (1846 - 1878), who claimed to have had Pope Pius VII as his mentor, towered highest by his writings and actions on St. Joseph. He is called the *Pope of St. Joseph* because of his great personal devotion and actions on St. Joseph. He was the Pope that declared the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1854AD. On 10th December 1847AD, Pope Pius IX, named the third Sunday after Easter as the feast day and liturgy for the *Patronage of St. Joseph* [22]. He stated in 1854AD that “St. Joseph, after our Lady, was the best hope for the Church”, just as he was quoted as saying “Whosoever consoles St. Joseph in life shall be aided by him at death” [23]. Pope Pius IX, declared the infallibility of the Pope and convoked the first Vatican Council on June 29th 1868AD with St. Joseph as protector after a period of planning and preparation that began on 6th December 1864AD. On 8th December 1870AD, with the decree *Quemadmodum Deus* he declared St. Joseph the

Patron and Protector of the Universal Church [24]. Pope Pius IX raised the natal feast of St. Joseph of March 19th to the liturgical rank of double the first class. By an apostolic letter in 1871AD, he decreed that St. Joseph's name be included in the *Prayer for the Mass of the Saints* and further added the formula for the antiphon at Vespers and Lauds and the oration in order to commemorate St. Joseph in the suffrage of the Saints [25]. Pope Pius IX composed Prayers in honour of Saint Joseph and attached indulgences to them as well as the ejaculatory prayer, "Foster Father Joseph, our guide, protect us and the holy Church".

Pope Pius IX granted various forms of indulgences for devotion to St. Joseph, for pious devout exercises all directed towards growing in holiness. These include those of 1846AD, 1847AD, June 12th 1855AD (for the month of March), January 1856AD, July 5th 1861AD, January 1863AD, June 26th 1863AD and April 27th 1865AD *Urbis et Orbis* at which he granted the same *indulgences attached to the month of Mary, to the month of March for St. Joseph*. In the last two years before his death, he granted other indulgences on the 26th of November 1876AD, February 4th 1877AD and April 27th 1877AD. It may be recalled that this Pope approved the crowning / coronation of St. Joseph's statue in 1872AD at Beauvais; Gante Mill Hill, England in 1873AD, Frigolet Archdiocese of Aix in 1874AD and in Mexico in 1875AD [26]. Pope Pius IX, died on 7th February 1878AD. His beatification started in his diocese in 1907AD and was declared *Blessed* on 3rd September 2000AD by Pope John Paul II.

11. Pope Leo XIII (1878 - 1903AD) succeeded Pope Pius IX in 1878AD and he did not let down on the actions and writings on St. Joseph as did by his predecessor. His first papal action on St. Joseph was to approve on July 5th 1883AD the *Wednesday*

recitation of the votive office of St. Joseph. He followed this with a verbal approval of the St. Joseph scapular in 1884AD but gave full and written approval to it in 1893AD, with options clarified in 1895AD. Pope Leo XIII who is known as the *Pope of the Rosary* because of his devotion to Mary and his Encyclicals on Mariology, (fifteen in Number), wrote the first ever encyclical on St. Joseph, titled *Quamquam Pluries of 15th August 1889AD* [27] giving Saint Joseph's place, position, importance and his efficacious intercessory powers. In the encyclical, he emphasized the need to consecrate the *month of March every year to St. Joseph.* Attached to the encyclical was a prayer titled *Ad-te-beate- Joseph (To you, O Blessed Joseph)* which should be said after the Rosary during the October devotion. The prayer was indulgenced for seven (7) years and seven (7) lents every time it is recited. The encyclical had other headlines, amongst which were that the Blessed Joseph was prefigured by the Joseph of ancient times, son of the Patriarch Jacob. Pope Leo XIII recalled that the Pharaoh of Egypt titled Joseph of the Old Testament "*Savour of the world*" as he presided over the kingdom when the harvests failed. In the same way, Joseph the husband of Mary would guard and protect the church, the house of God on earth. "St. Joseph", to Pope Leo XIII was "An example for particular imitation". Men of every rank and country should fly to the trust and guard of St. Joseph. He is truly the model of those who live by the toil of their hands (par.4). Pope Leo XIII further submitted that "our prayers will be most efficacious and pleasing to our Blessed Mother if we add St. Joseph's name to hers in our supplications". He asserted that just as "Joseph has been united to the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) 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 nature". Indeed ".....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...". For Pope Leo XIII, Jesus was the first-born of all Christians. Therefore all Christians by adoption and redemption are His brothers. For this reason, "the Blessed Patriarch Joseph looks at all Christians as confided to him, especially to his trust. Joseph and Mary are therefore parents of all Christians, -- the limitless family spread all over the earth, over which because he is the spouse of Mary and father of Jesus Christ, he holds, as it were, a paternal authority" [28]. At the end of the encyclical, he entrusted the entire Catholic Church to St. Joseph's protection.

Pope Leo XIII, among his many accomplishments composed, approved and indulgenced the following prayers: *St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church*: "O most powerful Patriarch St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, which has always been invoked in anxieties and tribulations -----" (granted in March 1882AD with 100days indulgence); --- "Grant O holy Joseph, that ever secured under thy protection ----", (an indulgence of three hundred days for every day it is prayed); His prayer of May 1884AD --- "Eternal Father, by the love which thou bearest St. Joseph, chosen by thee from all men to represent Thee on earth -----" (an indulgence of 300days); His prayer of July 18th 1885AD, "O Glorious St. Joseph, chosen by God to be the reputed father of Jesus, the most pure spouse of Mary ---" (an indulgence of 300days). Pope Leo XIII also indulgenced the Ejaculation "St. Joseph, model and patron of those who love the sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us -----" (100days indulgence anytime it is prayed) [29].

Pope Leo XIII approved special blessings of candles in honour of St. Joseph in 1891AD as well as the St. Joseph Ring. He also provided the rule for blessing St. Joseph's water. All these were also approved for all of Mexico in 1903AD [30]. Pope Leo XIII, the first Pope to be born in the 19th century and the first Pope to die in the 20th century (on 20th July 1903AD) was aged ninety-three (93) years. He celebrated three jubilees, twenty-five (25) years as Pope, fifty (50) years as priest and fifty (50) years as Bishop. He was the oldest Pope that ever lived as at July 2020.

12. The layers of honours and devotions to St. Joseph continued to thicken with every pontificate. The twentieth century was blessed with eight Popes who placed the cause of St. Joseph's liturgical rise and his place and position in the redemptive mission into higher perspectives. **Pope Pius X, (1903 - 1914AD), the Pope of the Eucharist**, who held that "the Eucharist is shortest and safest way to heaven" began his focus on St. Joseph with reaffirming and specifying all the Cinctures approved by his predecessor and how they should be blessed. This included the Saint Joseph's Cords, Scapulars, Candles, Water, Ring, Bread and Oil [31]. The Pope also chose the feast day of St. Joseph, 19th March 1904AD to set up a commission to prepare a universal set of laws to be the Code of Canon Law for the 20th Century [32]. It was this Pope who approved the ***Litany of St. Joseph*** as presented by the Abbot of the Cistercian Order for public use on 18th of December, 1909AD [33]. He left to the discretion of Bishops, the use of the words "Blessed be St. Joseph, spouse of Mary" in the Divine Praise. He composed and introduced the Prayer to Saint Joseph for the spirit of work as a model to all those devoted to labour, which he concluded with the words "All for Jesus, All through Mary, All in imitation of you O' Patriarch Joseph" [34]. He also indulgenced the Prayer

titled “St. Joseph the Virgin Father”, and the “Prayer for the observance of Sundays and feast days” in which he noted that St. Joseph refrained from labour on the Lord’s day and was a model for all workers to imitate [35]. Pope Pius X who performed various miraculous healings while alive, was canonised Saint on May 29th 1954AD by Pope Pius XII.

13. Pope Benedict XV (1914 - 1922AD), the first world war Pope, composed several prefaces for Masses in honour of St. Joseph including those for the dead in which St. Joseph featured prominently. In his July 25th 1920AD Bonum, Sane - a motu proprio on Saint Joseph and against Naturalism, which he described as an anarchaic form of government or universal republic of disorder, he recommended that “the cult of St. Joseph must be promoted much more intensely in villages and spread more widely”. He was very concerned about children who earn their bread by the labour of their hands, and had been grossly affected by Socialism. On this account Pope Benedict XV presented St. Joseph as “a model and particular guide with his life style to be venerated, imitated and honoured as a celestial patron [36]. For Pope Benedict XV, the school of St. Joseph is “where people should look at all things with the hope of the future, irrespective of the discomfort but with hope of heaven, living according to God’s mercy and justice”, --- that is, living “sober, straight and piously”. Pope Benedict XV recommended devotion to the Holy Family of which St. Joseph was the august head and asserted that “St. Joseph leads us directly to Mary and through Mary to the source of all sanctity, Jesus Christ, whose obedience to Mary and Joseph (has) sanctified the virtues proper to the holy family” [37]. Not only should Christians look at those wonderful examples of virtues and totally renew themselves but Bishops of the Catholic world should direct their faithful to the valid aid of St. Joseph, by

consecrating all *Wednesdays of the year* and the *month of March to St. Joseph* and invoke him as *patron of happy death* with devout prayer. Pope Benedict XV, following requests from several Bishops, extended the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph to the whole Catholic world and set the date at the Sunday within the Epiphany. One of the highlights of his works was his action of February 23rd 1921AD when he decreed that the invocation “Blessed be St. Joseph, her Most Chaste Spouse”, be added to the Divine Praises throughout the entire Catholic world [38]. Three months later, on May 10th 1921AD, Pope Benedict XV sanctioned a special Preface in honour of Saint Joseph with an indulgence.

14. Pope Pius XI (1911 - 1939AD), who had before becoming Pope earned three doctorate degrees was a Professor, the Ambrosian. Following the Marist formula of vows, he approved the placing of St. Joseph, after Mary and before Saint Michael the Archangel and other Saints in the Litany of Saints in 1922AD. He confirmed this order at the solemn pontifical Masses he celebrated in St. Peter’s Basilica in 1925AD and 1926AD [39]. On April 21st 1926AD, Pope Pius XI described St. Joseph as “a man who devoted his life to serving God by guarding the chastity of Mary, as well as providing protection for the Son, hiding the Son and the mystery known only to the Trinity ----”. For him, “No one is between St. Joseph and God except our Lady with her divine motherhood” [40]. In another comparison, this time on 19th March 1928, Pope Pius XI observed that between St. John the Baptist and St. Peter is St. Joseph with “his silence, recollected, almost imperceptible, only to be illuminated centuries after his death with songs of praise” [41]. On March 19th 1935AD, Pope Pius XI while speaking to the Nuns of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, submitted that “it is impossible to attain anything higher than the

hypostatic union, the personal union of God with man, which Saint Joseph attained. For that reason, St. Joseph can obtain from the Redeemer and His mother, in a manner of authority beyond those of a simple agent ^[42]. To these, he added on March 1938 that “as St. Joseph was indeed the head and master of the home, his intercession cannot but be all-powerful”.

In his *Divine Redemptoris Encyclical* of 19th March 1937AD, directed against the influence of Communism, Pope Pius XI designated St. Joseph as the “*Special Protector against Communism*” with the words, “We place the vast campaign of the Church against Communism under the standard of St. Joseph, her mighty Protector ^[43]. For Pope Pius XI, St. Joseph left an example for those who must gain their bread by the toil of their hands. St. Joseph won the title of “The Just”, serving thus as a living model that all Christian justice should reign in social life. It is recalled that Pope Pius XI, had in 1932AD, granted an indulgence to “the Seven Sorrows of St. Joseph”, just as in 1933AD, he increased the indulgences in common practice of consecrating the month of March by daily devotions in honour of St. Joseph. In 1936AD, he granted further indulgences for the Seven Sundays of St. Joseph and to the Seven Sorrows and Seven Joys of St. Joseph ^[44].

15. Pope Pius XII (1939 - 1958), the Pope of the Second World War, first entered the world of St. Joseph, when he met with young couples on April 18th 1940AD. He advised the young couples to turn to Saint Joseph, the guardian of the mother of Christ and “imagine the Holy family carrying out their daily devotion led by Joseph, the head of the holy family” ^[45]. Five years later, in 1945AD, in an address to the members of the National Congress of Christian Association of Italian labourers, he told them that “no labourer has ever been as perfectly and profoundly filled with this leaven as he who lived with Christ in

the intimacy of the family and workshop, His foster-father, St. Joseph [46]. They were to emulate him. Pope Pius XII carried a similar message, in 1947AD to the Italian Catholic Action, saying “There was never a man so close to the Redeemer through domestic ties, daily relations, spiritual harmony and the divine life of grace as Joseph of the line of David and none-the-less a humble labourer. He wondered how they could not have taken him as their heavenly patron all this while. Pope Pius XII then composed and introduced to them the *Prayer to St. Joseph for workmen as model of all* those who are devoted to labour [47]. On March 11th 1958AD, he composed a Prayer to St. Joseph the *humble artisan of Nazareth* that gave Christians an example of a perfect life through diligent labour [48]. The highlight of Pope Pius XII’s efforts on the promotion of St. Joseph was on May 1st 1955AD when he instituted the feast of St. Joseph the worker. He added these enchanting and revealing words “---if you would be close to Christ, we repeat, Go to Joseph ---” [49]. Pope Pius XII, who died on October 9th 1958AD, is now *Venerable*, on the way to Sainthood.

16. Pope John XXIII (1958 - 1963AD), now a saint, greatly enhanced the position of St. Joseph with his exceptional devotion, immense ecclesiastical honours, in addition to his writings, addresses and speeches. The man generally called the “good Pope John” could not, out of respect, take the name “Joseph”, as Pope but instead adopted St. Joseph’s feast day, 19th March as his name feast day. Pope John XXIII convoked the second Vatican Council under the patronage of St. Joseph.

To enhance the necessity for Devotions, Pope John XXIII invited Rectors of Seminaries and told them to treat Devotion to St. Joseph as Devotion to Christ and Mary. By way of hierarchy, after the devotions to the Eucharist, Sacred Heart and His most Precious Blood, then devotion to our Lady, the mother of Jesus

and our mother, it should be followed by Devotion to St. Joseph and other saints. He added that “for a holy and sanctifying clergy, these devotions are indispensable” and advised the Rectors to instill devotion to St. Joseph in the training of Priests [50]. Describing St. Joseph as “meek, quiet and discreet, St. Joseph is the perfect model for imitation in circumstances that recur in every age and that calls for self-denial and total abandonment to God” [51].

For Pope John XXIII, the home of Joseph in Nazareth is a school for lessons on piety, love, sacrifice and a place entrusted to Joseph for the development of the Mystical Body. He also recommended St. Joseph as the ideal teacher and Patron of Diplomats of the Holy See, for such diplomats must know when “to keep quiet, how to speak with care and reserve, knowing how to obey, knowing how to watch, guide and guard, just as St. Joseph did in the management of the Holy Family [52].

While asking the clergy to pray for the success of the Second Vatican Council, he asked rhetorically, “who is more fit than a Priest to enjoy the close friendship of St. Joseph” whose privilege it is, not only to see and hear him, but to take Him in his arms and kiss Him, clothe Him and protect Him”? A week before the start of the Second Vatican Council, on 4th October 1962AD, Pope John XXIII asked all the Bishops billed for the (Second Vatican) Council to study St. Joseph along with Mary and Jesus in their task of revitalizing the family. He saw the mystery of the Incarnation as consecrating the thirty (30) years of life in the silence of Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. The participants were to consider more thoroughly and in the light of the Holy Family, the greatness of the tasks the Church expects from them. It is also recorded that Pope John XXIII on July 26th 1960AD, reformed codified and promoted the feast of the Holy Family from double major to a second class rank. While for the success of the second Vatican Council, he

composed many Prayers, Novenas, letters, allocutions and addresses in honour of St. Joseph, he similarly requested them to “invoke St. Joseph, the Patron of the Council”.

Under Pope John XXIII, St. Joseph received the highest liturgical honour ever, by the insertion of his name among the Saints, in the age-long-communicates, the first Eucharistic Prayer, effective from December 8th 1962AD [53]. Incidentally this was the only Eucharistic Prayer in use at the time. It is an honour bestowed by the good Pope John, the most beloved Pope worldwide in history at the time. His feast day is on October 11th, the day he opened the Vatican II, as against June 3rd when he died. Pope John XXIII was canonised Saint by Pope Francis on April 27th 2014.

17. Pope Paul VI (1963 - 1978AD) who assumed the papacy at the death of Pope John XXIII during the second Vatican Council did not only have the responsibility of carrying on with the Council but had to implement the decisions. While he didn't give any ecclesiastical honour to St. Joseph, he did, at different times and fora, describe St. Joseph in very many glowing and assured words. He saw St. Joseph as a “Committed Man, who gave total commitment to Mary and total commitment to Jesus, including his offspring by legal descendance, not by flesh. He described Nazareth [the home of St. Joseph] as the place we learn to be oppressed rather than be oppressors, a place where one learns to pardon, to persevere, to work and to serve, to suffer and to love. For him, St. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises to great destinies [54].

In a later commentary on 26th March 1969AD, Pope Paul VI stated that “St. Joseph 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 common, simple, human virtues but they need to be true and authentic [55]. He did not

stop there, but held in 1970AD that “St. Joseph is a humble but courageous husband, in intimacy with Jesus Christ. He is the model of obedient faith and the summit of holiness [56]. In due consideration of the creation events and redemptive journey, he added: “Whereas Adam and Eve are the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, **Joseph** and **Mary** are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth” [57].

Pope Paul VI directed all of mankind to St. Joseph in his laborious and dignified poverty and admonished all to call upon him as protector and as a source and stimulus of provident charity. He envisioned “Work as the daily expression of love in the holy family. Work, which is the consequence of original sin, was redeemed by Christ, who laboured at the work bench with St. Joseph. Work is a human good that transforms nature and makes man, in a sense, more human”. Indeed for Pope Paul VI, “Joseph the ‘just man’, was a poor, honest, hardworking, perhaps even timorous man but one with unfathomable interior life, from which very singular directions and consolation came, bringing him also the logic and strength that belong to simple clear souls, giving him power of making great decisions” [58]. As he examined and pondered on St. Joseph’s life, Pope Paul VI asserted that “St. Joseph offered the whole of his existence in total sacrifice to the imponderable demands raised by the astonishing coming of the Messiah to whom he was to give the everlasting blessed name ‘Jesus’, whom he was to acknowledge as the effect of the Holy Spirit and his own son in the juridical and domestic way” [59]. “St. Joseph”, for Pope Paul VI “was the type of the message of that Gospel that Jesus was to announce as the programme in the redemption of mankind as soon as he left the workshop in Nazareth and began his work as prophet and teacher” [60]. Pope Paul VI gave a lot of credit to St. Joseph’s cooperation in the redemptive mission of Christ and thus recommended: “St.

Joseph is an example to us for imitation: one we should always call on as our protector. He is a spontaneous theological reflection on the “marriage” of divine with the human action in the economy of Redemption. Although the divine is wholly sufficient, the human action which is ours, though capable of nothing, is never dispensed from humble but conditional and enabling collaboration [61]. For these heroic efforts, Pope Paul VI concluded that St. Joseph had the burdens, the responsibilities, the risks and the labour surrounding the holy family ----. He was the service, the work, the sacrifice in the shadows of that gospel picture in which we love to meditate on Him [our Lord] [62]. No doubt, Pope Paul VI, had a very deep insight into St. Joseph’s theological and physical contribution to the life in Nazareth, before and after the birth of the messiah, and he rated them all in the superlative.

18. After the works of so many Popes, one would have thought that there was nothing left to write on St. Joseph but **Pope John Paul II (1978 - 2005AD)** who was described by Pope Benedict XVI as “*very devoted to St. Joseph*” wrote speeches, letters and sermons on St. Joseph, including the highly rated encyclical *Redemption Custos*, of August 15th 1989, where he described St. Joseph as the “Guardian of the Redeemer”. It is observed that Pope John Paul II spent a good portion of his pontificate teaching St. Joseph to mankind, much of which were in his sermons. In his sermon on *Joseph the man of Trust* in March 1980, Pope John Paul II admonished that, we should recognise the “great works of God in the one to whom He entrusted His mysteries” and live like St. Joseph in “faithfulness, humility and nobility of heart”. St. Joseph the just man, is the person who prays, lives by faith, and seeks to do good in every concrete circumstance of life [63].

18.1 In his examination of the *Unity in the family, and respect for life*, in March 1981, Pope John Paul II envisioned that, “it is in Joseph in whom is reflected more fully than in all earthly fathers, the fatherhood of God Himself. The family rests on the dignity of human fatherhood, on the responsibility of the man, husband and father, as also on work. Joseph of Nazareth bears witness to these for us”. The Holy Family of which St. Joseph was the august head, is a prototype and an example for all Christian families [64].

18.2 In his reflection on how the old Testament predictions have been fulfilled in the New Testament, Pope John Paul II asserted that, “The Church arose and exists because the promise once made to Abraham could be fulfilled in the world. The church links its beginning, the fulfillment of the hope of the world, with the faith of Joseph of Nazareth. ----- Both Mary and Joseph are united in this marvellous bond ---- Joseph of Nazareth is a **Just Man** because he totally lives by faith. He is holy because his faith is truly heroic” [65].

18.3 He stretched this further, saying that “----- St. Joseph is a man of great Spirit. He is great in faith, not because he speaks his own words, but because he listens to the word of the Living God. He listens in silence. And his heart ceaselessly perseveres in readiness to accept the Truth contained in the word of the Living God, in order to receive it and fulfill it with Love. Therefore Joseph of Nazareth becomes truly a marvellous witness of the Divine Mystery. He becomes a provider for the Tabernacle that God had chosen for himself on earth to carry out the work of Salvation [66].

18.4 Pope John Paul II, saw fatherhood as cardinal to the proper upbringing of children, as he offered advice to parents,

both natural and spiritual parents, and to children. Pope John Paul II advised *parents* to offer their fatherhood to their children just as Joseph did. Doing so, involves “combining tenderness with seriousness, understanding with strictness, camaraderie with the exercise of authority because only in this way will children be able to grow harmoniously, overcoming their fears and preparing themselves to meet courageously, the unknown factors in life”. He submitted that the energy needed to carry out these multifarious functions, in bringing up our children in a balanced form, comes from God, just as St. Joseph had taught us that God is the source of fatherhood ¹⁶⁷¹. *To Priests, the religious and consecrated souls*, Pope John Paul II had this to say: “Have recourse to St. Joseph, particularly you priests and religious, you consecrated souls, who in his virginal chastity and spiritual fatherhood see the highest ideals of your vocation reflected. St. Joseph teaches you love for meditation and prayers, generous fidelity to commitments assumed before God and the church, selfless dedication to the community in which Providence has placed you, however small and unknown it may be. In the light of St. Joseph’s example you will be able to learn and appreciate the value of all that is humble, simple, hidden and of what is accomplished without show and without clamour, but with decisive results, in the unfathomable depths of the heart” ¹⁶⁸¹. Extending his admonition to *the families of today*, who are experiencing rapid changes in modern society and suffering their sometimes worrying repercussions, he stated that “you can find in the Family of Nazareth, which Joseph watched over with anxious care, the ever-present model of a community of persons in which love assures an understanding that is daily renewed, Invoking **Jesus, Mary and Joseph**, the members of every family of your ecclesial communities can rediscover in the various moments of their lives, the Joy of the reciprocal gift, the comfort of

solidarity in trials, the serene peace of those who know how to count on the omnipotent, even if mysterious, Divine Providence” [69]. Pope John Paul II, reassured everyone that, “Like St. Joseph, you too must invoke the heavenly Father with persevering and fervent prayer, and you will experience, as he did, the truth of the following words of the Psalm: “*Forever I will maintain my kindness towards him, and my covenant with him stands firm*” (Ps. 89:29)” [70]. Pope John Paul’s admonition on the family, with St. Joseph’s role in focus was very revealing. Pope John Paul II taught that “God entrusted to Joseph, his own eternal Son, who in the house of Joseph embraced all that constitutes the truth of the Son of Man. He entrusted Mary, He entrusted the Holy Family, He indeed entrusted to Joseph what is “Most holy in the whole history of creation, and that humble man, that carpenter, did not disappoint God’s trust. To the very end, he showed himself faithful, thoughtful, provident, solicitous after the model of the eternal Father himself”. ***Joseph is a man the whole church has come to trust***, particularly in two closely related areas: family and work [71]. In this sermon of March 1987 in which the Pope saw the family as a community of love, John Paul’s preached that the Solemnity of St. Joseph had become for some, understandably, “***Father’s Day***” but in reality it should be a feast of family ties and affection in its naturalness. The family is the first school of love, community of love, where every member feels understood, accepted and loved -----, a community of prayer, that is not only open to human values, but also to higher values of the spirit. It is not enough to pray but to pray together. “There must be a gathering for prayers in a family, as it is a unifying moment for the family” [72].

18.5 Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris Custos - Guardian of the Redeemer of 15th August 1989*, to mark one year

of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, the *Quamquam Pluris* was an opportunity for the Pope to expose the indispensable role of St. Joseph in the salvation history. "The Son of Mary", Pope John Paul said, "is also the son of Joseph". Quoting St. Augustine, Pope John Paul stated thus: "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 flesh". 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" [73]. Commenting on the silence of St. Joseph, Pope John Paul II recalled that in the Annunciation, Joseph said nothing, he only did. "Doing" became the beginning of "Joseph's way" [74]. --- In his examination of the life in the family, Pope John Paul submitted that in the poverty in Bethlehem, in the flight and exile to Egypt and the life led in Nazareth, the Holy Family enjoyed this bond of Charity, as the mystery of Nazareth is "inserted directly in the mystery of the Incarnation". There was a true fatherhood in the human family of Nazareth, a true father not by his begetting offspring, neither was it an "*apparent or merely substitute*" fatherhood but one that "*fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and exhibits the mission of a father in the family*". It was a family in which humanity was "taken up" into the unity of the Divine person of the Word-Son-Jesus- "a hypostatic union". It is in this context that "Joseph's fatherhood was also 'taken up' in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation" [75].

With respect to the growth of our Lord, Pope John Paul II asserted that the virtue of Industriousness played a notable role in the "wisdom, age and grace" of Jesus ----- for work is human good which transforms nature. Joseph, he said,

“brought human work closer to the mystery of Redemption” [76]. According to John Paul II, those souls most sensitive to the impulses of divine love have rightly seen in Joseph, a brilliant example of the interior life. In Joseph, the apparent tension between active and contemplative life, finds an ideal harmony that was possible for those who possess the perfection of Charity (quoting St. Thomas Aquinas) [77]. “May St. Joseph”, Pope John Paul II prayed, ‘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 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 to the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. May St. Joseph obtain for the Church and for the world, as well as each of us, the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” [78].

18.6 Three years after the *Redemptoris Custos encyclical*, Pope John Paul II gave a sermon, titled *Spiritual Pilgrimage to the Holy Family*, in which he x-rayed among others, the fatherhood of St. Joseph. According to Pope John Paul II, “The whole church is built on the fatherhood of St. Joseph who in faith participates, in a special manner, in this spiritual genealogy: From the human point of view it is a putative fatherhood; from the viewpoint of the divine mystery it is fatherhood in Holy Spirit”. Hence the whole church venerates Joseph of Nazareth in a

“singular and extraordinary way” [79]. For these, Pope John Paul II invites every home to be the “shrine of love and school of persevering”. ---“Just as the Holy family of (Jesus, Mary and Joseph) was the cradle of the Church, so too every family is called to be a cradle of lay vocations and those of special consecration” [80]. Pope John Paul II recommended the building of strong families like that of St. Joseph, for “A strong family can be the cure for many serious threatening problems, founded on the rock of religious and moral principles; [81] it is an anchor of salvation capable of saving from shipwreck, the best of humanity’s energies, putting them into play for the restructuring of the social fabric ----” [82]. Directing his attention to the *youths*, he asserted that, “God is youth and only the person who lives in Him possesses the Secret of youth” just like St. Joseph did [83].

18.7 For Pope John Paul II, St. Joseph is the *guardian and protector*, who together with his vocation to be the foster-father of the Redeemer, received from divine providence, the mission of protecting His growth in wisdom, age and grace” [84] and Joseph continues his role as the Protector of the Body of Christ.

18.8 In his meditation on the holy family with respect to life and work, Pope John Paul II directs us thus: “Fix the eyes of your spirit on the Holy Family and through the intercession of St. Joseph, draw the determination that is enlightened by faith, courage and perseverance in goodness!” [85]. He reminded the Priests, Ministers of the free Gift of divine salvation that by their prayers, exhortation and example, they would be able to sustain the flock entrusted to their pastoral care; share their hopes and difficulties in a fraternal way. He also prayed for every family, so that “the image of the home in Nazareth, the

atmosphere of understanding and communion of simplicity and service be alive ¹⁸⁶l.

18.9 Pope John Paul II, in Angelus message in March 2002, saw St Joseph as “breaking the old vice of paternal familial domination, and suggests him as the model of a loving father” ¹⁸⁷l. This was an extension of his general teaching on fatherhood.

18.10 Writing on Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church and relying on the words of the Evangelists, Pope John Paul II concluded that St. Joseph “is the caring guardian of Jesus, an attentive and faithful husband who exercises his family authority in a constant attitude of service. His silence contains the special style of his mission; a life lived in the greyness of everyday but with steadfast faith in providence ---- Joseph, he concluded is a man of peace ¹⁸⁸l. The Pope advised and prayed for the young people from school, as well as the sick and the newlyweds. *To Young people from school*, “they should pray to St. Joseph to help them follow day by day, the Lord’s desire for them, in the school of truth which does not deceive and the life which does not perish”. *To Sick people*, “they should pray to St. Joseph to support them in suffering accepted as a way to cooperate with the salvation of the world”. *To Newly-weds*, he reminded them that “they are at the school of the chaste Husband of the Virgin Mary; they should therefore nourish their hearts with prayer and daily docility to divine plan” ¹⁸⁹l.

19. Pope Benedict XVI (2003 - 2013) Pope Benedict XVI’s teaching on St. Joseph can be seen to be very touching and indeed impactful. In his pontificate of nearly eight years, he dwelt on Joseph’s life as a carpenter, as a model of interior life, respect for family values, a man of work and one to be invoked

for protection. He preached that “the sin of Adam and Eve transformed work into effort and pain or a burden and as Jesus dedicated Himself to work, he was known as the Son of the Carpenter Joseph. He kept the divine plan of work intact. Like St. Joseph, Man is subject and protagonist of work” [90].

In his meditation on interiority of life, Pope Benedict XVI saw St. Joseph as a model of interior recollection. St. Joseph’s silence in the Gospel does not “demonstrate an empty interior but rather the fullness of faith that he carries in his interior heart”. In this light therefore, “we should be ‘infected’ by the Silence of St. Joseph for the world of today is so noisy and not conducive for recollection and listening to the voice of God. The period of Advent is the time to cultivate interior recollection so as to keep Jesus in our lives” [91].

Speaking on the fatherhood of St. Joseph, Pope Benedict XVI recalled that “when St. Joseph, following the angelic dream, took Mary into his home, he welcomed the mystery that was in Mary and the mystery that was Mary herself. He loved her with great respect, which is the mark of authentic love” [92]. Indeed, “St. Joseph teaches us that it is possible to love without possessing. In Joseph, faith is not separated from actions. His faith had a decisive effect on his action. Joseph is a “Just Man” because his existence is “ad-justed to the word of God”.

“The life of St. Joseph, lived in obedience to God’s word, is an eloquent sign for all the disciples of Jesus who seek the unity of the church. His example helps us to understand that it is only by complete submission to the will of God that we become effective workers in the service of his plan to gather together all mankind into one family, one assembly, one “ecclesia” [93].

Pope Benedict XVI in his homily in Yaoundé, Cameroon made a remarkable comparison, holding that “Throughout all history, Joseph is the man who gives God the greatest display of trust, even in the face of such astonishing news” --- news that

his wife was carrying a male child for months without his collaboration” 194]. Pope Benedict XVI advised all fathers to “take St. Joseph as their model”. Like Joseph, “you fathers should respect and love your spouses”. For fatherless children, those abandoned in poverty, those forced into terrorism, they should invoke St. Joseph for their protection. Husbands should look upon the love of Joseph for Mary and Jesus. For those preparing for marriage, they should treat their future spouses as Joseph did. Those who have given themselves to God in celibacy, should reflect upon the teaching of the Church, our mother. All fathers should take St. Joseph as their model. Like St. Joseph “respect and love your spouse and by that love and wise presence, lead your children to God 195]. He consoled all with this formula: “If **discouragement** overwhelms you, think of the faith of Joseph. If **anxiety** has its grip on you; think of the hope of Joseph, that descendant of Abraham who hoped against hope. If **exasperation** or **hatred** seizes you, think of the love of Joseph, who was the first man to set eyes on the human face of God in the person of the infant conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us praise and thank Christ for having drawn so close to us, and for giving us Joseph as an example and model of love for him” 196].

Pope Benedict XVI canonised many Saints during his pontificate. At a ceremony in Rome on October 17th 2010, he canonised Andre Bissette, a French Canadian, who performed numerous miracles, healings, four hundred and thirty-five (435) persons in the year 1916 alone through the humble intercession of St. Joseph, and he was instrumental to the building of the Oratory of St. Joseph in Montreal Canada 197].

Unannounced publicly before he left office, Pope Benedict XVI approved the insertion of the name of St. Joseph into the Eucharistic Prayers numbers II, III, and IV; thus completing the action started by Pope John XXIII in 1962. Pope Francis (his

immediate successor) confirmed it and it took effect from May 1st 2013, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker ¹⁹⁸l.

20. Pope Francis (2013 - date) Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pope, the first from the Americas, by his writings, personal devotion and meditation elevated the person and position of St. Joseph in Christendom. His thoughts revealed through his numerous writings that he has been a devotee of St. Joseph for years. It is recalled by his first act that although Pope Francis was elected on the 13th of March 2013, he chose the feast of St. Joseph, 19th March for his inauguration Mass as Pope. He also revealed this by the make-up of his coat of arms, with the attachment of a spikenard flower used as a symbol of St. Joseph. In Hispanic iconographic tradition, St. Joseph is often depicted with a branch of spikenard in his hand. With the symbols of Jesus and Mary understandably represented on the coat of arms, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph was seen to constitute the centre piece of Pope Francis' coat of arms and perhaps the mission of his pontificate.

It is also recalled that on May 1st 2013, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, Pope Francis used the occasion of his Wednesday audience with pilgrims, to give an address titled "*Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person*". In it, he highlighted the nature of human work, something that filled the life of St. Joseph "**Work**", he said "anoints us with dignity, fills us with dignity and makes us similar to God since God worked and still working with us". The Pope's second submission on this May-day reflection was that Joseph with Mary had a common centre of attention, **JESUS**. He prayerfully advised that we ask "St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary, to teach us to be faithful to our daily tasks, to live our life of faith in action of everyday life, give more space to the lord in our lives and to stop to contemplate His face" ¹⁹⁹l.

Effective from 1st May 2013, Pope Francis reaffirmed the insertion of the name of St. Joseph into the Eucharistic Prayers numbers II, III, & IV earlier approved by his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI. By this singular and heroic act, the five words, **with blessed Joseph, her Spouse**, were introduced to each of the Eucharistic Prayers immediately after the words, “**with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God**” [100]. The words come before those for the Apostles and the Angels. Not only did this complete the work begun in 1962 by Pope John XXIII, but was Pope Francis’ first decree pertaining to the liturgy.

The year 2013 was really a busy one for Pope Francis. On July 5th 2013, Pope Francis approved the Canonization of Pope John XXIII (alias Pope of St. Joseph) and Pope John Paul II, both ardent devotees of St. Joseph. The canonization ceremony of the two Popes took place in Rome on April 27th 2014. On the same day of the announcement, Friday the 5th of July 2013, Pope Francis, with his immediate predecessor Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI by his side, consecrated the Vatican City to St Joseph and St Michael, the Archangel.

In his Advent reflection on 22nd December 2013, Pope Francis preached that: “Joseph was a man who always listened to the voice of God; he was deeply sensitive to his secret will; he was a man attentive to the message that came to him from the depths of his heart and from on high. He did not persist in following his own plan for his life; he did not allow bitterness to poison his soul, rather, he was ready to make himself available to the news that, in such a bewildering way, was being presented to him. Indeed because St. Joseph did not hate and did not allow bitterness to poison his soul, “Joseph became free and greater. By accepting himself according to God’s design, Joseph fully finds himself, beyond himself. He had freedom to renounce what even what is his, the possession of his very life. St. Joseph’s full interior availability to the will of

God challenges us and shows us the way”. For these, we should always make ourselves ready to celebrate Christmas by “contemplating Mary and Joseph: Mary, the woman of full grace who had the courage to entrust herself to the Word of God; Joseph, the faithful and just man who chose to believe the Lord rather than listen to the voice of doubt and human pride: With them, let us walk together to Bethlehem” [101].

On his reflection on St. Joseph’s guardianship and as a model educator, Pope Francis asserted that “to grow in age, to grow in wisdom and to grow in grace”, was the work Joseph did with Jesus, to help him grow in these three ways. St. Joseph’s mission is certainly unique and unrepeatable because Jesus is absolutely unique. Joseph is therefore a model of every educator and the dad, the father. To all parents, priests, who are fathers, and those who have an educational role in the Church and in the society, “I therefore entrust to St. Joseph’s protection” [102].

Recalling St. Joseph’s spontaneous response to the message of the angel, Pope Francis admonished thus: “Like Joseph, once we have heard the voice of God, we must “rise up with Jesus and Mary”. Just as the Holy Family was entrusted to St. Joseph, to care for it, so is the gift of the family entrusted to each of us. The angel of the Lord revealed to Joseph the dangers which threatened Jesus and Mary, forcing them to Egypt. So also when our families are threatened, we must protect them from harm [103]. Pope Francis’ prayers for families was that “Saint Joseph should grant all of us the ability to dream because when we dream great things and good things, we draw near to God’s dreams and what God dreams about us” [104].

Pope Francis recalled that St. Joseph, after his encounter with the angel at the Annunciation, took Mary home as his wife, but he actually took up two things, namely: fatherhood and mystery, -- the mystery of salvation, the mystery of re-creation

or bringing back the people of God. He added that “Joseph, a man of silence, of silent obedience, took in hand the mystery and helps with his silence and with his work, up to the moment when God called him to Himself. This man, Joseph, who took fatherhood and mystery, was the shadow of the Father: the shadow of God the Father and if the Man Jesus learned to say “daddy”, “father”, to His Father, who He knows as God, “He learned it from life, from the witness of Joseph, the man who took care of Him, the man who raised Him, the man who carried forward every paternity and every mystery but took nothing for himself”. St. Joseph’s unwavering trust in God, allowed him to accept a humanly difficult and in a sense, incomprehensible situation. Joseph understands through faith, that the baby conceived in Mary’s womb is not his son, but the Son of God and that he Joseph, would be the guardian, fully assuming his earthly paternity. “The example of this humble and wise man, Joseph, teaches us to lift our gaze and look beyond. It is a question of recovering the surprising logic of God, who far from small or large calculations, is made of an openness to new horizons, towards Christ and the Word” [105].

Pope Francis as he reflected on how Joseph entered God’s mystery preached that “St. Joseph was chosen to educate a man who was true man but who was also God. Only God could have educated such a person but there wasn’t someone like that. The Lord chose a just man, a man of faith, a man who was capable of being a man and also capable of speaking with God, of entering into God’s mystery. This was Joseph’s life” [106].

While requesting that St. Joseph should help us to fight for the dignity of work, Pope Francis preached that work is only a continuation of God’s work and that human work is the vocation received by man from God at the end of His creation. Work is what makes us like God because with work, man is a creator; he is able to create, even to create a family “Let us

therefore ask St. Joseph, with the tools of work in his hand, to help us fight for the dignity of work, so that there is work for all and it is dignified work and not slave labour [107].

In his celebrated encyclical, *Patris Corde, (with a father's heart)* written at a time of a pandemic, Pope Francis described St. Joseph as “that beloved father, that tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father and a father in the shadows”. St Joseph stands out as an exemplary figure of our time, in a world that “needs fathers” and not “tyrants”, a society that “rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction”. For Pope Francis, “True fathers refuse to live the lives of their children for them; instead they respect their freedom. A father is most a father and an educator at the point he becomes “useless”, when he sees that the child has become independent and can walk the paths of life unaccompanied”; Emphatically he added that “Being a father has nothing to do with possession, but rather a ‘sign’, pointing to a greater fatherhood”, that of the “heavenly Father” [108].

Pope Francis declared 2021, the liturgical year of Saint Joseph. He indulgenced the Year of St. Joseph and provided fifteen ways of gaining plenary indulgence. The encyclical *Patris Corde* was accompanied with this 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.

Over the years, Pope Francis had a daily prayer which he revealed with the encyclical thus: “St. Joseph, 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 good as your power”.

21. Conclusion

The actions and teachings of Popes on Saint Joseph reveal the insurmountable virtues of St. Joseph, all encapsulated in silence but boldly demonstrated in action. St. Joseph’s way was ‘doing’. Without giving birth to a son, he showed that fatherhood is not by possession but by action. In his virginal fatherhood, he had a virgin son from a virgin mother. His work bench was a training school for work, dignity of work, work that anoints and makes us like God who is always working. St. Joseph lived out the virtues of justice, chastity, prudence, valor, obedience, faith. He stands out as a pillar for fathers and hope for the sick and the dying. The persons of Jesus and Mary that he served with his own existence were unique and therefore his service was not only unique but unrepeatable. His interior life, so couched in silence, was his strength for it enabled him to pray and meet with God the Father, through whom he knew how to care and direct these unique beings entrusted to him. St. Joseph stands out as one for imitation in every age, by everyone of any vocation. No wonder he stood out as the gospel message which Jesus took to the people as he left Nazareth for his public ministry. St. Joseph was his eight beatitudes. There cannot be another Joseph, not only because there cannot be another Jesus and Mary but because he dwarfed the Old Testament Joseph who prefigured him. These Popes show that Joseph, can no longer be hidden. They found St. Joseph in their pilgrimages of faith and journeyed along with him. Like the shell that houses the chicken, it has now been hatched and the chicken is out for all to see. The third millennium of Christianity has begun with Joseph. Joseph speaks volumes in silence and action. These

Pope were certainly in motion and have by their writings, entreaties and actions summoned us all unto motion. All for Jesus, all through Mary, all in imitation of St. Joseph (Pope Pius X).

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“PATRIS CORDE”: THEOLOGICAL – SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS AND IT’S RELEVANCE FOR AFRICA¹⁴

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Abstract

This study takes the path of orthopraxy; a theological supposition from the Revelatory starting point of view, en route sequential thinking. The purpose is to examine the relevance of “Patris Corde” for Africa. For brevity, three countries will be examined, namely, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Federal Republic of Nigeria, and Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia as representative of African countries because their situations are similar to what is going in different countries in the continent. In this paper, the current situations of these countries are viewed on how the Apostolic Letter is applicable to the Africans in their present predicament. The understanding of the concept of manhood and masculinity in Africa are examined. St. Joseph is presented to these countries as their advocate in the virtues of faith and hope; their exemplary figure in devotedness to his duty in providing for the Holy Family; and their ideal figure in commitment to work. The person and qualities of St. Joseph are examined as explicated by Pope Francis in the document and thereafter, some recommendations are presented which culminate in conclusion.

¹⁴ This article was written in 2021.on the occasion of the Year of St. Joseph.

Key Words: St. Joseph, Father, husband, work, creativity, family, masculinity.

Introduction

*Patris Corde*¹⁵ is Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter to the whole world celebrating the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph as the "Patron of the Catholic Church" and he is universally invoked as Patron of the sick and of a happy death as acknowledged by Blessed Pius IX, who also confirmed Joseph a Saint in December 8, 1870. St. Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is as well-known as "Patron of Workers" and he is celebrated on every May 1st as proposed by Venerable Pius XII in 1955. St. Joseph is, moreover, called "Guardian of the Redeemer", promulgated by St. John Paul II in August 15, 1989.

This Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, was promulgated on December 8, 2020. Characteristically, it is pastoral in nature, encouraging, and inspiring all people. Its transmission is germane in the contemporary time when the whole world and family life seem to be plunged into one crisis after the other; with conflicts in many countries, and the entire world experiencing the ravages of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pontiff's specific aim is to ginger up the virtue of love for St. Joseph, encouraging people to seek his continuous intercession, and proposing emulation of his virtues particularly the good quality of faith and zealous character of a husband and father. The quintessence of this recent document is for people to have recourse to St. Joseph's mediatory role in obtaining for individual, the family, and the whole world '*the grace of graces*', namely, *conversion*. The reason is because St. Joseph loved Jesus with a father's heart and, by extension, all the faithful followers of Jesus and all those whom Jesus came to redeem are loved tenderly by St. Joseph and he would want none of them to perish but be transformed, renewed, and

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, Apostolic Letter, December 8, 2020, <https://www.vatican.va> Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

converted, turning whole heartedly to the Lord Jesus, and be safe with him.

St. Joseph

Authentic memoirs of St. Joseph are recorded in the Gospel, the genuine extant records of him. He was from Galilee as of the house and lineage of David.¹⁶ He was a lowly carpenter ¹⁷ and Blessed Virgin Mary was betrothed to him as her husband.¹⁸ He was reckoned as a just man,¹⁹ who carried out God’s will as made known to him by God in dreams.²⁰ He was in attendance when the promised Messiah was born; adored the Saviour, ²¹ and became the father of the Saviour, and gave him the name, Jesus.²² He was very observant of what was revealed to him, and obeyed willingly the command of God.²³ In cooperation with Mary, Jesus was offered up to God, the Heavenly Father in the Temple of Jerusalem in accordance with the Law of Moses.²⁴ In times of trouble, he protected the baby Jesus from the assailant, Herod.²⁵ In collaboration with Mary, the betrothed, he looked for Jesus when the latter stayed behind in the Temple of Jerusalem, His acclaimed heavenly Father’s house.²⁶

This saint is important in our time as Pope Francis portends that our ‘lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people who we often overlooked and yet they shape the decisive events of our life’s history.’ St. Joseph is that man and

¹⁶ Luke 2:4.

¹⁷ Matt. 13:55.

¹⁸ Luke 1:27.

¹⁹ Matt. 1:19.

²⁰ Luke 2:22.

²¹ Luke 2:14.

²² Matt. 1:25.

²³ Matt. 1:24.

²⁴ Luke 2:22-35.

²⁵ Matt. 2:15-18.

²⁶ Luke 2: 41-50.

the saint who is unnoticed and yet played a significant role in the history of our salvation as intercessor, support, and guide.

The Understanding of Manhood and Masculinity in Africa:

Manhood denotes qualities traditionally associated with men, such as courage, strength, and sexual potency. Masculinity indicates qualities or attributes regarded as characteristic of men. In every society, gender relationships are determined by social norms and beliefs. The roles performed by males and females in the family and in the communities with the responsibilities assigned to these roles are socially constructed and are passed down by the socialization process. Family members, peers, teachers, religious leaders inculcate into an individual his/her position and the roles to be performed as at when due.²⁷

According to a research conducted in Nigeria in 2004 by a group of researchers,²⁸ males are assigned the head of the household which make them to display the attitude of dominance in decision making. The man is expected to provide for the family and protect the members of the family. Any proposed changes in the system would be legitimized by the traditional leaders who would inform their people of the changes. The society spells out:

1. What a male should be at different stages.
2. When he should be performing certain roles or assuming certain responsibilities.
3. How he should accomplish each of the socially defined roles and responsibilities.

²⁷ Janice E. Olawoye, et al. "Social Construction of Manhood in Nigeria: Implications for Male Responsibility in Reproductive Health", *Social Sciences and Reproductive Health Research Network, East Gate Road, University Collage Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria, Article* (April, 2004): 9, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/27794181/> Accessed: 14/3/02021.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 9-12.

Through formal and informal means such as jokes, social ridicules, and insinuations, a man is informed of what society expects of him. Men provide practical example by their behaviour in the home using counselling and advice to inspire character in their children, encouraging them to be hard working, form good character, and take care of the family in the future. The investigation revealed that people consider some occupations such as building/bricklaying, wine tapping, rearing of cattle as appropriate for males.²⁹

In another study in Ethiopia, there are many constructions of what it means to be a man or a woman. Masculine identity is seen as superior to feminine identity. The males manage the household, take major decisions or agree to share some of the decision making with the wife. To a boy growing up, the notion of masculine dignity and responsibility involves protecting the family and providing for it financially.³⁰

In Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), according to an investigation, masculinity encompasses a range of possible positions, identities, and performances and indicates ‘a set of attitudes and practices culturally deemed appropriate to men.’ Men want to be protector and the breadwinner but in many households they cannot meet the expectation because of the political situation in the country. As a consequence, they are frustrated and are full of rage.³¹

Thus, versions of manhood in Africa are:

1. Socially constructed.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gina and Nikki Van der Gaag. “Between Hope and a Hard Place: Boys and Young Men Negotiating Gender, Poverty, and Social Worth in Ethiopia”, *Working Paper (160)*, (Sept. 2016):13-15.

<https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files>.

Accessed: 14/02/2021.

³¹ Ingunn Bjorkhaug and Morten Boas, “Men, Women, and Gender Based Violence in North Kivu, (DRC), Fafo-Report (June 2014:39): 14.

<https://www.reliefweb.int/>, <https://www.fafo.no/en/publication/>.

Accessed: 30/08/2012.

2. Fluid over time and in different settings.
3. There are indigenous definitions of manhood by tribal and ethical group which are embedded in the social praxis.

Newer versions of manhood are shaped by Islam and Christianity coupled with western culture alongside peer pressures which filter down through the global media. Some common features of masculinity in Africa revolve around financial independence, employment/innovation for personal income, and the ability to start a new family. In Africa, especially in DRC, men's lives can be altered by conflict, fear, and displacement from abode and community.³²

Current Predicament in Three Different Countries:

1. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

DRC forms the largest country in size in sub-Sahara Africa region and the second largest country in Africa to Algeria. The country has grown in population to 86.79 million wherein 31 million live below poverty line. The country has one of the highest mortality rates in the planet because 43 % of the children under five years of age are not faring well. In DRC, traditionally, men are in charge of the household. Most families do fishing, hunting, and partake in subsistent farming to feed themselves with about 4 to 5 children. Women do not have some rights as men. Children are recruited and forced to train as children soldiers and experience poverty, sexual violence, diseases, many deprivations including clean water and food.³³ In another research, it was revealed that King Leopold II, the Belgium King who colonized DRC for over 70 years forced men to capture one another for slavery and used them as forced labour and took high taxes to do business. The torment split

³² Ibid. p. 14-15.

³³ Jennifer Prashad, "Realizing Children's Rights in DRC", *Article*, (May 19, 2020) <https://www.humanium.org/en/>. Accessed 31/08/2021.

families and many men went into exile to work and many families were destroyed. The repercussion is still lingering in DRC to the contemporary time. In modern time, it is common for men to have many wives especially in the rural areas. The goal is to have many children for the family's survival until adulthood. In many homes, women are burdened with the additional responsibility of paying schools fees. Male children advances further in education than female.³⁴

DRC is rich in natural resources such as bauxite, aluminium, cadmium, coal, cobalt, copper, coltan, diamonds, natural gas, gold, iron ore, lead, manganese, oil, silver, timber, uranium, and zinc. What DRC never had is a government interested in building an institution that will manage the wealth for the benefit of the people. Instead, sexual violence, looting, gender-based violence, torture, and disenfranchise of family life are what the country faces in recent times. In the year 2020 in DRC, human rights took a downhill turn. The Congolese authorities cracked down on peaceful protesters, journalists, and politicians and promoted senior officers known for their involvement in serious abuses and serious allegations over corruption.³⁵

In the Eastern Congo, numerous armed groups attacked civilians, killing and wounding many and forcing many people and family out of their homes with 5.5 million people internally displaced. Nearly 930,000 Congolese were registered as refugees and asylum seekers in many countries. Many people who criticize government policies were intimidated, threatened, beaten, arrested and in some cases prosecuted. In June 30, 2020, Belgium's present King Philippe expresses his deepest

³⁴ Jennifer J. Ziemke, "Democratic Republic of Congo", Article @ Advameg.Inc.2021. <https://www.everyculture.com>. Accessed: 8/3/2021.

³⁵ Ingunn Bjorkhaug and Morten Boas, p. 10-11.

regrets for the past injuries inflicted on the Congolese during the 75 years of colonial rule.³⁶

2. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The population of Ethiopia is 112 million and is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria and the fastest growing economy in the region, the Horn of Africa, with average growth of 9.4% from 2010/2011 to 2019/2020. The annual growth rate in economy decreased to 6.1% in 2019/2020 due to COVID- 19 pandemic. The increase is due to construction of industries and services. The country has also experienced worst locust invasion in decades and is the poorest in the region.³⁷ Literacy rates in Ethiopia are lower than regional averages. Half of the male population is literate; while the female population's range for literacy is about one-third to two-fifths.³⁸

World Bank is supporting Ethiopia to address its citizens' demand for basic human services such as education, health, clean water, improved livelihood and environmental protection. But the challenges are enormous and seem insurmountable in its developmental objectives to improve the living conditions.³⁹ A report from Ethiopia reveals that the security and human rights situation in the country is deteriorating. The Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed struggled to

³⁶ World Report 2021, "Democratic Republic of Congo" @Events of 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021> . Accessed: 14/06/2021.

³⁷ Gelila Woodeneh , "The World Bank in Ethiopia: Overview", *Report*, updated March 8, 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview> accessed: 22/03/2021.

³⁸ Assefa Mehretu," Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia", @ 2021 *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ethiopia/Federal-Democratic-Republic-of-Ethiopia-since-1995> Accessed: 07/07/2021.

³⁹ Gelila Woodeneh, "World Bank Group Statement on Current Situation in Ethiopia", New and Press Release, March 5, 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org>. Accessed; 14/05/2021.

maintain order in the middle of emergent turbulence and political pressure. There is increasing abuses by governmental security forces; attacks on civilians by armed groups, and deadly violence because of communal and ethnic conflicts.⁴⁰

In December 2019, many Amhara University students were allegedly abducted by armed thugs in western Oromia. In 2020, schools were closed until September affecting 26 million children. There has being a prolonged polarization over historical and complex situations about land, politics that impacted negatively on people's lives in 2020. There was a fight between the federal government forces and Tigray regional forces that sparked violence and led to 300,000 internally displaced persons and 96,000 refugees. In another testimony, it is discovered that more than 60,000 people have fled the conflict of Ethiopia's Tigray region to seek refuge in Sudan, the neighbouring country. Some of them became refuges for the second time in less than 30 years. It is a case where some of the Ethiopians were born a refugee and returned to the camp, and are raising their children as refugees in the same camp in Sudan.⁴¹

3. Federal Republic of Nigeria

The population of Nigeria is about 200 million and is the largest population in Africa. According to a report, the real GDP growth was estimated at 2.3 % in 2019. Furthermore, the real GDP growth is further projected to rise to 2.9% in 2020 and 3.3 % rise in 2021. The growth occurred mainly in transportation, oil sector, and information and communications technology. However, at the end of 2019, the total debt both internally and externally was \$83.9 billion. The

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2021" @Ethiopia Events of 2020. <https://www.hrw.org>. Accessed 14/05/2021.

⁴¹ Anthony Irungu, "Tigray Crisis: Why Sudan is a 'second home' to Ethiopian Refugees", @ 2021 BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-56374725>. Accessed 13/06/2021.

surplus in 2020 declined due to increase in importation of goods and lower oil revenues. Poverty remains widespread and unemployment is rising.⁴²

In another report in October 2020, there was a nationwide protest, calling on the authorities to end the police brutality and abolish an abusive police unit known as Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Protesters were harassed and attacked by security forces. In many repeated cases, the government is battling with the extremists, the armed Boko Haram and is in the 12th year of battle which has left over 7.5 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Between January and September 2020, at least 363 civilians were killed by the Islamist terrorists. In the northwest and parts of the south, there was intermittent inter-communal violence as herder-allied armed groups, vigilantes, and armed criminal gangs who have killed hundreds of civilians, kidnapped people for ransom, and cattle raiding. Moreover, there is widespread of sexual violence most especially against women and children. The effect of COVID-19 was devastating for the populous nation as the lockdown compelled the residents to stay indoors which has caused many businesses to close down and the economy of the country shrunk by 6%. However, the government continues to struggle with the insecurity challenges and allegation of corruption in every sector.⁴³

Reflection

Looking at the various situations in these countries, one would give up hope. However, it is said that one is better light a candle than cause darkness. The light at this perilous time is

⁴² African Development Bank Group, “Nigeria Economic Outlook”, Newsletter, @ 2021 African Development Bank. <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-west-africa-nigeria-economic-outlook>, Accessed: 22/04/2021.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2021” @Nigeria Events of 2020. <https://www.hrw.org> accessed 14/08/2021.

the gift of hope. Generally, hope gives the feeling that some desire will be fulfilled. It is about centering expectation in someone or on something. Hope allows people to approach problems with a mindset and a strategy suitable to achieve success. It provides goals and the motivation leading to achieving the goals. It is said that it is impossible to live without hope. Hope keeps the desire for something to happen in the future. To lose hope or give up hope leads to despair, darkness, helplessness, and despondency.

But God has always fulfilling his promises in our lives. We see the promise of God fulfilled in the life of Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Joseph and Mary.⁴⁴

Therefore, for all the men and husbands in these countries, we propose that they gaze their countenance on St. Joseph as they pay attention to 3 C_s - Consciousness, Curiosity (inquisitiveness, genuine interest), and Creativity.

1. *Being Conscious*: consciousness means becoming aware, being cognizant of the situation at hand. It is not helpful to bemoan the deplorable situations, lament, and sink into helplessness and depression. But one must be eager to outpace and rise beyond the depressive situation. When one is abreast with the circumstances, one is in the better position to think logically for the way forward and make small positive choices each day to move the self forward and thereby transcend the self. Anger, violence, and civil unrest cannot solve the above state of affairs. The victims of injustices of the countries need to rationally access their predicament and access the total effect of the condition on their family and think of harnessing their internally built resources- the gift of imagination and innovation- in order to take a laudable step out of helplessness, despondency, mediocrity, and mendacity.

⁴⁴ Luke 1: 26-37.

2. *Being curious*: this is a proactive inquisitiveness, developing a genuine interest in recovering from deplorable situation. Crises abound in African countries and information on the extent of the calamity filters throughout the world. The citizens are intelligent, talented, and knowledgeable in the use of modern technology to share information and use it for their betterment. Rather than dying in silence, the citizens, particularly the men, in an attempt to care for their family, could share their stories across the countries and discuss the issues affecting their families and come up with good ideas which could change the deplorable fate to proactive involvement in changing their story to becoming self-help, self-reliant. Even in the refugee camp, they can learn something good from one another. Small Skill-acquisition can take place. They could gather their children to educate them in all ramifications including respect of human rights and legitimate means of livelihood.

3. *Being Creative*: The biblical imperative rooted in the Old and New Testaments stresses that human beings have the commandment to work and have the obligation to do so in the right perspectives. The concept of labour is evident in the opening verse of the book of Genesis: “בָּרָא” (*baara*), which is a Hebrew word which means to create. God worked in order to create the world.⁴⁵ Accordingly, in order to achieve any meaningful development, there is an element of exertion of energy. Work is associated with God’s creation of the universe and is also related with what human beings are as evident in the book of Genesis⁴⁶ where we get some insight into human’s nature and the purpose of its existence.⁴⁷ *Adama* (representing human

⁴⁵ Gen. 1: 1.

⁴⁶ Gen. 2: 7, 21.

⁴⁷ Gen. 1: 26-28.

beings) was formed from the soil. They are to till the soil in order to make their living until they return to their Creator.⁴⁸ Work is a mandate from the Creator. When human beings work, they are replicating divine toil; fulfilling the obligation of maintaining humanity, and renewing the face of the earth in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Saint John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* insists that work is a fundamental dimension of our existence on earth ⁴⁹ as demonstrated in the book of Genesis.⁵⁰ God created, fashioned human beings, male and female in his image and likeness, and told them to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. The words are indicative of activities to be carried out in the world. By carrying out this mandate, every human being reflects and repeats the action of the God, the Creator. Work begins in the human subject and directs it towards an external object, which presupposes a specific dominion by people over the ‘earth’ and in its turn, work confirms and develops this dominion.

The ‘earth’ could mean a fragment of the visible universe that people inhabit and by extension it could also mean the whole of the visible world within the range of people’s influence where needs are met. To ‘subdue the earth’, the pontiff says, has many implications. It could mean that all the resources contained in the earth can be discovered through conscious activity of people, and be used for their needs. This is a process that embraces all human beings, every generation, every phase of economic and cultural development and it takes place within each human being. Each person subdues the earth through

⁴⁸ Gen. 3:19.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical, On Human Work, *Laborem Exercens*, September 14, 1981, on the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. <https://www.vatican.va> Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

⁵⁰ Gen. 1:27-28.

work in an uncountable ways. We dominate the earth by domesticating animals and getting our food and clothing from them and being able to extract various natural resources from the earth and seas. We ‘subdue’ the earth when we cultivate it and transform its products and adapt the products to our own use.⁵¹

This is so because Christ himself worked at a carpenter’s work bench.⁵² This is contingent on Christ’s words “My Father is working still and I too must work”⁵³ for the common good. Jesus proclaimed himself as a man of work, a craftsman like St. Joseph of Nazareth.⁵⁴ Jesus refers to God as his Father, the Vine Dresser.⁵⁵ God’s work sustains the world and He works with salvific power in the hearts of his people he has destined for “rest”⁵⁶ in union with Him in heaven after their sojourning on earth. With Christ’s example, there is a ‘Gospel of work’ where the basis for determining the value of human work is not the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing the work is a person. Thus, the dignity of human work is primarily in the subjective dimension. It is stated without ambiguity that we are called to work; work is for us and not us for work. Thus, it is the person who is the purpose of the work no matter the type of work.⁵⁷ The Christian truth about work opposes the various trends of materialistic and economic thought where human beings are treated as instruments of production.⁵⁸

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 3.

⁵² Phil 2:5-8.

⁵³ John 5:17.

⁵⁴ Matt. 13:55.

⁵⁵ John 15:1.

⁵⁶ Heb. 4:1, 9-11.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

The Dignity of Human Work:

Toiling is biblical; it is a phenomenon that is universally known and experienced:⁵⁹ The fact is unambiguous through:

1. Agricultural workers who do physical work.
2. Those who work in the mines and quarries.
3. The steelworkers and builders.
4. The intellectuals, scientists, technologists.
5. Services, doctors, nurses, women who bear the burden of their homes etc.

Through work, we transform our nature, adapting it to our own needs, achieve fulfilment as human beings and in a sense become more human beings.⁶⁰ It is when we comprehend the true meaning of work that we understand the meaning of the virtue of industriousness. Industriousness means to be diligent and hard working. It becomes a virtue when it makes an individual becoming good as a person. However, work should not be used to exploit, punish or oppress human beings but it should ennoble the dignity of the human person.⁶¹

Work as Foundation of Family life:

Work is a situation for making it possible to found a family since the family must be sustained and maintained. The Church teaches that the family is a community made possible by work and it is the first school of work within the home for every person. What goes on within the family shapes a person and the individual absorbs the values and contents of the family which in turn make up the culture of the society and the nation. Everyone combines the human identity with membership of a nation to increase the common good, and this is realized by working.⁶²

⁵⁹ Gen. 3:19.

⁶⁰ ST 1-11 q. 40, a.1; q. 34, ad.1.

⁶¹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 10.

In African Continent, there are 54 different nations, the second largest continent with many languages. An overview of the continent's main natural resources reveals that Africa is wealthy beyond compare. The continent is opulent in oil and natural resources; hence, it is the world's fastest-growing region for foreign direct investment. It has approximately 30% of the earth's remaining mineral resources.⁶³ Anthony Kelly avers that when each one lives in a community, he/she cannot escape the responsibility of living for others in the promotion of the common good.⁶⁴ In other words, as individual persons, we co-exist, in communities and in societies. In our responsible relationships with others, we not only 'co-exist' but we also 'pro-exist', that is we exist for the others in our freedom and exist as a progenitor. Every human person carries the grace and the burden of the whole human community; sharing and breathing a common culture, each one lives through others.⁶⁵ Thus, it becomes an obligation for the people in Africa to search for the multiple ways in which to make the world intelligible and hospitable to live for the common good. There are the natural resources to be used and cultivated for the common good.

As pointed out in *Laborem Exercens*, the resources of the earth can only serve us through work when we take over the ownership of the small parts of the various riches of nature, those on the ground, sea, land and space by making them our own bench work.⁶⁶

⁶³ Aljazeera News, "Mapping Africa's Natural Resources: an overview of the Continents main natural resources", Feb. 20, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com>, accessed: 18/05/2021.

⁶⁴ Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, (New York: Maryknoll Books, 2006), 119.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens.*, no. 12.

In this way, there are 2 sequential phases:

1. We acquire the knowledge to discover these natural riches and acknowledge the various ways in which they can be used by us and for us. We find (discover) and do not create them. This means that they are already prepared, ready for us to discover them, to use them correctly, legally, and creatively in the productive process. They are gifts ready made by nature, by God the Creator.
2. All the means of production- the machines and computers- are the result of the historical inheritance of human labour whereby people have gradually developed them through their intellect and experiences. Modern complex machines in factories, laboratories, and computers which are at the service of the workers are meant to achieve adequate progress and development of the society. They are mere instruments in the hands of the person. The technology and machines were invented, planned, built and perfected for human beings.⁶⁷

God is acknowledged as the Maker of all things but God entrusts the entire creation to human beings so that through dominion of all things, the name of God would be majestic in all the earth.⁶⁸ When human beings perform their work activities, they can look upon their work as:

1. Prolongation of the work of the Creator, God.
2. Service to their fellow human beings.
3. Their personal contribution to the fulfilment in history of the divine plan.

Consequently, dominion of the earth is not in opposition to God's power. It is rather the fulfilment of his designs, granting the responsibilities to humans to build, recreate, and renew the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, no. 34.

earth with God's blessings and human initiative.⁶⁹ Therefore, the lethargic and apathetic attitude to work in Africa is berated. The resources are for the development of Africa and we have them in abundance.

Working and Walking with St. Joseph, the Worker

African men have the obligation to walk and work with St. Joseph, and the Holy Family. As elucidated by Pope Francis in this Apostolic Letter, St. Joseph is an intercessor ⁷⁰ for the entire world and particularly for fathers and husbands in the following ways:

1. *St. Joseph as a devoted father, husband and defender of the Holy Family:* Jesus saw a tender and loving father in St. Joseph who walked with Him and fed Him. St. Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally and took active responsibility for his duties as a father and husband. He concretely exercised his fatherhood by being at the service of the entire plan of salvation, protecting Jesus and the Holy Family.⁷¹
2. *St. Joseph as a faithful follower, trusting in the promises of God and possessing ardent hope.* St. Joseph teaches us that faith can work through our fears, our frailties and weakness. Faith in God teaches us that in difficult times, we must never be afraid because God is in control. God revealed his saving plan to St. Joseph through dreams by which he submitted to the will of God. He taught Jesus to be obedient to the will of God and thus serves as true guardian for the mission of Jesus.⁷²
3. *St. Joseph as a committed worker and provider:* Pope Francis avers that God uses events and people to achieve His purpose and through that process, God works out

⁶⁹ Ibid, no. 34.

⁷⁰ Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, p. 2-7.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 2-5.

⁷² Ibid., p. 6-8.

humanity's redemption. God worked through St. Joseph's creative courage. He was a worker who earned his living and provided for his family and demonstrated the importance of dignified work in order to serve the family. The pontiff stresses that a family without work is vulnerable to difficulties, tension, estrangement and break-ups. God always find a way to save us when we show some creative courage, and by turning our problems into Him, trusting in His divine providence. The pontiff pointed out that the Holy Family has to face concrete problems like every other migrant and refugee families who risk their lives to escape misfortune, hunger, war, hatred, persecution, and poverty. St. Joseph is offered as the Patron for the orphans, as succour for the marginalized.⁷³ The economic predicament of African countries today call for a rediscovery of the value of authentic work and the importance of being creative with types of work that can feed the household.

Recommendations

1. Paul admonishes Christians to keep on working with fear and trembling to complete their salvation because God is always at work in them to make them willing and able to obey his own purpose. They must do everything without complaining or arguing so that they may be recognized as God's perfect children.⁷⁴ The wonderful redemptive works of God is perfected but we need to bring out the attributes and good characters by working because this is a way of trusting and believing in God's promises.
2. Standing and trusting in the passionate presence and promises of God. We need to trust in the grace of God, in

⁷³ Ibid., p. 9-10.

⁷⁴ Phil 2:12-16.

his love and goodness. Even though many are suffering and are in pain, God never abandons his people.⁷⁵

3. The dynamics of grace is active in each of the Africans, recognized or not. Grace is the power, the gift of God which enables us to do what we cannot do ordinarily by ourselves. Grace opens us to the mystery of otherness, moving us to be present and collaborate with people in the work of liberation. God works in us both to will and do what is good for the family and the entire community. Therefore, in this aura of economy of grace, the quintessential step is to claim the power manifested through grace to dispose us to a transformed spontaneity which aids us in our response to reach out to others in building, shaping, and articulating the fullness of the body of Christ⁷⁶ by working and eke out a way of meaningful living and livelihood. This is achieved by harnessing African resources to develop the continent. Creation through work becomes not a private affair but something we do jointly with others. Works bring us in direct relationship with others and with Mother Earth.

Conclusion

The Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, is valuable and relevant at this time especially for Africa. There are many families who are living in refugee camps and have given up all hope. But in St. Joseph, there is a light of hope to live by. There is the inspiration not to give up in face of turbulent situations. It is when we are at the low ebb of our time that we need to seek the intercession of St. Joseph to teach manliness, courageousness in the midst of persecution and the ability to work and act promptly when there is the need to protect the family.

⁷⁵ Isaiah 41:10.

⁷⁶ Jean-Marc Laporte, *Patience and Power: Grace for the First World*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press 1988) p 278, 279.

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GROW IN RELATIONSHIP WITH ST JOSEPH

Brother Kesiki Simon FSC⁷⁷

Abstract

This paper presents St Joseph as a character that lives and understands our human realities and invites each one of us to grow and bloom in relationship with him. Notwithstanding the fact that Joseph, Mary's spouse in the Bible, is that character who never uttered a word of his own, but his actions equipped Mary (all women) and Jesus (all children) with the audacity to tête-à-tête in a society that steps on the voices of women and children. Like all humans, irrespective of choice and stage of vocation, Joseph had his own exciting times; he had doubts and disillusionments, not forgetting that he was on several occasions faced with situations that demanded him to make decisions. Joseph effectively transcended his daily realities and afforded the Holy Family wholehearted loving experiences. This paper further asserts the loud silence of St Joseph as a canonical tact that beckons on all Christians to a 'talk less and do more' life. In an age prone to religious excesses at the expense of sound spirituality, Joseph's life is seen as a direct call. Summarily, growing in relationship with St

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Joseph is demonstrated as the ability to grow, especially in turbulent times.

Preamble

Linda Carroll, the well-known American family therapist, designed a non-linear cycle that will be adapted in discussing the call to grow in relationship with St Joseph. St Joseph represents the model for all vocations and states of life: craftsmen and women, married couples (together, separated or divorced), priests, religious and all forms of singlehood within and outside the church. St Joseph also stands for the voiceless and the marginalized minority groups: those discriminated against because of gender and race, the mentally and physically challenged, those discriminated by ‘sacramentalism’ or tagged-sexual-orientations, those excluded for standing for the rare truth and the socio-economically bruised. This model is composed of five components that relationships go through.

The components of this non-linear cycle are Merging, Doubt, Disillusionment, Decision and Wholehearted Love. Here, we shall expound on each with precise references to the life of St Joseph as our daily model and inspiration to continue growing in relationship with his fatherly disposition.

Joseph: The Universal Saint

As life progresses, we begin to see and believe more and more in the interconnectedness of events. I was born and baptised in a St Joseph’s parish. So, my baptismal card bears St Joseph’s Catholic Church somewhere in North East Nigeria. To add to this fact, three months ago I got transferred and currently I am worshipping at a St Joseph’s Catholic Parish in South West Nigeria. As if that is not enough, I am writing this article in the month of March, a month traditionally dedicated to St Joseph. Coincidentally, my current residence is next to a secondary school known as St Joseph’s College along Ife Road in Ondo City. Guess what, I belong to a choir and WhatsApp group

called St Joseph's Choir. To crown it all, Pope Francis on December 8, 2020, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, declared that this year will be dedicated to St Joseph till December 8, 2021. This makes growing in the relationship with St Joseph not an option but a canonical call to action.

Styled Silence of Joseph

In her celebrated article: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Gayatri Spivak paints an image that can sketchily be related to Joseph vis-a-vis his wife, Mary. The Blessed Virgin Mary seems to enjoy more veneration within Christendom and Islam. While Mary enjoys the status equal to that of a prophet in Islam, Joseph is not mentioned totally in the Koran (Quran 19:20-22). Scores of devotions, pious groups and angelic hymns are composed in the name of Mary. It is common knowledge among Catholics that on Saturdays one of the hymns to the Blessed Virgin Mary is sung as the recessional hymn at holy masses. In Nigeria for example, it is common to hear 'Our Lady of Nigeria hail...' coined from 'Our Lady of Fatima hail...' all to show the popularity of the Blessed Virgin. Can you sing two hymns in honour of St Joseph? I am cautiously cognizant of the likely dangers such conclusions could brew if done hastily. I risk the above mention for the reason that St Joseph is 'old enough' to speak for himself.

Subaltern is a neutral term for any class of people who face one form of oppression or the other. Frantz Fanon would call Joseph the 'canonical' Wretched of the Earth' in the way the Monseigneur Bienvenu in Hugo Victor's *Les Misérables* would cover up for St Joseph in the way he did for the young man who steals from him.

Ironical Silence of Joseph

Would subalternity really be applicable to St Joseph simply because his voice was never heard throughout the Gospels? In

Benjamin Franklin's philosophy, words may show a man's wit but actions show his meaning. Since Joseph had no words but actions, the actions he displayed definitely depicted tonnes of meaning. The way he conducted his affairs is an invitation to grow in relationship with him, especially during this year. In the Jewish setting, children and women were relegated as is still the experience in many parts of the world (Matthew 18:21). About four out of 10 women (42 per cent) in the United States of America say they have faced discrimination on their jobs for the simple fact of their gender.

In a research conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2017, the women reported forms of discrimination they faced ranging from earning lesser than their male counterparts while doing the same job to being put on the back burner on important decision processes and assignments. In the face of these, however, we see that the actions of Joseph put Mary and Jesus before his own needs. Thus, St Joseph becomes the advocate for women and children. Ironically, his advocacy is designed in silence and he ends up giving a voice to Mary and Jesus who are the real 'subalterns' here.

Another image St Joseph epitomises is of him playing the back-bencher role in the church despite his many titles. He is so prominent in the core structure of the Holy Catholic Church. Devotions to St Joseph began as far back as the year 800. He doubles as the Patron and Protector of the Universal Church instituted in 1870. He is also Patron of Happy Death according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. St Joseph is Patron Saint of Workers. Pope Pius XII declared May 1, as feast of St Joseph to carry the mind of the people away from the communists' May Day. In May 1, 2013, Pope Francis inserted St Joseph in the Eucharistic Prayer II, III and IV having been inserted in the Eucharistic Prayer I earlier. The Litany of St Joseph is one of the most beautiful treasures of the church. How many members of the Block Rosary movement talk about the appearance of St Joseph in Fatima on the day of the Miracle

of the Sun? Growing in relationship with St Joseph is about living beyond yourself to ensuring others fully live.

One is left to ask if Joseph's silence was a question of a moral dilemma, but no. He had all reasons to talk and stage even a confrontational dialogue with the angel. It was common for anyone facing the angel to ask the angel questions and even argue, and like Jacob, wrestle with the angel. Mary asked the angel (Luke 1:34) 'How can this be?' Zachariah questioned the angel (Luke 1:8), the prophet Zachariah questioned the angel (Zach. 1:9). Jacob in Genesis 32 went as far as wrestling with the angel of God. So, Joseph had all reasons to talk, question and assert himself before the angel. Again, it was Jewish not to marry a woman with pregnancy, and Joseph's 'Jewishness' was never a question. He was a quintessential Jew before and after taking in Mary. He presented his child Jesus in the temple according to the Jewish law (Law of Moses) when Jesus was 40 days old and he also presented two young pigeons (Luke 2:22-40). There are no records of Joseph having a speech impediment like Moses (Exodus 4). Moses complained of being 'heavy of speech' and to having 'uncircumcised lips'. Despite all these complains, Moses still spent most of the time talking and giving speeches on various issues; interceding for the Israelites, at the covenant, before and during the presentation of the commandments on Mount Sinai and on forbidden foods from the Plains of Moab (Deut. 1:5-7, 5, 14:3-21, 26).

A lead from Carroll's *Cycle of Love*

1. The 'Merging' Excitements of St Joseph

The scripture tells us that he who finds a wife, finds a treasure (Proverbs 18:22) and this comes with untold excitement and bliss. Meeting Mary was no doubt a delightful experience for Joseph. The news of being received into a religious congregation or seminary to commence training too comes with blissful feelings. This is what the stage of merging focuses

on. As a Jew, Joseph was aware of the promised Messiah and to have had a dream telling him that he was the one to name the Messiah was certainly a thing of joy (Matthew 1:21). The safe delivery of Jesus in a manger and the visit of the shepherds thereafter with gifts made Joseph's day (Matthew 2:1ff). When a woman is in the labour room, the man paces on the corridors anxiously; only wishing for the best. The period of uncertainty that precedes the safe delivery is not easy, but it forms the joy that follows. The news of a safe delivery with the mother and child in good health are merging experiences. Joseph knew the joy. The vocation of Christian life has 'merging moments' too. Paraphrasing Job 2:10: 'If bad things come my way and I have to receive them, why can't I celebrate the moments of joy in my Christian calling?'

(Matt. 2:13-23) 'Arise, take the child with his mother and go to Egypt for Herod seeks to kill the child.' We are told Joseph arose and hurriedly took the child and fled. The experience of a narrow escape comes with lots of relief when the epinephrine or adrenalin subsides. Joseph was told in the dream (just as he was told other things to do) that the child to be born would be the saviour. At any time in the life of a parent, the future of a child is a concern. The thought of Herod hunting to kill the child Jesus and bringing the prophesy to zero was similar to the journey of Abraham going to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac his only child (Genesis 22ff). What the human person fears most is dealing with uncertainties. Joseph enjoyed that privilege of knowing what was ahead of him concerning Jesus. Mary's role was just to follow, no doubt puzzled at all that Joseph seemed to know beforehand.

Therefore, to grow in relationship with St Joseph is to be a character that inspires hope in others, especially our partners as married or members of a religious community.

Growing in relationship with St Joseph is knowing what joy is wrapped in the experience of finding your missing child after three days. More 'merging' was the fact that the 12-year-old

Jesus was among teachers of the law teaching and listening to them (Luke 2:41-52).

Today, cases of missing children have left thousands of families heartbroken for life. During Joseph's time there was nothing like the Missing Children's Network to assist parents find their children. You can imagine the joy of finding Jesus in the temple doing the best thing a father would love his child to do. We will notice that Joseph disappeared from the Bible immediately he found the child Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus had grown already and later in his ministry, his saying will bear direct influences from the life of Joseph.

2. Growing in St Joseph's 'Doubts'

A period came to St Joseph when he doubted his intention to wed Mary (Matt 1:18-22). This must have led him to go to bed even earlier than usual. Mary knew she was betrothed to Joseph, but she went ahead to accept that she was ready to conceive even by a power outside Joseph (Luke 1:38). Today we read the story knowing how it will end, but poor Joseph was in the dark; completely in the dark. We watch the drama of the visit of the angel to Mary and analyse how heroic Mary was; forgetting what Joseph had to go through. Imagine yourself in Joseph's position. Marriages go through doubts and so are the experiences of the celibate priests and religious in parishes and religious houses. I was expecting Mary to tell the angel that she was already engaged to Joseph; but no. Her response was suggesting she was more ready to conceive without Joseph if only the angel would answer her question of being a virgin. I was expecting Mary to tell the angel that she would discuss this matter with her 'guy' Joseph and get back to the angel. While Mary is hailed for accepting the words of the angel, Joseph's spirit wasted in distress and doubt.

Periods of doubt are normal in relationships and Joseph had his about Mary. He never allowed his emotions to overwhelm him, so he planned to divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:19). He had

doubts about the prophecies he got in the dream about the mission of Christ when the prophet Simeon gave very painful prophetic messages concerning the child Jesus at the presentation (Luke 2:34). Simeon turned to Mary and said of the child Jesus, ‘This child is destined to be a sign that will be rejected and a sword will pierce your soul on account of this child.’ Even Mary at this point adopted Joseph’s strategy. We are told Mary pondered these things in her heart (Luke 2:19). She could not speak. She was growing in relationship with Joseph her husband. Who was this child that would bring pains to the heart of my wife, Mary? Joseph must have thought over these issues. Let us not forget that he had a blueprint of what the child was to be going by the series of dreams he had had at the beginning of the relationship. Growing in relationship with St Joseph is to be conscious of doubts at some points in life.

3. The ‘Disillusionment’ of Joseph: Source of Growth

A thorough understanding of the point of departure and estimated destination is very crucial. Joseph knew his point of departure as being the corporeal father of Jesus, but at a point, his estimated destination became blurred and almost distorted. He recalled the angel telling him the child would be great and save his people (Luke 2:11, Acts 13:28). Although he never asked the angel how the child Jesus would save the world in practical terms? Joseph would never talk I dare you! But he had in mind that his child would save the world. Joseph was disillusioned when he had to take the child to and from exile in Egypt under strenuous conditions (Matthew 1:5, 2:13-18). Before Jesus ever went the way of the cross, Joseph had saved Jesus first.

Therefore, Jesus’ moving the way to the cross was a manifestation of the relationship with Joseph. Mary almost hurried Jesus at the wedding in Cana to appear public before his time (John 2:1-12).

Joseph's situation is not different from that of the years of anti-colonial struggles by Africa's nationalist leaders. Derek Wright clearly puts it that the nationalist leaders had a better view of what they were fighting against than of what they wanted to gain from the fighting. They knew that they needed a change from the life of slavery from colonial masters and mistresses but did not have the exactitude of the freedom they craved. Joseph knew exactly where he was coming from (Acts 13:38) but not where the child was going to take him in the process to save the world. What of when the child Jesus disappeared for three days? Definitely, this was not what Joseph thought he understood from the messages in the dream given by the angel. Perhaps he had become too naïve just following subsequent dreams simply because the first dream gave him Mary (but who would not?). The cases of missing children down the centuries are in the increase. One just needs to check the website for Missing Children's Network.

4. By Joseph's 'Decisions' We Grow

St Matthew's Gospel was addressed to the Jewish community and assumingly positioned to demonstrate allegiance to the laws of the Israelites. One would expect by this, therefore, that Matthew would present Joseph or any other character as acting to keep to the Mosaic laws. One would expect that a total adherence to the letter of the law be demonstrated in the gospel so that Jewish community would easily relate to it. Joseph, however, subtly acts directly contrary to the written law. For example, in Deuteronomy 22:21, the Israelites were expected to treat women who got pregnant before marriage as follows:

'Then they shall bring the young woman to the entrance of her father's house and the men of the town shall stone her to death because she committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house. So, you shall purge the evil from your midst.'

Joseph's reaction was already defined by the law as we can see. However, when Joseph got to know that Mary was with a child, Matthew 1:9 says:

'...Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. When he had resolved to dismiss Mary quietly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as 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.'

Without saying a word, Joseph went ahead and followed the instruction he received in the dream and took Mary.

Guy Kawasaki asserts that the hard part is implementing the decision not making it. Joseph made the decision to take in Mary as he was told in the dream and went ahead to implement that decision by actually taking Mary as his wife (Matt. 1:24-25). Without a word, we see Joseph speaking for Mary. The hardest things to do, Kawasaki adds, are the right things. So 'hardest things to do' is synonymous to 'the right things to do'.

To grow in relationship with St Joseph is to do the hardest things which are the right things. What choices are we making as institutions and as individuals? Jesus falls in the group of the minority of men who will not stone a woman to death. Jesus learns this virtue through growing in relationship with his father, Joseph. Jesus recalls that Joseph had given a voice to Mary (his mother) by not allowing her to be stoned as stipulated in the Law of Moses. Jesus had experienced the boldness in Joseph's action for going ahead to take Mary as wife. Joseph taught Jesus that it was not logical for a woman to commit adultery alone as one can readily observe the absence of any stipulated punishment for men who impregnate virgins. Men are totally absent in Deuteronomy 22:21 and John 8:7 - the case of the adulterous woman.

5. *Growth in 'Wholehearted Love'*

Jesus was able to understand the pains of the woman caught in the very act and was to be stoned by the men (John 8:1-11). When Joseph took in Mary with her pregnancy, the child in the womb felt the difference. We can confidently deduce that Jesus leapt in the womb of Mary when Joseph took her long before Mary's visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1:44-45). Joseph taught him without words respect for women.

Therefore, to grow in relationship with St Joseph is to give back life to those who have lost hope in their religions, political structures, educational and socio-economic procedures and bureaucracies. We understand why Jesus quietly wrote on the ground and told the elders, 'If you know you are without sin; be the first to cast a stone at the woman.' Joseph without words had demonstrated that attitude.

Pope John Paul II wrote in his apostolic exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos*, that St Joseph is the first guardian of the divine mystery which is Jesus. The 'divine mystery' was entrusted to St Joseph not by accident but because Joseph was wholeheartedly love. To have led the divine mystery is to have understood the divine mystery.

'The greatest gift in man's life is love. Everything you see in this room was bought by either blood or love,' Sultan Amar advised his son, Auda, in the in the movie *Black Gold*. The Holy Family feast was instituted by Pope Benedict XV in 1921 and it is a feast that became possible because Mary and Jesus learnt to grow in relationship with St Joseph.

Conclusion

In a world obsessed with titles and fame, the level headedness of Joseph is the way to grow. In a world where the 'fake' is celebrated and the 'real' is ridiculed, growing in relationship with St Joseph becomes the way to the 'divine mystery'. Moments of joy are part of the Christian journey and moments of doubt are inevitably crucial in the journey to salvation.

Disillusionment leads us to rethink and refuse our paths. The call to decision reshapes the vision to the next direction in striving to lead an authentic life according to the precepts set by the life of St Joseph.

Ultimately, the goal is to live full lives following the wholehearted love shared by the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. As usual, St Joseph the key to the Holy Family is mentioned last.

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PATRIS CORDE, A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract

When life is well lived it becomes a blessing, going further than just the lived experience of the individual to become a testimony of many others who now witness out of their encounter to the goodness that adorns the beautiful soul. No one who truly lives live alone, for living is always a relationship that brings heart together, creates warmth that assures and continuously generates hope. A theological reflection on the life of any individual is thus an indication that such an individual had lived in worthy relationship with God and becomes a light on the lampstand giving brightness to others (cf. Mt 5:15). The life of St. Joseph, pictured in the Apostolic Letter Patris Corde of Pope Francis, is a call to see the splendour of God's glory in the life of St. Joseph, who lived the daily ordinary life in extraordinary ways. It is the aim of this article, therefore, to reflect on the life of St. Joseph through the lens of the document, giving attention primarily to the title, aim and contents. This will afford us the opportunity to see the beauty hidden in the title, the wisdom in

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the aim, the clarity in the intention and the practicality of the message. St. Joseph is a Saint rooted in the daily life experiences of every one of us and he is a sure sign of holiness for all who desire to serve God in simple fidelity to their daily task and in total abandonment to God's providential guide. He is a true model of building a sincere heart of love for God, family and all.

Keywords: Heart · Father · Imitation · Service · Virtue · Ite ad Ioseph · Prayer · Intercession

The Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde* (With a Father's Heart) of the Holy Father Francis, written on the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, reflects on the life of St. Joseph in relation to the divine incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and His Blessed Mother, Mary.

“With A Father's Heart”

Patris Corde opens on a very descriptive note with reference to the degree on which the beloved Joseph of Nazareth loved the only begotten Son of the Father, the Word incarnate, entrusted to his care. “WITH A FATHER'S HEART” reflects more than just an action. It relates rather a way of life or a way of being, which characterizes the person and life of St. Joseph. The eloquence of the descriptive phrase evokes a sentiment of authenticity and fact. To love with one's heart is an indication of a tender and sincere concern for the beloved. It echoes a love that is prepared to go any length for the sake of the beloved and that makes the beloved ever present to the one who loves. True love transcends the self and makes one pour out the self effortlessly for the good of the beloved. This love sentiment is summarily captured by St. Paul when he wrote: “love is patient, love is kind... Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all

things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

The characteristics of love enumerated above, fit the love description presented by *Patris Corde* (PC) and make glowing the vocation to fatherhood which stood St. Joseph out as the head of the family of Nazareth and one who fulfils all that is required of him disinterestedly. Joseph’s only desire was God and the fulfilment of all that He commands. He assumed every responsibility over the child Jesus as though he were His biological father and went every mile to fulfil the requirements of the law in making him a trueborn son of his family and the human family at large, such that no one in their immediate environment or elsewhere, except to whom it was revealed, had the faintest idea of the paternity distance between Joseph and Jesus. Thus, this cluelessness is well expressed in different parts of the Gospels where Joseph was presumed to be the biological father of Jesus (cf. Mt 13:55, Lk 3:23, Jn 6:42). Matthew and John expressed clearly the opinion of the people as regards paternity in a very common sense that everyone would judge, that is, biological, without probe, since the situation surrounding the conception of the child Jesus was an unprecedented phenomenon and, more so, because it happened within a legitimate union of a husband and wife. Luke on the other hand makes this more interesting, expressing the assumption of the people by putting in invited commas “as was supposed” or “as was thought”, while narrating the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (cf. Lk 3:23). The clause introduced by Luke is indicative of his own later knowledge and faith in Jesus, the Son of God. In that manner, he affirmed the miraculous incarnation of Jesus and emphasizes His divinity. St. T. Aquinas noted that Luke made the addition “for safeguarding Mary’s good name”⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologica* III, q. 28, art 1

It is to be noted, however, that Luke had earlier, in Chapter 2:33, used the term “father” to describe Joseph without any clause added. The passage reads in Greek: Καὶ ἦν ὁ **πατήρ** αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἡ **μήτηρ**, θαυμάζοντες ἐπὶ τοῖς λαλουμένοις περὶ αὐτοῦ - translated word for word as “*And were the **father** of Him and the **mother** marveling at the things having been spoken concerning Him*” (emphasis mine). Furthermore, Luke uses the same term “father” at the event of the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple. The passage reads: “When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” (Lk 2:48). While there is some contention on the usage of the word “father” in 2:33 (with some translation using father and others using Joseph), all, old and modern, texts agree on the term “father” in 2:48, without discrepancy. These passages, thus, makes it clearer that it was not Luke’s intention to deny ascribing fatherhood to Joseph but that he rather only tried to make clearer that the knowledge of the Jews of the time was limited, and rightly so, in understanding the depth of the fatherhood of Joseph in relation to Jesus.

The Aim of *Patris Corde*

The Holy Father, at the concluding part of the document, noted that “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”. This aim, as it were, could be better understood within the contest of its triadic dimensions, namely: a) increasing in love for St. Joseph b) Implored his intercession c) Imitating his virtues and zeal.

- a) Firstly, by *increasing Our Love for Joseph*, the first call of the aim of the Apostolic Letter suggests that the person of St. Joseph is not loved yet as he should be loved, hence the call to do something about it. This position is tenable because St. Joseph’s role and place in the history of Salvation and in the

service of the interest of Jesus is not yet known or appreciated as it should be. Being a man who enjoyed but a little mention in the Gospels, his place and significance could easily be brushed aside but a deeper look at the little events recorded or reported about him show that he deserves more than he received by all those who hold his Son dear to their hearts. It is to this that the need for increase in love for St. Joseph becomes pertinent. In fact, the call to increase our love for St. Joseph, is a call for us to become “Josephs”, that is, for us to increase, since the name Joseph itself implies increase (Cf. Gen 30:24). The awakening call is not definitely going to add to the greatness of the saint, since he has been raised to the greatest height, after his beloved spouse Mary, it rather would be for us a help to a deeper appreciation of the goodness of God in the life of such a faithful servant.

Upon this first dimension rests the remaining two dimensions because the depth of love we have for someone determines how much we are ready to do for such a person. If we increase our love for St. Joseph, because of his love for the Son of God, we surely would want him also to be known by others, hence the promotion of the devotion to St. Joseph that manifests in imploring his intercession or seeking his assistance. St. Joseph is a saint of hidden life, who preferred to decrease while Jesus and His mother increase, yet like the Queen of the night flower which, though does not share the beauty of the Rose or the Lilly, nevertheless, has a scent which surpasses all others in the quiet of the night, when the beauty of nature seem to have been obscured by the darkness of the night. The silent flower releases scents in volume to the glory of God and gladness of human hearts. Like the Queen of the night, the deeds of Joseph speak loudly in silence, and its volume echoes till date in hearts that know the value of true love. The Holy Father says in this regard “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” (PC).

When the love of/for Joseph increases in us then we would also discover the benefits of so faithful a steward that Pharaoh found when in the Old Testament he entrusted the governance of his kingdom to the old Joseph and would not hesitate to refer all that comes to him for help to him, saying as the Scripture recorded: “*ite ad Ioseph*” - go to Joseph (Gen. 41:55). The direction Pharaoh pointed the people and the words with which he admonished them are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. His words remain golden and they communicate deeply to the heart of the devotion to the new Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and father of Jesus. No doubt the lives of the two Josephs, known to be both sons of Jacob are so much interwoven that some have suggested that the Old Testament Joseph was a forerunner to the New Testament Joseph, such that the lives and activities of the New Testament Joseph was another episode of the Old Testament Joseph. Their interwovenness is so strong that no other figures in the entire Old and New Testaments have such striking relationships and mission. In this regard Pope Pius IX wrote: “In the same way that God placed that Joseph, Son of the Patriarch Jacob, over the land of Egypt, so that he might provide grain for his people, so also, with the arrival of the fullness of times, when he was about to send His Only Begotten Son to earth as Saviour of the world, did He choose another Joseph, of which the first was a type and figure, who having been made head and master of the house and of his possessions, he chose him guardian of his greatest treasures” (*Quemadmodum Deus*).

b) The call of the Holy Father to implore the intercession of Joseph could be expressed still in the words of the same Pharaoh, who directed both the Egyptians and all foreigners to Joseph saying: “*ite ad Ioseph, et quid quid obis dixerit, facite*” - Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you (Gen. 41:55). It is to be remembered that at the point in the life of the Egyptians there was to be and indeed there was turbulence all over the land and over the earth. It is worth noting that it was at this point of emergency that the person of St. Joseph was most required. His promptness to respond and his ability to weather difficult storm stood him out as “the man of the season”, and indeed a man of all seasons. Joseph made a wonderful preparation for the famine that was to befall the land and more than just gathering for its sake, he was able to disburse all accordingly, for the common good of all men. More than just this example in the life of the Old Joseph, we see the same significant event happening in the life of the New Joseph, whom God trusted with the care of His household to watch over his most treasured pearls on earth. Joseph indeed was the man chosen to prepare the ground for the birth of the Son of God. Like the Joseph of old who preceded his brothers to the land of Egypt were they will eventually find life and be saved from the famine, Joseph, the father of Jesus, also preceded the Old Testament Patriarchs into the New Testament in order to welcome the Savior of the world and as such offer to the world the one who is life and who came to give life abundantly to all (cf. Jn 10:10).

The resilience of St. Joseph in the face of difficulty has been noted over time and for this the Church never fails to invoke him at all times and most especially at moments of difficulty. This idea was well considered when the Holy Father, Pius IX, in 1870 declared him the Patron of the Universal Church. The era was described by the Pope as “most sad”. The Decree reads in part: “Now, in these most

sad times, the very same Church, on every side attacked by its enemies, and oppressed by the gravest evils, such that the impious men thought that the gates of hell had finally prevailed against her, by means of the most Excellent and Venerable Bishops of the entire Catholic world, sent to the Supreme Pontiff their supplications, and those which the faithful committed to their care, asking that he deign to constitute St. Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church.” The request of the Venerable Bishops and People of good will who sought the need for the intervention of the humble Guardian of the House of Nazareth was the force behind the proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church.

The time we are living today has also become turbulent in many forms and especially with the outbreak of the Corona Virus that continues to ravage the world, living nothing but fears, apprehension, hunger, isolation, social distancing, unemployment, sickness and death in its paths. This era, also marked by extreme ideologies of freedom and fluid morality, threats to freedom of worship and various acts of terrorism etc., where nothing seems certain anymore and integrity of service fast eroding, the declaration of the Year of St. Joseph, to seek his intercession in a universal way for the Catholic Church is timely. In fact the Holy Father, Francis, said his desire to appreciate more fully the central role St. Joseph played in the history of salvation increased during the months of pandemic. In his words: “My desire to do so increased during these months of pandemic, when we experienced, amid the crises, how ‘our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked’” (PC). Joseph, like many silent workers are often forgotten and overlooked.

We need the help of St. Joseph to help us find our peace and focus and be once again determined to muscle our strength to realize the utmost for the interest of Jesus in every given circumstance. The man who knows how to

weather the storm of life and faith will always remain a guide when the winds of trouble are about us and the gates of the underworld threaten to prevail against us. For this Pius VI says “The Church wants him as its protector with the unshakable confidence that he, to whom Christ desired to entrust the protection of His frail human infancy, will desire to continue from Heaven his caregiving mission to guide and defend the Mystical Body of the same Christ, always weak, always threatened, always dramatically in danger.”⁸⁰ Pope St. John Paul II also noted that the Church always needs the intercession of St. Joseph. He wrote: “His protection is an efficacious defense against the dangers which arise, and even more, he is a great support in taking up the work of the New Evangelization... I exhort everyone to entrust, with perseverance, this work to the intercession of St. Joseph.”⁸¹ The recognition of St. Joseph’s power of intercession is what endeared him to many who heeded in a very strong manner the counsel of Pharaoh “for all your needs, go to Joseph.” Being the one who was most close to the heart of Jesus, in the home of Nazareth, after the Blessed Virgin Mary, Joseph knew how to address the needs of Jesus and how best to approach him for any need. As one, who never recoiled at moments of need for the incarnate word, the Lord will surely not also recoil at his request for his brothers and sisters in their earthly pilgrimage. Of this assurance St. Theresa of Avilla would say: “I cannot call to mind that I have ever asked him at any time for anything which he has not granted; and I am filled with amazement when I consider the great favours which God hath given me through this blessed Saint; the dangers from which he hath delivered me, both of body and of soul” (Autobiography,

⁸⁰ PAUL IV, “Homily of March 19”, 1969.

⁸¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Discourse to the Faithful of the Diocese of Kalisz”, Nov. 6, 1997.

Chapter 6). St. Thomas Aquinas spices this position saying: “Some Saints are privileged to extend to us their patronage with particular efficacy in certain needs, but not in others; but our holy patron St. Joseph has the power to assist us in all cases, in every necessity, in every undertaking.” Thus, he added “... the power given to St. Joseph is unlimited: it extends to all our needs, and all those who invoke him with confidence are sure to be heard”. The powerful grace of intercession bestowed on St. Joseph owes its source to the tender and loving care with which he cared for the Lord and stands always in the gap for Him in His incarnate fragility. St. Gregory Nazianzen, recognizing the splendor of God’s grace in St. Joseph was quoted to have said, “The Almighty has concentrated in St. Joseph, as in a Sun of unrivalled lustre, the combined light and splendor of all the other saints”.⁸² Drawing from these, St. Francis de Sales says: “Nothing will be refused him [St. Joseph], neither by Our Lady nor by his glorious Son.”⁸³

Pope Francis is quite aware of the beautiful ideas of the Saints and his predecessors about St. Joseph and he has himself experienced it such that he says to us during our audience to Him, after our General Chapter in 2018: “I have a great love for St. Joseph, because he is a man of silence and strength. On my table, I have an image of St. Joseph sleeping. Even when he is asleep, he is taking care of the Church! Yes! We know that he can do that. So when I have a problem, a difficulty, I write a little note and I put it underneath St. Joseph, so that he can dream about it. In other words, I tell him: pray for this problem”. St. Joseph, no doubt, prays for us and comes to our aid, if not, as St. Joseph Marelllo says: “If

⁸² St. Gregory Nazianzen, in Antony J. Patrignani, SJ, *A Manual of Practical Devotion to St. Joseph*, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1982, 72.

⁸³ St. Francis de Sales, in Andrew Doze, *Saint Joseph: Shadow of the Father*, trans. Florestine Audett, RJM, Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1992, 56.

St. Joseph do not grant graces, he would not be St. Joseph (Lett. 173).

The conviction of the Saints and the Magisterium of the Church are the examples of faith we have to also fly to the patronage of St. Joseph, not only so that he may help us in our necessities or at moments of needs but more especially that we may be able to imitate his examples and in the words of St. Joseph Marello, be able to serve the interest of Jesus, his Son, as he did (cf. Lett. 76). With this we consider the intention of the Holy Father, Francis, in proposing that through this year dedicated to St. Joseph, we may be able to ‘imitate his virtues and zeal’ for service and holiness. St. Joseph Marello was aware of the ability of St. Joseph to school others in virtues, as he imparted on the young Jesus, that he entrusted his Sons, the Oblates of St. Joseph, to the fatherly care of St. Joseph. With conviction of faith, they are to pray to the Patriarch saying: “Here we are, all yours, O Joseph, and you be all ours. Show us the way; support us at every step; guide us where divine providence wants us to arrive. Be it long or short the journey, smooth or rough, whether the goal is seen clearly in sight or not, whether in a hurry or slowly, with you we are sure to go always well” (Lett. 208). St. Peter Julian Eymard would say: “when God wishes to raise a soul to greater height, he unites it to St. Joseph by giving it a strong love for the good of the saint”. St. Josemaria Escriva, says “Joseph can tell us many things about Jesus. Therefore, never neglect devotion to him – *Ite ad Ioseph*”.

- c) The imitation of the virtues of St. Joseph quickens in us the ardent desire to want to fulfil the word of God in our lives. It opens up in us the disposition to place God first in our life and instills that hunger, which Christ described as the will of the Father, in us, such that like him, the will of God becomes the command of our lives and we will be ready always to respond to it without conditions. The attentiveness to the

will of the Father is the secret of Joseph's success in his stewardship in the home of Nazareth. We know that Joseph was a lover of the law and would do his best to keep it faithfully. He seeks only to please God and not indulge himself. The story of the Joseph of old rightly comes to mind here again, when he had the pressure from the wife of Potiphar to come to bed with him (cf. Gen 39:1-20). Joseph could have thrown every caution to the wind, being the one in charge of Potiphar's household, yet he never considered the invitation as an opportunity for pleasure but rather as the evil that it is in the sight of God. Joseph's emphatic response to her was: "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9b). Joseph always had God before him and, as a man who has fixed his gaze on his goal; he would let nothing debar him from attaining the target that lay before him. His Hunger was the will of God because he had chosen the Lord as his portion. Everything he ever wanted to live for and to realize was motivated by this force, "the Spirit of God". This became the catalyst for his actions, filling him daily with the zeal for service and holiness.

Since the lives of the Saints is a "concrete proof that it is possible to put the Gospel into practice", imitating St. Joseph will, therefore, open us up, first and foremost, to hunger for the will of God and to seek nothing but to fulfil it. This is the sense of Justice which Matthew refers to when it described St. Joseph as a Just man (cf. Mt. 1:19). A just man is not righteous only in the sight of God, he is also known to be just and righteous in the sight of his neighbours and all who encounter him. For justice to God is the demand of religion and justice to man is the demand of a right social order. One cannot be fulfilled without the other, even though like the commandments of love, one comes before the other, yet they are never to be separated. St. Teresa of Avila would say of learning virtue from St. Joseph: "would that I could

persuade all men to be devout to this glorious Saint; for I know by long experience what blessings he can obtain for us from God. I have never known anyone who was really devout to him, and who honoured him by particular services, who did not visibly grow more and more in virtue; for he helps in a special way those souls who commend themselves to him” (Autobiography, Chapter 6).

Learning virtue in relation to personal growth is well rooted in Joseph – his sense of intimate union with God, humility, hard work, life of silence, dedication to the interest of Jesus, right dealings with all, union with God, etc., are virtues desirous of this age and time. The sense of trust of Joseph to the divine providence should challenge our vision of wanting to struggle to have all to ourselves and pretend as though we have life itself under our control. Joseph’s prompt obedience on many instances was instrumental to the fulfilment of God’s plan in the salvation of man and in fact proved most effective in making him the savior of the infant Jesus when the power-drunk Herod sought to undo the child. We can go on and on in enumerating the virtues of this noble, yet humble, servant of the divine mysteries. One thing St. Joseph, however, request of us, and indeed of anyone who would wish to imitate him, is never to remove their gaze from Jesus. In contemplating Him the desire to love and live for Him grows unhindered in us and the joy of doing all things for His interest becomes utmost in us. So, anyone who desires to be like Joseph or be another Joseph must have his gaze fixed always on the Beloved Son of the Father and be ready to sacrifice all for his sake and for the sake of His kingdom.

Embracing the Document

The Holy Father, right from the beginning of the document, noted that the Gospels tell very little, yet enough, for us to appreciate the person of St. Joseph, to know what sort of father

he was, and understand the mission entrusted to him by God's providence. He, nevertheless, made reference to certain acts of Joseph, which marks the infancy narratives of the Messiah and was distinguished by Joseph's prompt obedience to the Divine will. The simplicity of Joseph's life is easily noted and his refuge in Nazareth which earned him the name Joseph of Nazareth and won the famous title "Jesus of Nazareth" was made evident. The emergence of Jesus, as one from Nazareth, changed a narrative which had for long held the people down to being considered as worthless or unimportant. The Lord created all humans equal and vested on everyone equal dignity, such that, the value and worth of our humanity is not measured by the goods in our possession but by His Life and Spirit in us. We are all children of the same Father and no one deserves to be discriminated because of background, colour, language, creed or location because much more than these differences, we are of the same image and likeness, blessed with hearts that are fashioned the same way, works the same way and serve as temple or dwelling place of the same God in everyone.

Pope Francis mentioned in the introductory part that "after Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse" (PC). Indeed, St. Joseph's role in the history of Salvation was for the first time universally proclaimed by the Church, when Blessed Pius IX declared him "Patron of the Catholic Church" in 1870, the 150th anniversary occasion of which brought about the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* and the declaration of the Year of St. Joseph". Following the declaration of St. Joseph as "Patron of the Catholic Church", Venerable Pius XII in 1955 established the "Feast of St. Joseph the Worker" on May 1 as a counter-celebration to the communists' May Day and thus proclaimed Joseph as "Patron of Workers". Saint John Paul II in 1989, following in the steps of his predecessors released the document hailing St. Joseph as "Guardian of the Redeemer". The silence and hidden life of St. Joseph was

succinctly brought to the fore in a delightful manner. Not mentioned in the document is also Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter *Quamquam Pluries* of 1889, *Bonum Sane* of Benedict XV in 1920, written on the 50th anniversary of *Quemadmodum Deus*.

The Holy Father structured the document, *Patris Corde*, in a seven-theme design reflecting the life of St. Joseph in the famous coat of many colours. These themes shall be tersely considered one after another as treated in the document.

1. *A beloved father*

The Holy Father here reflects on what constitutes the greatness of St. Joseph, namely the fact of his being the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus. Providence brought Joseph and Mary together in His own loving plan. Neither Joseph nor Mary was aware of what laid in store for them when the journey of their life together was begun. Joseph was indeed the luckiest of all men, the most blessed at that, to be privileged to have the holiest of persons of all time loved and cared for under his roof and under his care as husband and father. With his yes to the message of the Angel, he, like Mary, accepted to yield his entire life to the service of God and His sacred mysteries. As Pope Francis puts it: “he placed himself, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, ‘at the service of the entire plan of salvation’” (PC. 1). Such that St. Paul VI could reflect 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’” (PC. 1).

His role in the salvation history consequently endeared him to Christian faithful who saw in him the image of a true

father. This devotion thus reflects in the number of Churches dedicated to him nationwide, the numerous religious institutes, like ours, and other ecclesial groups, saints and individuals who felt inspired to live out his spirituality by bearing his name and by following his virtuous examples. Famous among his devotees for example are, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Joseph Marello, St. Andre Bessette, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, among others. They did not only imitate him but also persuaded others to cultivate devotion to him.

2. *A tender and loving father*

This theme begins with the beautiful expression of Luke 2:52 and references Joseph as a loving father who saw Jesus grow daily “in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favour”. The Holy Father adds: “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)” (CP. 2). Joseph was shown to have learnt the tender love of God, in praying the Psalms, and to have lived out His compassion. Joseph, like every man, had his moments of fear, but he entrusts those moments of weakness to God who strengthens and reassures, such that “even through his fears, God’s will, his history and his plan were at work”. Joseph, by this, teaches that “faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses” and “that amid the tempest of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course”.

3. *An obedient father*

Joseph as an obedient father lived out his vocation in obedience to the divine command as made manifest by his swift response to the Angel’s messages on the four occasions he had the dream encounter, namely: The

annunciation to Joseph which goes with the admonition “do not to be afraid to take Mary as your wife” and the command “you are to name him Jesus” (Mt 1:20); The command: “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt” (Mt 2:13); yet another command: “Get up, take the child and his mother and return to the land of Israel” (Mt 2:19) and the warning: “Having been warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee” (Mt 2:22). Joseph’s obedience was also captured by Luke to include, not only the divine command but also the positive law of the state. Luke says he made the challenging journey to Bethlehem with the expectant wife (Lk 2:5) and alongside his wife 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). The Holy Father noted that “in every situation, Joseph declared his own ‘fiat’, like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane” (CP.3). Joseph the obedient father also taught his son obedience in accordance with God’s command (cf. Ex 20:12; Lk 2:51), such that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews would say that Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8). His obedience made it clear that “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” (PC. 3).

4. *An accepting father*

The picture of St. Joseph as an accepting father is beautifully painted in *Patris Corde*. His acceptance attitude was contingent upon his unflinching trust in God’s providential care which he had learnt from the law of the Lord and His relationship with His people Israel. He accepted Mary unconditionally, as encouraged by the Angel Gabriel. As the

Holy Father quotes: “the nobility of Joseph’s heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity”. In our world where distrust had caused untold damage to marriages and family life, where violence of all sorts and display of egomaniac attitudes reigns, Joseph is presented as “the figure of a respective and sensitive man”. Joseph always sorts how best to act even when he lacked total understanding or clearer picture. He sorts to “protect Mary’s good name, her dignity and her life”. In his quest on how best to act, God enlightened his Judgement (cf. PC. 4). Hence, “Joseph’s attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak.”

The Holy Father also makes it clear that Joseph is our example when we sail through the storm without a clear vision or direction. Accepting the course of events from God, after we might have done what is possible on our part enables us to take responsibility and make them part of our history. He noted: “Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow”. Joseph’s example is not one that seeks to explain, but accepts. Joseph’s resignation, Pope Francis notes, is certainly not passive, “but courageously and firmly proactive”. The Holy Father added a beautiful note here to drive the message deeper home. He says: “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.” Trusting in the words of the Apostle Paul: “We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God” (Rom 8:28). To which St. Augustine adds, “Even that which is called evil”.⁸⁴ The Holy Father adds: “The faith

⁸⁴ *Enchiridion de fede, spe et caritate*, 3. 11: PL 40, 236.

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” (PC. 4).

5. *A creatively courageous father*

This point explains the courage which emerges in the way we deal with difficulties. It encourages us to engage and not give up or walk away from difficulties, which could also bring out of us resources we did not even think or know that we had (cf. Lk 5:17-26). Creative courage made Joseph wield through the night of danger in order to save the Infant King and His mother (cf. Mt 2:13-14). The command was given but the intelligence and courage was his’ to know how best to execute it and how to survive in the land of Egypt. Creative courage gives the occasion to be “able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence”. The Holy Father noted: “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” (PC. 5).

Joseph’s creative courage was dedicated totally to the service of Jesus and His mother, Mary. We are also encouraged to take care of the little Jesus(es) and needful Mary(es) “mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping (cf. Mt 25:40 – what you do to the least of my brothers, you did also to me). The Son of the Almighty came into our world in a state of great vulnerability” and Joseph was there for Him to nourish, defend, protect and save. For this Joseph could also be called the saviour of the Saviour. “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. 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*” (PC.5).

6. *A working father*

Patris Corde noted that “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 fruit of one’s own labour”. His place was recognized in the Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (On Capital and Labour) and he has been universally acclaimed Patron of workers, over time, as earlier noted. The Holy Father underscores that “work is a means of participating in the work of salvation...an opportunity for the fulfilment not only of oneself, but also of that primary cell of society which is the family”. Working persons cooperate with God in furthering the beauty of creation and thus become “in some way creators of the world around us”. The unfortunate condition of lack of employment opportunities, therefore, rubs many of the opportunities of contributing their quota to the ever growing need of the world in a dignifying manner. Pope Francis appeals that we “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*

Described as being “the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father”, Joseph lived out his fatherhood in quiet and humility. The Holy Father teaches that “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”. He further noted that “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”. In this consists the logic of

chaste love – “the logic of love is always the logic of freedom.” St. Joseph knew how to love in freedom. He never made himself the centre of things, though the head of the family. He focused rather on his selfless service, removed from any form of publicity or propaganda, making himself a true gift for Jesus and Mary. A true father will always know that the child is not here for him. He is rather called to be the light to enlighten the child in realizing the unique mystery he bears within himself – the realization of his God given purpose on earth. No child belongs to the parent, they are only gifts entrusted to their care.

Hence, the Holy Father concluded, “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.... a shadow that follows his Son”.

Conclusion

The Holy Father, through the Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, has opened before us a wealth of spiritual fountain from which we can all drink so as to be carried farther on our pilgrimage towards our eternal Home of Nazareth, where men now dwell with God perpetually, as God once dwelt temporarily with men on earth. This year of St. Joseph, as declared thus provides opportunity for Catholics to receive plenary indulgence, as contained in the decree for the declaration of the year. The plenary indulgence will apply to the faithful who under the usual conditions of sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, prayer for the Pope’s intentions and with a spirit detached from sin, participate devotedly in the Year of St. Joseph as indicated by the Apostolic Penitentiary, through: Meditating for at least 30 minutes on the Lord’s Prayer, or take part in a Spiritual Retreat of at least one day that includes a meditation on St. Joseph; Performing of a spiritual or corporal

work of mercy in imitation of St. Joseph; Praying the Rosary of Our Lady or of St. Joseph, as a family or engaged couples, so as to recreate the same atmosphere of intimate communion, love and prayer that was in the Holy Family; Entrusting ones daily activity to the protection of St. Joseph and invoking his intercession so that those seeking work can find dignifying work; Reciting of the Litany to St. Joseph or any other prayer to St. Joseph and interceding for the relief of all Christians suffering all forms of persecution; Reciting any legitimately approved prayer or act of piety in honour of St. Joseph, for example, “To you, O blessed Joseph” especially on “19th March, 1st May, the Feast of the Holy Family, on St. Joseph’s Sunday (according to the Byzantine tradition) on the 19th of each month and every Wednesday, a day dedicated to the memory of the saint according to the Latin tradition.”

As we avail ourselves the opportunities to be nourished by the life and spirituality of St. Joseph, our roots grow deeper and bodies extend in union with the Lord such that rooted in spirit with hearts full of love we can all like St. Joseph commit ourselves entirely to the service of Jesus, where He calls us, in the imitation of St. Joseph and in Union with Mary His spouse.

References

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