



SAINT JOSEPH. MYSTERY OF LOVE

Reflection on Pope Francis' letter Patris Corde

in the year of St. Joseph (8.12.2020-2021)

Monsignor Eduardo GARCÍA

Bishop of San Justo and Ecclesiastical Advisor AC Argentina and IFCA

Thanks to his role in salvation history, Saint Joseph has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people. This is shown by the countless churches dedicated to him worldwide, the numerous religious Institutes, Confraternities and ecclesial groups inspired by his spirituality and bearing his name, and the many traditional expressions of piety in his honour. Innumerable holy men and women were passionately devoted to him.

God willed that the fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation should take place through human history, sometimes through outstanding figures such as Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul; or through simple men such as the humble carpenter of Nazareth.

Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. PC

What matters before God is faith and love which each one of us weaves the tapestry of our lives with, in the warp and woof of our normal and ordinary occupations. God will not ask us if we have done great deeds, but if we have done well and lovingly the task we were meant to do. The Gospel hardly tells us anything about St. Joseph.

It tells us very little about his life, and nothing about his death, which must have occurred in Nazareth shortly before Jesus' public life.

The Pope tells us: amid the crisis, how "our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show, yet in these very days are surely shaping the decisive events of our history. Doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests, men and women religious, and so very many others. They understood that no one is saved alone

The Gospels tell us very little about St. Joseph, but they present him with five important and significant titles that define him and his place in salvation history: he is called "son of David" (Mt

1:20), "husband of Mary" (Mt 1:16), "father of Jesus" (Lk 2:48), "righteous man" (Mt 1:19), and "the carpenter" (Mt 13:55) who taught Jesus his work (Mk 6:3).

Only Matthew writes of Joseph a laconic phrase that sums up his holiness: he was a just man. Accustomed to so many superlatives, this short word says very little to us, so baroque. But to an Israelite it said a lot. The word "righteous" surrounds Joseph's name like a halo, like the names of Abel (Heb 11,4), of Noah (Gen 6,9), of Tobit (Tb 7,6), of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Lk 1,6), of John the Baptist (Mk 6,20), and of Jesus himself (Lk 23,47). "Righteous", in biblical language, designates the good man in whom God is pleased. Psalm 91:13 says that "a righteous man flourishes like a palm tree". The slender and elegant palm tree, so common in the East, is a beautiful image of St. Joseph's mission. Just as the palm tree offers the Bedouin its protective shade and dates, so does St. Joseph stand in the holy house of Nazareth, offering shelter and sustenance to his two loves: Jesus and Mary.

In Joseph the paradox of God is fulfilled. The Pope tells us: he history of salvation is worked out "in hope against hope" (Rom 4:18), through our weaknesses. All too often, we think that God works only through our better parts, yet most of his plans are realized in and despite our frailty.

Joseph's weakness and simplicity make way for God's greatness to come to the fore and speak to those who are able to listen. It is those who listen to the heartbeat of history, who learn from the signs of the times, who build the history of peoples beyond the place they have been assigned to occupy.

There are **lives that mark history and the lives of men** by their words, by their actions, and this can be positive or negative.

There are, however, **lives that also mark history by their silences**. There are harmful silences of omission, which are simply the absence of words.

But there are others, **fruitful silences**, those that **give way and allow a true word**, silences that **are the capacity to hollow out the heart, to listen**, to listen to the voice of people in order to discover their needs and make the appropriate gesture, silences that **allow the inner beat to resound in the depths of the human heart**, that inner beat which, when we can hear it, constantly calls us to a full, authentic life, to a life with meaning, to situate ourselves and to reach that unique, unrepeatable and irreplaceable place.

That space which, because it is **a space spoken by God**, is **sacred**.

Saint Joseph, we are celebrating today, was one of those men with the **ability to let himself speak**, which is more than just listening, the ability to **let God speak, to let himself be named**.

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

Although this incomprehensible call, in the eyes of men, only brings disadvantages, **in the eyes of faith**, it reveals to the Church and to humanity, a **warm and close holiness** that is made of small, daily things, but that has the **mark of fire of a man who believes**; and because he believes, he is capable of the greatness of putting aside his project to **make God's project flesh, of abandoning human fulfilment, to live the fullness, the fullness of the encounter with God**.

Even through Joseph's fears, God's will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture. PC 2

God did not call him to something extraordinary, simply to be "daddy", the loving father of his son in the village life of Nazareth.

Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust. Our world today needs fathers. It has no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs. It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction. Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. PC 7

Smallness and greatness that combine. **God and man intermingled.**

That father was engraving in the eyes and heart of Jesus the images he could speak to men of the strong and sure embrace of the merciful father. From the hand of Joseph the father, Jesus learned to discover the miracle of the seed that falls on the good soil, and of the labourers who wait for their pay, in that father, he could see the father who gets up at midnight and looks for the bread for his children.

In his "being a father" every day, Joseph lived the fulfilled promise of the encounter with God.

This year, let us allow **St. Joseph to initiate us into the mystery of silence**, which becomes a sacred space of prayer, **where God himself speaks his words**. May He reveal to us the greatness and beauty of doing the little things of each day with simplicity and love.

May He teach us the fruitfulness of the simplicity of everyday life, with our heart and our eyes fixed on God, who passes through history and makes it a history of salvation.

Father St. Joseph, you have been the blessed tree placed by God, not to bear fruit, but to give shade; the protective shade of Mary, your Bride; the shade of Jesus who called you father and to whom you gave everything.

May your life, woven of work and silence, teach us to be effective and fruitful in all situations; may it teach us to hope in the dark, firm in faith.

May your example accompany us at all times: to flourish where the Father's will has planted me, to know how to wait, to give myself without reserve until the sadness and joy of others are my sadness and my joy.

Joseph, saint of silence.

Not of the silence of apocacy, of complexes, of shyness

or of contemptuous or resentful silence.

Your silence José is the respectful silence

that listens to others,

that prudently measures its words.

It is the silence necessary to channel life inwards,

to meditate and to know God's will.

Joseph, the saint who works and prays.

You work under the gaze of God who does not hinder the task,

but helps you to do it with greater perfection.

While you were handling the mallet and the saw, your heart was united to God,

who was so close to you in your own workshop.

Teach us the wisdom of generous and silent dedication,

take care of our families and awaken in many

the desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son

in total dedication to the service of the Kingdom.