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宗座牧函

以父親的心

教宗方濟各

聖若瑟奉為普世教會主保一百五十周年紀念

若瑟以父親的心愛了耶穌——在四部福音中祂被稱為「若瑟的兒子」¹。

瑪竇及路加這兩位談論若瑟最多的福音作者只提供了一點訊息，但足以讓我們了解他是怎樣的父親，以及上智的安排所賦予他的使命。

我們知道，若瑟是一位卑微的木匠（參閱：瑪十三55），與瑪利亞訂了婚（參閱：瑪一18；路一27）；他是一位「義人」（瑪一19），隨時準備履行上主透過法律（參閱：路二22、27、39）和四個夢境（瑪一20；瑪二13、19、22）所啟示給他的旨意。在納匝肋到白冷這段漫長勞累的旅程之後，他目睹了默西亞在馬槽的誕生，「因為在客棧中為他們沒有地方」（參閱：路二7）。他見證了牧人（參閱：路二8~20）和賢士（參閱：瑪二1~12）的朝拜，他們分別代表了以色列民和外邦人。

¹ 路四22；若六42；參閱：瑪十三55；谷六3。

若瑟有勇氣作耶穌在法律上的父親，並按照天使的揭示給祂起名：「你要給祂起名叫耶穌，因為祂要把自己的民族，由他們的罪惡中拯救出來」（瑪一21）。如同亞當在創世紀敘述（參閱：創二19~20）所行一樣，為古代人來說，給某人或某物命名，表示歸屬關係的確立。

耶穌出生後四十天，若瑟與瑪利亞在聖殿裡將他們的孩子奉獻給上主，並懷著驚訝聆聽西默盎關於耶穌和祂母親的預言（參閱：路二22~35）。為了保護耶穌免受黑落德迫害，若瑟客居埃及（參閱：瑪二13~18）。回國之後，他避居在加里肋亞隱世無名的小村莊納匝肋——那裡流傳著這樣的說法：「從加里肋亞不會出先知的」及「從納匝肋還能出什麼好事嗎？」（參閱：若七52；若一46）——那處遠離祂的出生之地白冷，也遠離矗立聖殿的耶路撒冷。在往耶路撒冷朝聖時，若瑟和瑪利亞失去了耶穌的蹤影，他們焦急地尋找，發現祂正在聖殿與經師們討論。（參閱：路二41~50）

除天主之母瑪利亞之外，沒有其他聖人如同她的淨配若瑟一般，在教會訓導裡更頻密地被提及。為了更突出若瑟在救恩史上的核心角色，我的前任們深化了在福音中描述他的寥寥片段所傳遞的訊息。真福碧岳九世宣布他為「普世教會主保」²，可敬者碧

² 聖禮部，「Quemadmodum Deus」法令（1870年12月8日）：《宗座公報》6（1870~71），194。

岳)十二世薦舉其為「勞工主保」,³聖若望保祿二世稱其為「救主的監護人」。⁴聖若瑟同時被世人稱作「善終主保」⁵。

因此，在真福碧岳九世宣布其為普世教會主保（1870年12月8日）一百五十年後的今天，正如耶穌所說：「心裡充滿什麼，口裡就說什麼」（瑪十二34），對這位與我們人類經驗何其接近的不凡人物，我願跟你們分享一些個人反省。我這意願在疫情影響下的幾個月來，日有所增，我們可以體驗到身處打擊著我們的危機之中，「我們的生命彼此交織、互相扶持，這事實經常被人忘記。可是那些既不會出現在報章雜誌的標題上，也不會現身在最新電視節目中的人們，今天正在塑造我們歷史的決定性事件。醫生、護士、店主、超市職員、清潔人員、家庭傭工、運輸工人、提供必要服務及維護公共安全的人員、志工、司鐸、修道人以及許多許多不同的人，他們都明白沒有人能獨善其身。（……）多少人每天發揮耐心，播種希望，小心謹慎地不散播恐慌，而是促進共同責任。多少父親、母親、祖父母和老師以日常不起眼的舉動向我們的孩子展示該如何以調整日常生活習慣、展望將來、堅持祈禱，來接受並度過危機。多少人為眾人的益

3 參閱：於大聖若瑟瞻禮向意大利天主教工人協會致詞（1955年5月1日）：《宗座公報》47（1955），406。

4 參閱：《救主的監護人》宗座勸諭（1989年8月15日）：《宗座公報》82（1990），5~34。

5 《天主教教理》，1014。

處獻上祈禱、奉獻和轉求。」⁶我們每個人都在聖若瑟身上發現，他是一個可以不受注意的人，他是一個平常、謹慎、隱藏的人，他也是在困厄之時的轉禱者、支援者和指引者。聖若瑟提醒我們，那些表現低調者或在「第二線」者，在救恩史中扮演著無可比擬的角色，他們都值得被肯定和備受感謝。

1. 受愛戴的父親

聖若瑟的偉大，在於他作了瑪利亞的淨配及耶穌的父親，由此他正如金口聖若望所言「參與整個救恩計劃」。⁷

聖保祿六世指出，若瑟在不同的層面具體地表現出其父親的身分：「他將自己的生命成為服務和犧牲，奉獻予與他生命相連的降生奧蹟和救贖使命；透過行使法律賦予的權柄，以其生命和工作全然自我贈予於聖家；他把自己、心靈和所有能力超然奉獻，並將愛置於為使默西亞在其家中茁壯成長的服務當中，在這奉獻和愛內，他把人性的召叫轉化為家庭之愛，作為他超性的責任。」⁸

因著聖若瑟在救恩史中的角色，他是一位常為基督徒所敬愛的父親，從以下各方面就可以看出來：全球有不少聖堂奉獻於他；許多修會團體、善會及教

6 疫情下的默想（2020年3月27日）：《羅馬觀察報》（L' Osservatore Romano），2020年3月29日，第10頁。

7 《釋瑪竇福音講道集》五3：希臘教父57，58。

8 講道（1966年3月19日）：《保祿六世的教導》4（1966），110。

會團體，皆受其靈修精神所啟發，及以其命名；在各個世紀中，各種尊崇他的神聖敬禮。許多聖人都熱心恭敬聖若瑟，其中包括聖女大德蘭，她選擇了聖若瑟為自己的轉禱中保，時常求助於他並獲得所求之恩寵；受這份經驗所鼓舞，大德蘭鼓勵對聖若瑟的敬禮。⁹

所有祈禱冊都包括敬禮聖若瑟的禱文，逢星期三特別敬禮聖若瑟，尤其在整個三月份，傳統上是將這個月奉獻給他。¹⁰

人們對於聖若瑟的信賴，可概括在「你們到若瑟那裡去」這一表達中，它回顧埃及鬧饑荒時，人民向法郎央求食糧，法郎回答說：「你們到若瑟那裡去，照他對你們所說的做」（創四一55）。法郎所指之若瑟為雅各伯的兒子，他因為受兄弟嫉妒而被賣作奴隸（參閱：創卅七11~28），根據聖經記載，他後來成了埃及的總督。（創四一41~44）

9 參閱：《自傳》6，6~8。

10 超過四十年的時間，在每一天晨禱之後，我都會誦念一篇取自耶穌瑪利亞愛德修女會（Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary）十九世紀法語祈禱書的聖若瑟禱文。它表達了對聖若瑟的虔敬和信任，甚至帶有一點挑戰：「光榮的聖若瑟，你使不可能變成可能，求你在痛苦和困難之時助祐我。請將我交託的那些嚴重而令人不安的境況納入你保護之下，使其獲得完滿的結果。我敬愛之父，我全信靠你，求你不要讓我的呼求白費。你為耶穌和瑪利亞獻上所有，請展示你的善良與能力兼備。阿們。」

作為達味這位按照納堂先知所應許（參閱：撒下七），耶穌祖先的後裔（參閱：瑪一16~20），以及納匝肋人瑪利亞的配偶，聖若瑟是連接舊約與新約的樞紐。

2. 溫良慈愛的父親

若瑟看著耶穌一天一天「在智慧和身量上，並在天主和人前的恩愛上成長」（路二52）。如同上主怎樣對待以色列民，若瑟也怎樣對待耶穌：「教導祂邁步、牽著祂的手、有如高舉嬰兒到自己面頰的父親，俯身餵養祂。」（參閱：歐十一3~4）

在若瑟身上，耶穌看到了天主的慈愛：「就如父親怎樣憐愛自己兒女們，上主也怎樣憐愛敬畏自己的人們。」（詠一〇三13）

在會堂以聖詠祈禱時，若瑟一次又一次聽到以色列的天主是一位溫良的天主，¹¹「祂對待萬有，溫和善良，對祂的受造物，仁愛慈祥。」（詠一四五9）

救恩史藉我們的軟弱，「在絕望中懷著希望」（羅四18）實現。許多時候，我們以為天主只在我們優秀之處工作，但在現實中，祂大部分的計劃往往藉著我們的軟弱而得以實現。故聖保祿說：「免得我因那高超的啟示而過於高舉自己，故此在身體上給了我一根刺，就是撒殫的使者來拳擊我，免得我

11 參閱：申四31；詠六九17；詠七八38；詠八六5；詠一一一4；詠一一六5；耶卅一20。

過於高舉自己。關於這事，我曾三次求主使它脫離我；但主對我說：『有我的恩寵為你夠了，因為我的德能在軟弱中才全顯出來。』」（格後十二7~9）

如果這就是救恩計劃的遠景，我們須學習以深刻的溫良來接納我們的軟弱。¹²

魔鬼使我們以負面的批判來看自己的脆弱，聖神則將它帶往溫良的光。溫良是接觸我們內在脆弱的最佳方式，指責和判斷別人往往表露我們無能力接受自己的軟弱和弱點。唯有溫良能把我們從控告者的羅網中拯救出來（參閱：默十二10）。如此說明了與天主的慈愛相遇的重要性，尤其在和好聖事之中經驗祂的真理與慈愛。諷刺的是，魔鬼也會向我們講真相，但只是為了譴責我們。我們知道來自天主的真理並不譴責，而是接納、懷抱、支持和寬恕我們。那真理總是像耶穌比喻（參閱：路十五11~32）中的慈父一般向我們展示：祂親自前來迎接、恢復我們的尊嚴、讓我們重新振作並為我們歡欣鼓舞，就如那父親所說：「我這個兒子是死而復生，失而復得了。」（參閱：路十五24）

天主的旨意、歷史和計劃甚至透過若瑟的恐懼工作，由此若瑟教導我們，信靠天主包括相信祂能在我們的恐懼、脆弱和軟弱之中工作。若瑟同時教導

¹² 參閱：《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭（2013年11月24日），88；288；《宗座公報》105（2013），1057；1136~1137。

我們，在生命的暴風驟雨之中，不要害怕讓天主掌舵，有時我們想完全掌控，但天主的視野總是更廣大。

3. 服從的父親

當天主向瑪利亞表明祂的救恩計劃時，祂也向若瑟做類似的事，向他揭示祂的計劃；天主透過夢境向若瑟啟示祂的訊息，在聖經中，天主也曾以這方式啟示舊約子民，作為祂展露其旨意的一種媒介。¹³

由於瑪利亞不可思議地懷了孕，令若瑟深受困擾：他「不願公開羞辱她」，¹⁴但他決定「暗暗地休退她」（瑪一19）。在第一個夢境裡，天使幫他解決他重大的兩難問題：「不要怕娶你的妻子瑪利亞，因為那在她內受生的，是出於聖神。她要生一個兒子，你要給祂起名叫耶穌，因為祂要把自己的民族，由他們的罪惡中拯救出來」（瑪一20~21）。若瑟的回應是即時的：「若瑟從睡夢中醒來，就照上主的天使所囑咐的辦了」（瑪一24）。他以服從去突破困局，並同時解救了瑪利亞。

在第二個夢境中，天使命令若瑟：「起來，帶著嬰孩和祂的母親，逃往埃及去，住在那裡，直到我再通知你，因為黑落德即將尋找這嬰孩，要把祂殺

¹³ 參閱：創廿3；創廿八12；創卅一11、24；創四十八；創四一1~32；戶十二6；撒上三3~10；達二；達四；約卅三15。

¹⁴ 遇此情況，甚至有處以石頭砸死的規定。（申廿二20~21）

掉」(瑪二13)。若瑟不問他將要面臨的困難，就只毫不猶疑地服從：「若瑟便起來，星夜帶著嬰孩和祂的母親，退避到埃及去了。留在那裡，直到黑落德死去。」(瑪二14~15)

在埃及，若瑟懷著信心和耐心，等待天使許諾的傳報，才返回他的家鄉。在第三個夢境裡，神聖的傳訊者天使告訴若瑟，那些謀殺孩子性命的人死了，便命令他起來，帶著孩子和祂的母親，返回以色列地域(參閱：瑪二19~20)。若瑟再一次毫不猶疑地服從。「他便起來，帶著孩子和祂的母親，進了以色列地域。」(瑪二21)

但在回程途中，「當若瑟一聽說阿爾赫勞繼他父親黑落德作了猶太王，就害怕到那裡去；夢中得到了指示後——這樣發生已第四次——便退避到加里肋亞境內，去住在一座名叫納匝肋的城中。」(瑪二22~23)

依照凱撒奧古斯都有關人口登記的規定，眾人要回到自己的家鄉登記，按聖史路加報導，若瑟要從納匝肋往白冷，旅程漫長而艱苦。就在這種境況中，耶穌誕生了(參閱：路二1~7)，祂的誕生，像其他孩童一樣，會被帝國的戶籍登記，紀錄下來。

聖路加特別關注到，耶穌的父母遵守了法律上所有的規定，即：耶穌割損的儀式、瑪利亞分娩後的取潔禮、開胎首生的男性奉獻於上主。(參閱：路二21~24)¹⁵

¹⁵ 參閱：肋十二1~8；出十三2。

在若瑟生命中的每個境況中，他都就答允「願照祢的話成就於我罷」，就好像瑪利亞領受天使的報喜，以及耶穌在革責瑪尼山園所做的一樣。

作為一家之主，若瑟依照天主的誡命(參閱：出廿12)，教導耶穌服從父母(參閱：路二51)。在納匝肋隱居的歲月裡，耶穌從若瑟的教導中，學到承行天父的旨意。這旨意就成了祂的日用糧(參閱：若四34)，甚至在祂人生最困難的時刻，祂來到革責瑪尼的時候，耶穌仍選擇照天父的意願，¹⁶而不是照祂自己的意願，成就了「聽命至死，且死在十字架上」(斐二8)。致希伯來人書的作者因此總結出，耶穌「由所受的苦難，學習了服從。」(斐五8)

從以上種種，可以明確指出「聖若瑟受天主召喚，經由他父職的行使，直接服務耶穌本人和祂的使命：正是以這種方式，他在時期屆滿時對救恩的大奧祕通力合作，他真是一位救恩的僕人。」¹⁷

4. 接納的父親

若瑟無條件接納瑪利亞，他深信天使的說話。「若瑟的心之高貴品質，使他遵循愛德，這是他從法律所學會的；在今天這個世界，對女性在心理上、語言上和身體上的暴力是如此明顯，而若瑟表現出一

¹⁶ 參閱：瑪廿六39；谷十四36；路廿二42。

¹⁷ 參閱：聖若望保祿二世，《救主的監護人》宗座勸諭(1989年8月15日)，8：《宗座公報》82(1990)，14。

個懂得尊重和優雅的形象，縱使他不明白全局，他仍決定要維護瑪利亞的名聲、尊嚴和生命。在他處於思慮如何作出最佳行動的猶疑中，天主透過啟發他的判斷來幫助他。」¹⁸

在我們的生命中，很多時候都會發生我們不明白的事情。我們第一個反應通常是失望或反抗，若瑟卻將他自己的看法擱置一旁，好讓奧妙之事彰顯在他眼前，遂欣然接受，負起責任，並讓它們成為他自己歷史的一部分。如果我們不與自己的歷史修和，我們就無法向前邁步，我們將永遠被困於我們的期望和隨之而來的失望之中。

若瑟向我們呈現的靈修之路，並非追求解釋，而是接納。只有從這種接納和修和開始，我們才可以領略一個更偉大的歷史，一層更深入的意義。約伯那激烈的回應，似乎是回答他的妻子反對他要忍受災禍的邀請：「難道我們只由天主那裡接受恩惠，而不接受災禍嗎？」（參閱：約二10）

若瑟並不是一個被動消極的人，相反地，他是勇敢和堅強的人。聖神賜予我們的剛毅之恩，透過我們接納生命中的各種事物而呈現出來。只有天主才能賜予我們力量，去面對人生的一切，並坦然接受生命中所存在的矛盾、挫折和失望部分。

耶穌來到我們中間，是天父的一份禮物，為使我們

¹⁸ 彌撒及冊封真福典禮講道，比亞維森西奧，哥倫比亞（2017年9月8日）：《宗座公報》109 (2017)，1061。

每一位可與自己歷史中的人性修和，縱使我們未能夠徹底明白。

就如天主告訴聖若瑟：「達味之子若瑟，不要怕」（瑪一20），祂似乎向我們同樣地說：「不要害怕！」我們需要將憤恨和失望放下，不帶世俗的認命，卻滿懷望德的剛毅，坦然接受那些確實存在但不是由我們選擇的事情。以此方式接納生命，我們便更能窺探生命蘊藏的意義。如果我們尋獲勇氣，根據福音所教導去做，我們每個人的生命可奇蹟般地得到重生。如果現在凡事看似錯繆，或有些事情已不能逆轉，這並不要緊，主可以從石頭地裡湧現出花朵，即使我們在一些事情上受到內心的譴責，但「天主比我們的心大，祂原知道一切。」（若壹三20）

在此，我們亦再度看到基督信仰的現實主義，它不排斥任何既存的事物，並在它那奇妙和不可逆轉的複雜性中，以其光照和影像去傳遞存在的意義。因此，保祿宗徒這樣說：「我們也知道：天主使一切協助那些愛祂的人，獲得益處」（羅八28）。聖奧斯定補充：「即使那被稱為邪惡的（*etiam illud quod malum dicitur*）」¹⁹ 從這個整體的角度來看，信仰給每一件快樂或悲傷的事情賦予意義。

我們不認為相信等同尋找容易讓人安心的解答；基督教導我們的信仰，是我們在聖若瑟身上所見到的，他不尋求捷徑，反而要「睜開雙眼」面對現

¹⁹ 《論信望愛》，3.11：《拉丁教父集》40，236。

實，並為它接受個人的責任。

若瑟以接納邀請我們以他人之所是去接納他，不排斥他，愛弱者為先，因為天主召選了世上懦弱的（參閱：格前一27）。祂是「孤兒的慈父，是寡婦的保護」（詠六八6），並命令我們要愛在我們中間的陌生人。²⁰我想，耶穌宣講蕩子和慈父的比喻，是從聖若瑟的態度而得到啟發。（參閱：路十五11~32）

5. 富有創意的勇氣的父親

所有真正內在醫治的第一步，是要接納我們個人的歷史，即是要坦然接受那些在我們生命中不能選擇的事情。然而，必須多加另一個重要元素：富有創意的勇氣。尤其當我們面對困難的時候，它便會浮現出來。當困難在前，我們其實可以放棄和一走了之，或以某種方式處理它。有時，困境會從我們每一個人身上去掉一些我們從沒想過的素質。

當我們讀「耶穌的童年史」時，我們許多時候可能會發問，為何天主不以一個更直接和清晰的方式介入。但天主卻透過各種人和事參與其中。若瑟是那位讓天主透過他去看顧救贖歷史伊始的人。若瑟是那真正的「奧蹟」，靠著他，天主拯救了嬰孩和祂的母親。在天之父信任若瑟那富有創意的勇氣所引發出來的行動，他們來到白冷後，發覺沒有客棧可供瑪利亞分娩，若瑟於是找到一個馬廄，並盡他的

²⁰ 參閱：申十19；出廿二20~22；路十29~37。

最大努力，使之變成一個歡迎天主子來到這世界的地方（參閱：路二6~7）。面對即將來自黑落德的危險，就是殺害那嬰孩，若瑟再一次在夢中得到警示，要保護那孩子，便起來，星夜退避到埃及去了。（參閱：瑪二13~14）

表面地閱讀這些故事時，我們常有一個世界是由強者和當權者所支配的印象，可是福音的「喜訊」顯示出，對世上當權者的自大與暴力，天主總有方法實現祂的救恩計劃。我們的生命似乎有時也在強權者手中，但福音向我們揭示什麼才最關鍵。納匝肋的木匠若瑟時常信賴天主上智的安排，因此他懂得化難為機，只要我們也運用像他一樣的富有創意的勇氣，天主總能有方法拯救我們。

如果有時主好像沒有幫助我們，這並不表示我們被遺棄，而是祂相信我們有能力去計劃、創造和尋找。

那癱子的朋友們具有同樣富有創意的勇氣，他們為將他帶到耶穌跟前，就從屋頂將他放下去（參閱：路五17~26）。困難並不阻礙那些朋友的勇敢和堅持。他們確信耶穌可以醫好這人，並「因人眾多，不得其門而入，遂上了房頂，從瓦中間，把他連那小床繫到中間，正放在耶穌面前。耶穌一見他們的信心，就說：『人啊！你的罪赦了』」（路五19~20）。他們找辦法把他們有病的朋友帶到耶穌跟前，耶穌讚賞他們富有創意的信德。

福音沒有告訴我們瑪利亞、若瑟和嬰孩留在埃及多久，但可以肯定的是，他們需要食糧以及尋找住所和工作。我們不用想像也可以填補福音所沒有交代的部分。像其他所有家庭一樣，聖家必須面對具體的問題，就好像我們眾多的新移民弟兄姊妹，他們今天還冒著生命危險去對抗災禍和饑餓。在這意義上，為那些因著戰爭、仇恨、迫害和不幸而被迫離開家園的人，我相信聖若瑟確實是他們特選的一位主保。

若瑟參與的每一個事件的結尾，福音都這樣描述，他起來帶著嬰孩和祂的母親，做主指示給他的事（參閱：瑪一24；瑪二14、21）。實在，耶穌和祂的母親瑪利亞，是我們信仰最寶貴的富源。²¹

在救恩計劃中，聖子和祂的母親是密不可分的，瑪利亞「在她的信仰之旅中前進，忠心地堅持與她的聖子契合，直至站在十字架下。」²²

我們應反躬自問，我們是否有盡全力保護耶穌和瑪利亞，他們也神妙地被託付予我們的責任、照顧和保護。至高者的兒子以極為軟弱的形態來到人間。祂使自己需要被若瑟捍衛、保護、照顧和養育。天主信任若瑟，就像祂信任瑪利亞一樣，祂從若瑟身

21 參閱：聖禮部，「Quemadmodum Deus」法令（1870年12月8日）：《宗座公報》6（1870~71），193；真福碧岳九世，〈Inclutum Patriarcham〉牧函（1871年7月7日）：l.c.，324~327。

22 梵蒂岡第二屆大公會議，《教會憲章》，58。

上發現他不僅會救她的性命，還會一生為她和她的孩子提供一切所需。從這個角度看，教會的守護者唯聖若瑟是賴，因為教會是歷史中基督奧體的延續，同時，瑪利亞母親的身分是教會母親身分的反映。²³若瑟不斷保護嬰孩和祂的母親，以此不斷保護教會；而我們愛這嬰孩和祂的母親，也以此而愛教會。

這嬰孩就是那位曾說：「凡你們對我這些最小兄弟中的一個所做的，就是對我做的」（瑪廿五40）。因此，每一位有需要者、貧窮人、受苦者、臨終者、離鄉背井者、囚犯、病弱者，都是若瑟不斷守護著的那位「嬰孩」。為這原因，聖若瑟被呼求作不幸者、有需要人士、難民、受苦者、窮人和臨終者的保護者。故此，教會不得不首先愛那些最小弟兄姊妹，因為耶穌以他們為先，並認同他們。從聖若瑟那裡，我們必須學會同樣的關心和責任：愛那嬰孩和祂的母親；愛聖事和愛德；愛教會和窮人。這每一個現實，都是那嬰孩和祂的母親。

6. 勞動的父親

聖若瑟的特點之一就是與工作的關係，自第一份教會社會訓導文件——教宗良十三的《新事物》通諭頒布以來，這議題就備受關注。聖若瑟是一位木匠，他正直地工作以養家糊口，享用由自己勞動所賺取得來的食糧，耶穌就從他身上學會這價值、尊嚴和喜樂。

23 《天主教教理》，963~970。

在我們的時代，就業似乎再次成為一個迫切的社會議題，甚至許多在數十年來享有一定程度的繁榮國家，失業情況也破紀錄水平，我們需要以一種新的體認，去了解工作所帶來尊嚴的意義，聖若瑟就是堪作模範的主保。

工作是參與救恩工程的一種方式，給我們機會去促使天國臨現，發揮自己的天賦與才能來替社會大眾和人類共融作出服務；如此，工作不僅是個人自我實現的機會，而且它更成就社會的基本細胞——家庭。一個欠缺工作的家庭，特別容易受到困難、壓力、不和，甚至是離異的危害。我們怎能談論人性尊嚴，卻不致力使每一個人都有機會爭取有尊嚴生計的呢？

無論是何種工作，工作的人是與天主合作，以某種方式成為我們身處世界的創造者。我們時代在經濟、社會、文化和靈性上的危機，可視作對我們所有人的一種呼喚，去重新發現工作的價值、重要性和必要性，為促成一種沒有人被排除在外的新「常態」。聖若瑟的工作提醒我們，天主自己成為人，並沒有輕視工作。失業問題打擊著許多弟兄姊妹，尤其最近的新型冠狀病毒疫情更使情況惡化，這狀況提醒我們，要重新審視優先的事項。讓我們懇求聖若瑟勞工主保，幫助我們尋找途徑，去承諾不讓任何一個青年、任何一個人和任何一個家庭缺乏工作！

7. 反映天父影像的父親

波蘭籍作家賈恩·都布拉辛斯基（Jan Dobraczyński）在他的著作《天父的影子》²⁴中，以小說的形式描繪聖若瑟一生的故事。他以影子的暗示圖像來勾畫若瑟的形象；對於耶穌，若瑟是在天之父地上的影像：他看顧並保護耶穌，為了跟隨耶穌的腳步，從不離開祂。我們想到梅瑟向以色列子民所說的話：「在曠野裡，你也看出上主你的天主在你所走的長途中，攜帶你們，如同人攜帶自己的兒子一樣，直到你們來到這地方」（申一31）。若瑟以同樣的方式，終其一生擔當父親之職。²⁵

父親並非天生的，而是要被塑造的。一個男人成為父親，不僅由於他把孩子帶到世界上，更是因為他要肩負起養育子女的責任。當一個人為另一個人的生活承擔責任時，他就以某種方式向那個人行使父職。

在我們目前的社會中，孩子都活得好像無父的孤兒。現今的教會也需要父親。聖保祿給格林多人的忠告，現今還是合用：「你們縱然在基督內有上萬的教師，但為父親的卻不多」（格前四15）。每位司鐸或主教應該增添如保祿宗徒般的情懷：「我在基督耶穌內藉福音生了你們」（格前四15）。保祿也對迦拉達人表示：「我的孩子們！我願為你們

²⁴ 原著：Cie Ojca，華沙，1977。

²⁵ 參閱：聖若望保祿二世，《救主的監護人》宗座勸諭 7~8：《宗座公報》82（1990），12~16。

再受產痛，直到基督在你們內形成為止。」（迦四19）

作父親的，意味著要引導孩子進入生活體驗和現實。不壓抑他們，不束縛他們，不占有他們，而是使他們有作出選擇、享有自由和探索新機遇的能力。或許為此緣故，傳統上在提及若瑟時，也把他為父的稱呼冠以「最貞潔」的專稱。這專稱不指純粹情感上的跡象，而是表達一種與占有慾相反的整體態度。貞潔是一種在生活各方面都不受占有慾所控制的自由。只有當愛是貞潔時，才算是真愛。占有慾的愛，最終總會變得危險、束縛、窒息並帶來痛苦。天主自己以貞潔的愛去愛人；祂甚至讓我們擁有犯錯和背叛祂的自由。愛的邏輯往往就是自由的邏輯，而若瑟懂得如何以超凡的自由去愛。他從不將自己置於中心。他懂得謙下自處，把瑪利亞和耶穌的生活置於他生活的中心。

若瑟的喜樂不僅在於自我犧牲，更在於自我奉獻。在他身上，從看不到挫敗，只有看到信任。他一貫的沈默並不指向抱怨，而常表現出信任的具體姿態。今天的世界需要父親，以抵抗專制者，即抵抗那些想占有他人以填補自己空虛的人；它反對那些把權威與專制主義、服務與奴役、對話與壓迫、愛德與福利心態、權力與破壞混淆的人。每一個真正的召叫都是出於自我奉獻，這是單純犧牲的成熟。聖職人員和獻身生活者也同樣需要這種成熟。無論我們的召叫是婚姻、獨身還是守貞，如果只停留在

犧牲的邏輯，而未達到自我奉獻的成熟，那麼，這召叫就不能成為愛之美與喜樂的標記，甚至有可能導致憂愁、悲傷和挫敗的危機。

為父者拒絕決定子女生活的誘惑，嶄新的，以及不可意想的遠景就會展開。每個孩子總是帶著一個謎，一些聞所未聞的東西，只有在一個尊重他自由的父親的幫助下才能顯露出來。就是一位父親覺得他已經完成了他的教育行動，並完全地活出了父職時，只有當他成為「不必要」時，當他看到他的兒子變得獨立自主並獨自踏上生命之途時，當他置身於若瑟的處境時，像他常常知道那位嬰孩不是他的，僅是委託給他照顧而已。總之，這就是耶穌的意思，祂說：「不要在地上稱人為你們的父，因為你們的父只有一位，就是天上的父。」（瑪廿三9）

每當我們在行使父職時，我們應時常謹記，這不是行使占有權，而是一個指向更高的父權的「標記」。我們所有人在某程度上都有若瑟的處境：天上唯一父親的影子，「因為祂使太陽上升，光照惡人，也光照善人」（瑪五45）。也是伴隨著祂聖子的影子。

上主給若瑟說：「起來，帶著嬰孩和祂的母親。」（瑪二13）

此宗座牧函的目的，是為增加我們對這位偉大聖者的愛，鼓勵我們懇求他轉禱，並效法他的眾德行與熱誠。

的確，聖人的特殊使命不只在於賜予奇蹟和恩寵，更是在天主面前為我們轉禱，猶如亞巴郎²⁶和梅瑟，²⁷也如「唯一的中保」耶穌（弟前二5），祂是我們在父那裡的「護慰者」（若壹二1），祂也是「常活著，為我們轉求」的那位。（希七25；參閱：羅八34）

聖人們幫助所有信友「獲致聖德及本地位的成全。」²⁸他們的生命就是把福音付諸實行的具體明證。

耶穌說：「跟我學罷！因為我是良善心謙的」（瑪十一29）。聖人們的生命也是我們仿效的表率。聖保祿明確地勸告我們：「你們要效法我！」（格前四16）。²⁹聖若瑟以有力的沈默表達了同樣的訊息。

在眾多如雲的聖人的典範面前，聖奧斯定曾自問：「他們能做的，難道你就不能做嗎？」因此，他終於歸依並大聲呼喊：「我愛祢太遲了，祢是萬古常新的美善！」³⁰ 他就這樣更接近決定性的歸依。

26 參閱：創十八23~32。

27 參閱：出十七8~13；出卅二30~35。

28 梵蒂岡第二屆大公會議，《教會》憲章，42。

29 參閱：格前十一1；斐三17；得前一6。

30 《懺悔錄》，VIII，11，27：PL 32，761；X，27，38：PL 32，795。

我們只須向聖若瑟祈求恩寵中之恩寵，就是：我們的歸依。

讓我們以此禱文一起向他呼求：

萬福，贖世主的守護者，
童貞聖母瑪利亞的淨配。
天主把祂的獨生子託付予你；
你的淨配瑪利亞信賴你，
因你的合作，基督降生成人。

大聖若瑟，請向我們顯示你也是我們的父親，
並在人生的旅途上引領我們。
請為我們祈獲恩寵、慈悲和勇氣，
並保護我們免於一切凶惡。阿們。

方濟各

頒於羅馬，聖若望拉特朗大殿

2020年12月8日，聖母始胎無染原罪節日，本人在任第八年。

（台灣地區主教團 恭譯）

APOSTOLIC LETTER
PATRIS CORDE
OF THE HOLY FATHER
FRANCIS

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

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

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

We know that Joseph was a lowly carpenter (cf. *Mt* 13:55), betrothed to Mary (cf. *Mt* 1:18; *Lk* 1:27). He was a "just man" (*Mt* 1:19), ever ready to carry out God's will as revealed to him in the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:22.27.39) and through four dreams (cf. *Mt* 1:20; 2:13.19.22). After a long and tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, he beheld

the birth of the Messiah in a stable, since "there was no place for them" elsewhere (cf. *Lk* 2:7). He witnessed the adoration of the shepherds (cf. *Lk* 2:8-20) and the Magi (cf. *Mt* 2:1-12), who represented respectively the people of Israel and the pagan peoples.

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

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

to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary lost track of the twelve-year-old Jesus, they anxiously sought him out and they found him in the Temple, in discussion with the doctors of the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:41-50).

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

Now, one hundred and fifty years after his proclamation as *Patron of the Catholic Church* by Blessed Pius IX (8 December 1870), I would like to share some personal reflections on this extraordinary figure, so close to our own human experience. For, as Jesus says, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (*Mt* 12:34). My desire to do so increased during these months of pandemic, when we experienced, amid the crisis, how “our lives are

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

1. A beloved father

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

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

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

and intercessor, had frequent recourse to him and received whatever graces she asked of him. Encouraged by her own experience, Teresa persuaded others to cultivate devotion to Joseph.^[9]

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

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

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

2. A tender and loving father

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

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

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

The history of salvation is worked out “in hope against hope” (*Rom* 4:18), through our weaknesses. All too often, we think that God works only through our better parts, yet most of his plans are realized in and despite our frailty. Thus Saint Paul could say: “To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (*2 Cor* 12:7-9).

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

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

for, as the father says: “This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (v. 24).

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

3. An obedient father

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

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

In the first dream, an angel helps him resolve his grave dilemma: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will

save his people from their sins” (*Mt 1:20-21*). Joseph’s response was immediate: “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (*Mt 1:24*). Obedience made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary.

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

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

During the return journey, “when Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. After being warned in

a dream” – now for the fourth time – “he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth” (*Mt 2:22-23*).

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

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

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

During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father. That will was

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

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

4. An accepting father

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

Often in life, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow.

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

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

and disappointments.

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

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

Here, once again, we encounter that Christian realism which rejects nothing that exists. Reality, in its mysterious and irreducible complexity, is the bearer of existential meaning, with all its lights and shadows. Thus, the Apostle Paul can say: “We know that all things work together for

good, for those who love God” (*Rom 8:28*). To which Saint Augustine adds, “even that which is called evil (*etiam illud quod malum dicitur*)”.[19] In this greater perspective, faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad.

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

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

5. A creatively courageous father

If the first stage of all true interior healing is to accept our personal history and embrace even the things in life that we did not choose, we must now add another important element: creative courage. This emerges especially in the

way we deal with difficulties. In the face of difficulty, we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even think we had.

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

A superficial reading of these stories can often give the impression that the world is at the mercy of the strong and mighty, but the “good news” of the Gospel consists in showing that, for all the arrogance and violence of worldly powers, God always finds a way to carry out his

saving plan. So too, our lives may at times seem to be at the mercy of the powerful, but the Gospel shows us what counts. God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence.

If at times God seems not to help us, surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions ourselves.

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

The Gospel does not tell us how long Mary, Joseph and

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

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

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

We should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping. The Son of the Almighty came into our world in a state of great vulnerability. He needed to be defended, protected,

cared for and raised by Joseph. God trusted Joseph, as did Mary, who found in him someone who would not only save her life, but would always provide for her and her child. In this sense, Saint Joseph could not be other than the Guardian of the Church, for the Church is the continuation of the Body of Christ in history, even as Mary's motherhood is reflected in the motherhood of the Church.[23] In his continued protection of the Church, Joseph continues to protect *the child and his mother*, and we too, by our love for the Church, continue to love *the child and his mother*.

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

and charity, to love the Church and the poor. Each of these realities is always *the child and his mother*.

6. A working father

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

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

Work is a means of participating in the work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom, to develop our talents and abilities, and to put them at the service of society and fraternal communion. It becomes an opportunity for the fulfilment not only of oneself, but also of that primary cell of society which is the family. A family

without work is particularly vulnerable to difficulties, tensions, estrangement and even break-up. How can we speak of human dignity without working to ensure that everyone is able to earn a decent living?

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

7. A father in the shadows

The Polish writer Jan Dobraczyński, in his book *The Shadow of the Father*,^[24] tells the story of Saint Joseph’s life in the form of a novel. He uses the evocative image

of a shadow to define Joseph. In his relationship to Jesus, Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father: he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way. We can think of Moses’ words to Israel: “In the wilderness... you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you travelled” (*Deut* 1:31). In a similar way, Joseph acted as a father for his whole life.^[25]

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

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

Being a father entails introducing children to life and

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

Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust. Our world today needs fathers. It has no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs. It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with

servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction. Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. The priesthood and consecrated life likewise require this kind of maturity. Whatever our vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self will not come to fulfilment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case, instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness and frustration.

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

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

* * *

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

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

Indeed, the proper mission of the saints is not only to obtain miracles and graces, but to intercede for us before God, like Abraham[26] and Moses[27], and like Jesus, the “one mediator” (*1 Tim 2:5*), who is our “advocate” with the Father (*1 Jn 2:1*) and who “always lives to make intercession for [us]” (*Heb 7:25*; cf. *Rom 8:34*).

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

the Gospel into practice.

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

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

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

Let us now make our prayer to him:

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.*

*Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father*

*and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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