A special year dedicated to St. Joseph

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"O Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father, and guide us on the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen."

The Apostolic Letter Patris corde (with a father's heart), signed on December 8 by Pope Francis, invokes a special year dedicated to Saint Joseph, until December 8, 2021. The Holy Father thus remembers the 150th anniversary of proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the universal Church by Blessed Pius IX.

"After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse," notes Pope Francis. He continues "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."

By inviting us first of all to contemplate in Joseph a "tender and loving father" who taught Jesus to walk, holding him by the hand and revealing the tenderness of God, the Pope insists on the importance of learning "to welcome our weakness with deep tenderness."

"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", he writes, adding that "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," the Holy Father recalls.

Pope Francis continues by evoking Joseph as "an obedient father," who in all of life's circumstances was able to pronounce his "fiat", just like Mary at the Annunciation and like Jesus in Gethsemane: "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).” The Pope again speaks of Joseph as “an accepting father”: “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,” comments the Holy Father with a wisdom full of humanity. He adds that “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,” the Pope writes paternally.

The carpenter of Nazareth is also a “creatively courageous father” who knows how to transform problems into an opportunity, always relying on Providence. Recalling his being a “working father”, Francis considers that “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.

” Finally, Joseph is a “father in the shadows”. “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,” notes the successor of Peter, praising the fact that Joseph has always known how to decentralize and “focus […] instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus.” “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.”

In his conclusion, the Pope tells us that “the purpose 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.”

In the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, not only those Knights who are fathers of families but also the pastors – fathers from whom we receive spiritual support – and the Dames, we will all have the opportunity to deepen our reflections on this Apostolic Letter. It will help each and every one to draw closer to St. Joseph, “this extraordinary figure, so close to our own human experience” today.

F.V.

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