

# WITH A FATHER'S HEART

*"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. St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation." Patris Corde*

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary - December 8, 2020 - Pope Francis proclaimed a year dedicated to St. Joseph, the spouse of Mary and foster-father of Jesus. The Immaculate Conception celebrates Mary as the one conceived without sin for the special purpose in the plan of salvation to be the mother of Jesus. Connecting the Year of St. Joseph to the Feast of the Immaculate Conception draws attention to Joseph's important role alongside Mary in salvation history.

The Holy Father notes that the dedication of this year was inspired, in part, by the insights learned from the crisis caused by the global pandemic. He says the pandemic has taught us that "our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked" (Patris Corde). The pandemic has called us to acknowledge our common humanity and the need for each person to do their part - in big and small ways - to bring about the common good for all. St. Joseph embodies this principle as the example of an ordinary person filled with the grace of God to do extraordinary things.

Pope Francis's apostolic letter on St. Joseph, *Patris Corde* (With a Father's Heart), encourages us to embrace St. Joseph as our loving father and as a righteous man of virtue. The life of St. Joseph is rooted in a deep faith in God that enables him to offer sacrificial love for the Holy Family. As foster-father, St. Joseph lovingly protected Jesus and Mary - so too does he love and protect us now with a father's heart as the Patron of our Church. It is St. Joseph's faith, perseverance in uncertainty, and self-sacrificing love, that we are encouraged to incorporate in our own lives as we grow in our relationship with St. Joseph.

This seven-part guide will draw from Scripture, the apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, and the wisdom of the saints, as it invites us into deeper relationship with St. Joseph. The guide includes reflection questions, found at the end of the resource, to help guide personal reflection and small group discussion. The reflections will consider the following virtues of St. Joseph highlighted by Pope Francis:

- A beloved father
- A tender and loving father
- An obedient father
- An accepting father
- A creatively courageous father
- A working father
- A father in shadows

In this Year of St. Joseph, may each of us grow in relationship with this righteous man of God who leads us closer to Jesus and Mary and inspires our efforts to grow in holiness and love of God.



## 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." Patris Corde*

God the Father chose St. Joseph to be the foster-father of Jesus. The Gospel of St Matthew (1:18-21) describes the moment when the angel of the Lord appeared to St Joseph in a dream and announced "[Joseph] do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home... She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus" (Matthew 1:20). In this moment, Joseph is invited to accept an important and significant mission in salvation history. Joseph, in faith, said "yes" to God's calling and assented to his role as foster-father and guardian of Christ.

St. John Paul II remarked, "St. Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood." By loving, teaching and protecting Jesus, St. Joseph served God through his vocation as a father. St. Joseph faithfully lived out his vocation as he gave his life in "sacrificial service to the mystery of the incarnation" (Patris Corde). It is this sacrificial love and service - demonstrated in the countless ways he cared for and protected the Holy Family - that bestows on St. Joseph the title of beloved father. St. Joseph gave his heart to Jesus and Mary, who in turn loved him.

Each of us has been chosen by God for a particular vocation through which we love and serve Him. We are all, in our own unique way, called to bring the love of God to others. This call to love is particularly important within our families. Every person comes from, and is formed, in a family. Like the Holy Family, we too are called to love God by loving those He has entrusted to us - our family. As brothers and sisters in Christ, this call also extends to our communities of faith.

Let us turn to St. Joseph, beloved foster- father of Christ, to implore his intercession for our needs and the needs of our families.

### An Ancient Prayer to St Joseph

- *St. Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in you all my interest and desires.*
- *St. Joseph, do assist me by your powerful intercession, and obtain for me from your divine Son all spiritual blessings, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So that, having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer my thanksgiving and homage to the most loving of Fathers.*
- *St. Joseph, I never weary of contemplating you, and Jesus asleep in your arms; I dare not approach while He reposes near your heart. Press Him close in my name and kiss His fine head for me and ask Him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath. St. Joseph, patron of departing souls, pray for me. Amen.*



## A TENDER AND LOVING FATHER

*"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."  
Patris Corde*

The story in the Gospel of Luke is familiar to us - prior to the birth of Jesus, a decree went out from the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, calling for a census. With Mary soon to give birth, Joseph led his family out of Nazareth to his home town of Bethlehem. Pause to think about the journey - it was 90 miles long through difficult desert terrain. Making a journey of this kind would be difficult for anyone, how much more difficult for Mary and Joseph making this journey with only a donkey to help. Imagine the concern, exhaustion, and worry of Joseph as he led his family to Bethlehem. In this difficult journey, we see the gentle love of Joseph as he cared for Mary along the way.

As he faithfully loved Mary, so too did Joseph love his son Jesus whom he nurtured as he grew up under his care. Joseph's care for Christ mirrors the gentle love of God, which accompanies each one of us, every moment of our lives. The tenderness of God accepts both our strengths and our frailty, embracing us in love.

In reflecting on the fatherhood of St. Joseph, St. Josemaria Escriva said, "Joseph loved Jesus as a father loves his son and showed his love by giving him the best he had." St. Joseph acknowledged his weakness before God and presented them as an offering - trusting that the Lord would use everything to bring about His plan of salvation. We are emboldened by the humble, tender love of St. Joseph, and see in him the confident trust that God desires for us also to be part of His plan of salvation. In humility, God asks us to make an honest reflection of our hearts - where we are close to Him, and where we drift away from his love. In the latter, we need to consider our personal shortcomings or weaknesses that keep us from fully accepting the merciful love of God. When we resolutely cling to those things that keep us from God, they can become sinful.

One of the best places to acknowledge and uproot our sinfulness is in the Sacrament of Penance. Through this sacrament of healing, we encounter the tender love of God that forgives our sins and gives us the grace to avoid sin as we continue to grow in holiness. Are there sins on your heart in need of God's forgiveness? Celebrate God's tender mercy in the Sacrament of Penance.

Invite St Joseph to intercede as you strive to grow in holiness.

### **Prayer of St Bernardine of Sienna to St. Joseph**

*Remember us, Saint Joseph, and plead for us to your foster-child.  
Ask your most holy bride, the Virgin Mary, to look kindly upon us, since  
she is the mother of him who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives  
and reigns eternally. Amen.*



## AN OBEDIENT FATHER

*"Obedience made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary." Patris Corde*

Joseph was a man of deep faith - grounded in a vibrant prayer life in which he both spoke to, and listened for God's voice. This intimate life of prayer unfolded even as Joseph slept - as he received God's plans for his life in dreams. Joseph's first dream details his annunciation. Much like the annunciation of Mary, an angel appeared to him. However, in his dream, the angel told Joseph that Mary was pregnant with Jesus, the Son of God, and that he should not be afraid to take her into his home. Unlike Mary's fiat, Joseph spoke no word. His "yes" to God was reflected in action - Joseph awoke from his sleep and promptly took Mary into his home. In a second dream, following the birth of Jesus, Joseph is warned to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt to protect the Christ-child from King Herod's wrath. Again, Joseph does not hesitate to obey the word of God. As St. Sebastian Pelzacz remarked - "If you want to know St Joseph's obedience, look at how he rose at night at the angel's voice and, giving no care to hunger, hardships, or cold, went to Egypt where he led a hard life until the next command of God." In humble obedience, Joseph leads his family to Egypt and remains there awaiting a message from God that it is safe to return home.

In spite of the challenges, Joseph did not begrudgingly submit himself to God's will, but rather freely accepted and obediently trusted in God's plan. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines obedience in faith as the ability to "submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself" (CCC, 144). Obedience, in a negative context, can be misunderstood as restriction on personal freedom. Obedience in faith however is the fruit of filial trust in God's truth, which is objective and eternal. It is a truth that always desires what is best for us in this world and in the next - allowing us the freedom to love generously. In the midst of the noises in the world, we must be attentive to the voice of God speaking the truth of His love into our hearts. Listening for the voice of God, and trusting in His word, inspires us to follow His ways. Like Joseph, we must cultivate a strong prayer life so that when God speaks we will recognize His voice and respond in faith.

One of Pope Francis' prayer devotions is to the Sleeping St. Joseph. Trusting in St. Joseph's intercession, the Pope presents his needs to him, and asks that he in turn present his requests to the Lord as he sleeps. Enrich your prayer life by practicing this devotion before bed.

### Prayer to the Sleeping St. Joseph

*Saint Joseph, you are a man greatly favored by the Most High. The angel of the Lord appeared to you in dreams, while you slept, to warn you and guide you as you cared for the Holy Family. You were both silent and strong, a loyal and courageous protector.*

*Dear Saint Joseph, as you rest in the Lord, confident of His absolute power and goodness, look upon me. Please take my need (mention your intention) into your heart, dream of it, and present it to your Son. Help me then, good Saint Joseph, to hear the voice of God, to arise, and act with love. I praise and thank God with joy. Saint Joseph, I love you. Amen.*



## AN ACCEPTING FATHER

*"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."*

*Patris Corde*

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of Jesus's presentation in the temple. Following the Law of Moses, which calls for the first-born son be brought to the Lord for consecration, Joseph and Mary present Jesus at the temple. There, they encounter a righteous man by the name of Simeon. This was not a chance encounter - the Holy Spirit had prompted Simeon that he would see the promised Messiah before he died. Taking Jesus into his arms, Simeon prophesized, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted" (Luke 2:34). Scripture goes on to say - "the child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him" (Luke 2:33). Joseph and Mary received Simeon's words in awe and wonder. Imagine how Mary must have felt at his next words - Simeon said a sword would pierce her own heart as Mother of our Redeemer. Joseph accepted these startling revelations in silence as he led his family home to Nazareth.

Simeon's words must have reminded Joseph of the announcement of the angel when he was told that Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit and the child in her womb was to be named Jesus because "he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20). These words - first spoken by the angel and now by Simeon - revealed to Joseph the redemptive mission for which Christ was born and entrusted to his care. As before, Joseph accepts the word of God, and with it his role as "guardian and cooperator in the providential mystery of God" (St. John Paul II).

Pope Francis invites us to be like Joseph, as we strive not so much to understand, but humbly accept both the joy and sufferings of life. Pope Francis says - "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" (Patris Corde). Let us turn to St. Joseph in prayer, asking him to intercede for us, that we too may lovingly accept the joys and sorrows of this life as part of God's plan of salvation.

### Prayer of St Peter Julian Eymard

*O glorious St. Joseph, you who did faithfully obey the law of God, your heart was pierced at the sight of the Precious Blood that was shed by the infant Savior during his circumcision, but the name of Jesus gave you new life and filled you with quiet joy.*

*By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us the grace to be freed from all sin during life, and to die rejoicing, with the holy name of Jesus in our hearts and on our lips. Amen.*



## A CREATIVELY COURAGEOUS FATHER

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

Jesus's birth could not have been easy. Joseph and Mary were required to travel to Bethlehem to be counted to comply with the order of Caesar Augustus. This was a long hard journey for Joseph and Mary only to arrive in Bethlehem and be unable to find a place to stay. Imagine the fear and anxiety of Joseph and Mary as they sought a safe place for the birth of their child. Courageous in conviction that God was with him, Joseph "took a stable, and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God to come into the world" (Patris Corde). This creativity and courage mark the commitment of Joseph to love and care for Mary and Jesus. Joseph's courage is rooted in unfailing trust that God is with him in all things.

Joseph, a man of great virtue, habitually chose to follow the will of God - even in times of difficulty. In the moment of Jesus' birth, the virtue of fortitude stands out as the foundation for Joseph's creative courage. As defined by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* - "Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good" (CCC, 1808). The virtue of fortitude bestows on us the strength to resist temptation and overcome obstacles as we strive to do what is right and good in God's eyes. Committed to his calling to love and protect the Holy Family, Joseph found the strength to overcome the challenges of everyday life in innovative ways.

The Church continues St. Joseph's mission as we too have been entrusted with the responsibility to love and protect the Holy Family. Pope Francis remarks, "Indeed, Jesus and Mary his Mother are the most precious treasure of our faith" (Patris Corde). Our world is in desperate need of an encounter with Christ, and His beloved mother. Our love for Jesus and Mary should embolden us to share this treasure with others. This is the work of evangelization.

The mission to evangelize requires that each person find creative courage to bring Jesus to world. In the words of St. John Paul II - "It is precisely the intrepid faith of St. Joseph that the Church needs today in order to courageously dedicate herself to the urgent task of the new evangelization." We must seek new and innovative methods through which to share the faith with those around us - even when it is difficult. Whether in the face of a pandemic or social relativism, we are challenged to grow in the virtue of fortitude as we adapt to new ways of sharing our faith. Inspired by St. Joseph, let us share Jesus and Mary, and the gift of God's love they are, with the world.

Implore St. Joseph's intercession with the following prayer.

### Prayer by St Bernardine of Sienna

*O Joseph, virgin father of Jesus, most pure spouse of the Virgin Mary, pray for us daily to your Son of God, that, armed with the weapons of his grace, we may fight as we ought to in life, and be crowned by him in death. Amen.*



## A WORKING FATHER

*“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.” Patris Corde*

Joseph was a hardworking carpenter. As many fathers of his time, Joseph taught Jesus his craft. He formed Jesus in the skills needed to measure, cut, and shape wood in order to create something new. With every project, Jesus learned the patience needed for carpentry work. Through the practice of his craft, Joseph also taught Jesus the value, dignity, satisfaction and joy that comes to those who “eat the bread that is the fruit of one’s own labour” (Patris Corde). Being a carpenter was not a glamorous occupation, but it was fulfilling work, which provided for the Holy Family a decent and fair living.

In raising up Joseph as a working father, Pope Francis invites us to consider the dignity of work - one of the tenants of Catholic Social teaching - as an important aspect of human life and an essential means for participating in God’s work of salvation. Through his work as a carpenter, Joseph used his talent to not only provide for those entrusted to his care, but also participate in God’s plan for the common good of all. In this same way, working people today cooperate with God in service to the common good through their work.

In this time when many are underemployed or unemployed, Joseph’s example of the dignity of work is also a call for all to advocate for the right to work for all people. Understanding that God created each person with a vocation to work, we are to strive to create a society in which all have equal access to meaningful and dignified work. The common good is only obtained through the active participation of every human person in the fabric of society.

The Church highlights the dignity of work as an essential part of everyday human life in the celebration of St Joseph the Worker on May 1. This Church memorial invites us to give thanks to God for the gift of work, and to pray on behalf of those in search of meaningful employment. We entrust these prayers to the intercession of St. Joseph - the hardworking carpenter of Nazareth - as we too come to understand the value of our work as more than merely a means for making a living, but a form of participation in God’s creation.

### Prayer of St. Pope Pius X to St. Joseph the Worker

*O glorious St. Joseph, model of all who labor,  
obtain for me the grace to work in the spirit of penance  
in expiation for my numberless sins -  
preferring devotion to duty to my inclinations;  
to work with joy and gratitude, regarding it as an honor  
to develop and employ by work the gifts which I have received from God;  
to work with order, peace, patience, moderation,  
without ever recoiling before weariness and difficulties;  
to work, especially, with a pure intention and detached from myself,  
ever having death before my eyes and the account which I must give for  
time lost, for talents unused, for good omitted, and for vain satisfaction in  
success, so fatal to the work of God. Amen.*



## A FATHER IN THE SHADOWS

*"Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father; he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way." Patris Corde*

Though there are no recorded words of Joseph in Scripture, in the Gospel we "hear" the heart of Joseph through his actions. Throughout his life, Joseph was a "just man," that is, he was known for habitually doing what was right in his relationship with God and neighbor. This steadfast commitment to a life of faith and justice laid the foundation for Joseph's "yes" to God at the moment of his annunciation. Joseph's life of love models God's own just and merciful love for us, His children.

Pope Francis describes Joseph as a "shadow of the Heavenly Father" (Patris Corde). Though this image can be seen in a negative context, the image of a "shadow" in this case highlights Joseph's intimate closeness to God, the Father. In the shadow, Joseph faithfully remains close to God. Living in the shadow of God the Father rooted Joseph in love, and shaped him for his mission as foster-father to Christ.

Shadows can both go behind or in front of us. Shadows are most easily seen in the light, but shadows remain present in the dark. With these images, we see that Joseph also lives in the shadow of his son, Jesus. Though often unnoticed, Joseph was always present as protector and guardian of Jesus and His mission. The selfless and sacrificial love of Joseph for Jesus is a reflection of the love of God for each of us. God the Father is always present- guarding and protecting us - at the same time, giving us the freedom to choose to do what is right and just.

Let us continue to grow in friendship with St. Joseph, the shadow of the Father. We are called to become shadows - like Joseph - following closely behind Christ, reflecting our love of God. From the shadow, Joseph teaches us the true meaning of discipleship. Disciples follow closely behind Christ - serving Him in joy and humility. Our call to discipleship is born of love for Christ, a response to the love received from God. Living in the shadow of God is comforting, but can be challenging in a culture that values autonomy and power. Invite St. Joseph, the model of humility born of love, to help you understand the vastness of God's love and strive to live in the shadow.

### Prayer to St. Joseph by St Francis de Sales

*Glorious St Joseph, spouse of Mary, grant us thy paternal protection, we beseech thee by the heart of Jesus Christ. O thou, whose power extends to all our necessities and can render possible for us the most impossible things, open thy fatherly eyes to the needs of thy children.*

*In the trouble and distress which afflicts us, we confidently have recourse to thee. Deign to take under your charitable charge this important and difficult matter, cause of our worries. Make its happy outcome be for God's glory and for the good of His devoted servants. Amen.*





# WITH A FATHER'S HEART – REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*"The saints help all the faithful "to strive for the holiness and the perfection of their particular state of life". Their lives are concrete proof that it is possible to put the Gospel into practice." Patris Corde*

Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter on St. Joseph - *Patris Corde* - is an invitation to all the faithful to grow in relationship with this great saint, implore his intercession, and strive to imitate his virtues:

- A beloved father
- A tender and loving father
- An obedient father
- An accepting father
- A creatively courageous father
- A working father
- A father in shadows

RCIA groups, parish ministry groups, men or women's groups, Bible study or other small groups are encouraged to reflect on the life of St. Joseph by unpacking, with others, the beautiful, yet challenging attributes highlighted in *Patris Corde*. The following small group discussion questions may be helpful in facilitating conversation with others.

## A BELOVED FATHER

God has created us all with a specific vocation to love. As Pope Francis explains - "Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice" (*Patris Corde*). Consider your own vocation in your present state in life.

- How has God called you to give of yourself in love and sacrificial service for others?
- How are you in turn "beloved" by another?

## A TENDER AND LOVING FATHER

Reflect on the following quote from *Patris Corde*: "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." God worked through Joseph's frailties to bring about His plan for salvation. He works through ours too. Consider your own fears and weakness.

- How does St Joseph's example inspire you to overcome these fears and present these weaknesses to God?
- What spiritual practices help you to overcome fear?

## AN OBEDIENT FATHER

St. Joseph received God's plans for his life in prayer - often in his dreams. St. Joseph models for us that prayer is both talking to and listening to God. Think about your own life of prayer.

- How regularly do you speak to God?
- When have you heard God's voice?
- How often do you create silence where you can listen for God?

Often we learn the will of God for our lives in prayer, or through a person/event.

- What is most difficult for you about following God's will?
- How does St. Joseph's obedience inspire you to grow in trust of God?



# WITH A FATHER'S HEART – REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## AN ACCEPTING FATHER

St. Joseph is a model of Christian hope - a man of great trust that God works all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). It is with hope in God that St. Joseph was able to accept the joys and sufferings of life. Think about the joys and sufferings across your lifetime - especially at time of significant change.

- What has been your source of hope?
- How have you seen God's hand at work during these trying times?
- What helps you to accept the joys/sufferings in hope and love?

## A CREATIVELY COURAGEOUS FATHER

The Gospel refers to St. Joseph as a "just man" - a man who habitually chose to do what was right in his relationship with God and others - even in the face of temptation or difficulty.

- Think of a moment in which you struggled to do what God was asking of you. How did you respond?
- How does St. Joseph's creative courage inspire you to respond to life's obstacles in new ways?

The Church exists to evangelize - to share the treasure of our faith found in the person of Christ.

- Do you see this as an opportunity for courage or creativity or both?
- How are you called to share your faith journey with those around you?
- What creative methods can you use to nurture faith in others?

## A WORKING FATHER

Pope Francis emphasizes work as a means of participating in the work of salvation and an opportunity to develop our abilities in service to the common good. Consider your own work.

- How are you cooperating with God's plan for creation through your daily work?

An important aspect of the Church's understanding of the dignity of work is the belief that all human beings have a right to work and protection from inhumane employment practices.

- At a time in which many are unemployed or underemployed, how can we better advocate for the universal right to work?
- How can we better support those who are financially disadvantaged during this time of crisis?

## A FATHER IN SHADOWS

St. Joseph is described as a 'father in the shadows.'

- How does the image of a shadow help you better understand St. Joseph's relationship with God? with Jesus?
- How can you live in the shadow of God?

Consider all you have learned about St. Joseph.

- What has impacted you most about this great saint?
- Which attributes do you hope to imitate in your own journey of faith?
- How can you inspire others to also "go to Joseph"?

