



On 8 December, 2020, the solemn feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis has, through his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* ("With a Father's Heart"), proclaimed a special "Year of St. Joseph" from 8 December, 2020 to 8 December, 2021, in order to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Pope Pius IX's declaration of St. Joseph as patron of the universal Church. Let us recall in this context that our founding fathers had nourished a special tender devotion to St. Joseph and every year on March 19 we renew the consecration of our Congregation to him. In 1831 as the foundation stone of our mother house at

Mannanam was laid, it was laid in the name of St. Joseph, overriding the other two opinions, namely, to lay it in the name of St. John the Baptist or St. Dominic. In the *Chronicles of Mannanam* we have numerous references to St. Joseph and also of the special and extra-ordinary favours received through his intercession (*Chronicles I*, 25; 135; 136; 150; 152; 153; 157; *Chronicles II*, 3; 19; 85; 106). St. Joseph is also the patron of our Prior General's House, two of our provinces and many other houses and monasteries. St. Teresa of Avila, whom we venerate very much in the family of Carmel, was a great devotee of St. Joseph.

In this context, I would like to highlight certain points that Pope Francis mentions about St. Joseph in his encyclical *Patris Corde*. "Jesus saw the tender love of God" in St. Joseph (PC 2). The Pope then observes that only tender love can save us from the snares of the devil. It is by encountering God's mercy especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we experience God's tenderness, because His truth "does not condemn us, instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us".

In his role as the head of a family and himself as an "obedient father" (PC 3) Joseph taught Jesus to be obedient to his parents (cf. Lk 2:51). In every situation, Joseph declared his own "fiat", like that of Mary at the Annunciation and of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father. St. Joseph is also "an accepting father" (PC 4); he accepted Mary unconditionally as well as the events in his life, setting aside his own ideas and reconciling himself with his own history. In other words, his spirituality is "not one that *explains*, but *accepts*". The Pope depicts St. Joseph also as a "creatively courageous father" (PC 5), for he accepted his personal history and embraced even the things in life that he did not choose.

Further, St. Joseph was "a working father" (PC 6). "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". He teaches us the value, dignity and joy of work. Pope Francis reminds us of the "renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which St.

Joseph is an exemplary patron". According to the Pope "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". "Working persons, whatever their job may be, are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us". Pope Francis further draws our attention to the "loss of employment that affects so many of our brothers and sisters, and has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic". He therefore appeals to us that we may find ways to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work! This makes us reflect on our own attitude to work and our (domestic) workers. Do we give them just wages and treat them with respect? Are their faith formation and growth in spiritual life a concern for us?

St. Joseph is characterized by Pope Francis also as a "father in the shadows" (PC 7). In his relationship to Jesus, Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father: he watched over him and protected him. In this connection the Pope remarks 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. Children today often seem orphans, lacking fathers. The Church too needs fathers." Following the example of St. Paul (1 Cor 4:15) we are called to become fathers in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

Pope Francis understands St. Joseph as a "most chaste" father, because his attitude was opposed to possessiveness. "Chastity is freedom from possessiveness in every sphere of one's life. Only when love is chaste, is it truly love". The Pope notes, "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". As Joseph never made himself the centre of things and "did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus" (PC 7), we are also called to think of others who are entrusted to our care.

"Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust" (PC 7). Today, the following appeal of the Pope is very relevant in the church and society: "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." (PC 7)

Pope Francis emphasizes that "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". The Pontiff makes then the final remark that "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." (PC 7)

I would like to remind you of the consecration to be made on March 19 at the Provincial and local levels with the usual special preparation such as novena. We will have on the Foundation Day on 11 May, 2021 a special celebration at Mannanam, as the Mother House is dedicated to St Joseph.

The Egyptians were directed to "go to Joseph" (Gen 41:55) in their crisis; let us similarly go to St. Joseph in our needs. May St. Joseph intercede for our Congregation and for each one of us!

Yours fraternally in our Lord,

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General