

PATRIS CORDE: DEVOTIONS TO ST JOSEPH



James Tissot (1836-1902). *The Anxiety of Saint Joseph*

Brooklyn Museum, New York

The painting depicts a lonely carpenter. Betrothed but still unmarried, Mary and Joseph do not yet live together, making the news of her unexpected pregnancy a cause of deep concern for Joseph. Ordinarily industrious, as the curled wood shavings around his feet attest, the carpenter hunches over his bench, lost in thought and unable to work. In the hope of catching a glimpse of Mary, he gazes out at the street as women pass carrying jars filled with the day's water.

Although traditional representations of Joseph show a man of advanced age, Tissot painted him as younger and more robust, arguing in his accompanying commentary that Rabbinical doctrine would have regarded the union of an old man and a young girl as a profanation. He further asserted that the rigorous demands placed on the Holy Family required a man of vigour.

On the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Joseph as patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis published his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* – with a father's heart – stating at the outset that this is how Joseph would have loved Jesus. Obedient to the message of the angel, revealing God's divine will, Joseph had the courage to become the legal father of Jesus, giving him the name which means, 'God saves'. What follows is a brief summary of excerpts from the *Letter*, and how it may help us in our daily walk with Jesus.

Section 2 of the Letter reminds us that 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, who is good to all, whose *“compassion is over all that he has made”* (Ps 145:9).

Section 4 recalls that, 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”*.

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.

Section 7 reminds us that 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. 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.

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 (see below).

LITANY OF ST JOSEPH (taken from the *St Gregory's Prayer Book*, pp377-379)

Lord, have mercy upon us

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, hear us,

O God the Father of Heaven,

O God the Son, Redeemer of the World,

O God the Holy Spirit,

O Holy Trinity, one God,

Holy Mary,

St. Joseph,

Renowned offspring of David,

Light of Patriarchs,

Spouse of the Mother of God,

Chaste guardian of the Virgin,

Foster father of the Son of God,

Diligent protector of Christ,

Head of the Holy Family,

Joseph most just,

Joseph most chaste,

Joseph most prudent,

Joseph most strong,

Joseph most obedient,

Joseph most faithful,

Mirror of patience,

Lover of poverty,

Model of workmen,

Glory of home life,

Guardian of virgins,

Pillar of families,

Solace of the afflicted,

Hope of the sick,

Patron of the dying,

Terror of demons,

Protector of Holy Church,

O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,

He made him the lord of his household,

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

have mercy upon us.

have mercy upon us.

have mercy upon us.

have mercy upon us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

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pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

spare us, O Lord.

graciously hear us, O Lord.

have mercy upon us.

And prince over all his possessions.

Let us pray:

O God, who in thine ineffable providence didst choose Blessed Joseph to be the spouse of thy most Holy Mother; grant that as we venerate him as our protector on earth, we may deserve to have him as our intercessor in heaven: thou who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen.

Saint Joseph, pray for us.

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.

This prayer was given in Rome by Pope Francis, at Saint John Lateran on the 8th December - Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary - in the year 2020.

NOVENAS TO ST JOSEPH

The General Calendar has two principal feasts of St Joseph:

19th March – St Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

1st May – St Joseph the Worker.

In preparation for these you could pray one of the novenas below, starting on the 10th March and 22nd April respectively.

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/devotiupons/novena-to-st-joseph-304>

<https://catholicnovenaapp.com/novenas/st-joseph-novena/#>

<https://dioceseofvenice.org/wp-content/uploads/Novena-for-the-Intercession-of-Saint-Joseph.pdf>