

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, Assam, India

JS – 49/2021

9 March 2021

My Dear Confreres,

I am writing this short special circular in order to remind every confrere and each community that tomorrow we begin the novena to celebrate the feast of St Joseph, the Husband of Mary. Almost every year, we celebrate the solemnity of St Joseph during the season of Lent; but celebrate it in a fitting manner to emulate the holiness of this great saint, the foster father of Jesus. Moreover, Pope Francis has declared this year as “Year of St Joseph.”

Pope Francis proclaims “Year of St Joseph”

In his new Apostolic letter entitled *Patris corde* (With a Father’s Heart), Pope Francis describes St Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

The Letter marks the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX’s declaration of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. To celebrate the anniversary, Pope Francis has proclaimed a special “Year of St Joseph,” beginning on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2020 and extending to the same feast in 2021.



Church grants plenary indulgence for year of St Joseph

The Holy Father wrote *Patris corde* against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which, he says, has helped us see more clearly the importance of “ordinary” people who, though far from the limelight, exercise patience and offer hope every day. In this, they resemble St Joseph, “the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence,” who nonetheless played “an incomparable role in the history of salvation.”

A beloved, tender, obedient father

St Joseph, in fact, “concretely expressed his fatherhood” by making an offering of himself in love “a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home,” writes Pope Francis, quoting his predecessor St Paul VI.

And because of his role at “the crossroads between the Old and New Testament,” St Joseph “has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people” (PC, 1). In him, “Jesus saw the tender love of God,” the one that helps us accept our weakness, because “it is through” and despite “our fears, our frailties, and our weakness” that most divine designs are realized. “Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser,” emphasizes the Pontiff, and it is by encountering God’s mercy especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we “experience His truth and tenderness,” – because “we know that God’s truth does not condemn us, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us” (PC, 2).

Joseph is also a father in obedience to God: with his ‘fiat’ he protects Mary and Jesus and teaches his Son to “do the will of the Father.” Called by God to serve the mission of Jesus, he “cooperated... in the great mystery of Redemption,” as St John Paul II said, “and is truly a minister of salvation” (PC, 3).

Welcoming the will of God

At the same time, Joseph is “an accepting Father,” because he “accepted Mary unconditionally” – an important gesture even today, says Pope Francis, “in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident.” But the Bridegroom of Mary is also the one who, trusting in the Lord, accepts in his life even the events that he does not understand, “setting aside his own ideas” and reconciling himself with his own history.

Joseph’s spiritual path “is not one that *explains*, but *accepts*” – which does not mean that he is “resigned.” Instead, he is “courageously and firmly proactive,” because with “Holy Spirit’s gift of fortitude,” and full of hope, he is able “to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.” In practice, through St Joseph, it is as if God were to repeat to us: “Do not be afraid!” because “faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad,” and makes us aware that “God can make flowers spring up from stony ground.” Joseph “did not look for shortcuts but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it.” For this reason, “he encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak” (PC, 4).

A creatively courageous father, example of love

Patris corde highlights “the creative courage” of St Joseph, which “emerges especially in the way we deal with difficulties.” “The carpenter of Nazareth,” explains the Pope, was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting in divine providence.” He had to deal with “the concrete problems” his Family faced, problems faced by other families in the world, and especially those of migrants.

In this sense, St Joseph is “the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty.” As the guardian of Jesus and

Mary, Joseph cannot “be other than the guardian of the Church,” of her motherhood, and of the Body of Christ. “Consequently, every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is ‘the child’ whom Joseph continues to protect.” From St Joseph, writes Pope Francis, “we must learn... to love the Church and the poor” (PC, 5).

A father who teaches the value, dignity and joy of work

“A carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family,” St Joseph also teaches us “the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labour.” This aspect of Joseph’s character provides Pope Francis the opportunity to launch an appeal in favour of work, which has become “a burning social issue” even in countries with a certain level of well-being. “there is a renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which St Joseph is an exemplary patron,” the Pope writes.

Work, he says, “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.” Those who work, he explains, “are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us.” Pope Francis encourages everyone “to rediscover the value, the importance and the necessity of work for bringing about a new ‘normal’ from which no one is excluded.” Especially in light of rising unemployment due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Pope calls everyone to “review our priorities” and to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work!” (PC, 6).

A father “in the shadows,” centred on Mary and Jesus

Taking a cue from *The Shadow of the Father* — a book by Polish writer Jan Dobraczyński — Pope Francis describes Joseph’s fatherhood of Jesus as “the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father.” “Fathers are not born, but made,” says Pope Francis. “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.” Unfortunately, in today’s society, children “often seem orphans, lacking fathers” who are able to introduce them “to life and reality.” Children, the Pope says, need fathers who will not try to dominate them, but instead raise them to be “capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying freedom and exploring new possibilities.”

This is the sense in which St Joseph is described as a “most chaste” father, which is the opposite of domineering possessiveness. Joseph, says Pope Francis, “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.”

Happiness for Joseph involved a true gift of self: “In him, we never see frustration, but only trust,” writes Pope Francis. “His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust.” Joseph stands out, therefore, as an exemplary figure for our time, in a world that “needs fathers,” and not “tyrants”; a society that “rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction.”

True fathers, instead, “refuse to live the lives of their children for them,” and instead respect their freedom. In this sense, says Pope Francis, a father realizes that “he is most a father and an 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.” Being a father, the Pope emphasizes, “has nothing to do with possession, but is rather a ‘sign’ pointing to a greater fatherhood”: that of the “heavenly Father” (PC, 7).

A daily prayer to St Joseph... and a challenge

In his letter, Pope Francis notes how, “Every day, for over forty years, following Lauds,” he has “recited a prayer to St Joseph taken from a nineteenth-century French prayer book of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary.” This prayer, he says, expresses devotion and trust, and even poses a certain challenge to St Joseph,” on account of its closing words: “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.”

At the conclusion of his Letter, he adds another prayer to St Joseph, which he encourages all of us to pray together:

*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.*

Special Intention to be prayed for during the Novena to St Joseph

As you all know that the meeting of the Salesian Provincials of South Asia was held in the Provincial House, Bangalore. From all points of view, the meeting was very enriching, the fruits of which could bring about lasting benefits for the young in all our apostolate, if we commit ourselves to work on its deliberations. I hope to share effectively the deliberations of the meeting in different meetings at the provincial, the regional and the community levels. The Provincial and his council will make a study of them first in the provincial council and will later animate and disseminate the same to other parts of the Province.

Soon after the meeting, the President of the SPCSA cum Regional, South Asia, Fr Biju Michael invited all the provincials to organise the novena to St Joseph in a special way and pray for the intentions of the provinces particularly for the intentions of the Regional and the growth of the South Asian region through the fatherly and powerful intercession of St Joseph. We all know that our region is very rich in the salesian charism, however it is also not free from certain challenges and difficulties. We need to keep working hard through radical fidelity and ask for the guidance, protection and creativity of the father of the Holy family. Hence I request all the Rectors and leaders of all communities to organize the novena as devoutly as possible and pray for the intentions of the province especially of Fr Biju Michael, the Regional.

We are enclosing some of the prayers that the communities could make use for the novena.

Prayers to St Joseph

O glorious St Joseph, faithful follower of Jesus Christ, to you we raise our hearts and hands to implore your powerful intercession in obtaining from the benign heart of Jesus all the helps and graces necessary for our spiritual and temporal welfare, particularly for the grace of a happy death and the special favour we now request.... (*mention your request*) and for the needs of our Congregation, for an increase in vocations, and for our Confreres. O guardian of the Word Incarnate, we feel animated with confidence that your prayers in our behalf will be graciously heard before the throne of God. O glorious St Joseph, through the love you bear to Jesus Christ and for the glory of His name, hear our prayers and obtain our petitions. Amen.

To you, O blessed Joseph, do we come in our afflictions, and having implored the help of your most holy Spouse, we confidently invoke your patronage also.

Through that charity which bound you to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God and through the paternal love with which you embraced the Child Jesus, we humbly beg you

graciously to regard the inheritance which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood, and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities.

O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ; O most loving father, ward off from us every contagion of error and corrupting influence; O our most mighty protector, be kind to us and from heaven assist us in our struggle with the power of darkness. As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril, so now protect God's Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity; shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection, so that, supported by your example and your aid, we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.

St Joseph, I, your unworthy child, greet you. You are the faithful protector and intercessor of all who love and venerate you. You know that I have special confidence in you and that, after Jesus and Mary, I place all my hope of salvation in you, for you are especially powerful with God and will never abandon your faithful servants. Therefore I humbly invoke you and commend myself, with all who are dear to me and all that belong to me, to your intercession. I beg of you, by your love for Jesus and Mary, not to abandon me during life and to assist me at the hour of my death.

Glorious St Joseph, spouse of the Immaculate virgin, obtain for me a pure, humble, charitable mind, and perfect resignation to the divine will. Be my guide, my father, and my model through life that I may merit to die as you did in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

Loving St Joseph, faithful follower of Jesus Christ, I raise my heart to you to implore your powerful intercession in obtaining from the divine heart of Jesus all the graces necessary for my spiritual and temporal welfare, particularly the grace of a happy death, and the special grace I now implore: (mention your request).

Guardian of the word incarnate, I feel confident that your prayers in my behalf will be graciously heard before the throne of God. Amen.

The Litany of St Joseph

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.

God, the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, One God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, pray for us.

St Joseph, pray for us.

Noble Offspring of David, pray for us.

Light of Patriarchs, pray for us.

Spouse of the Mother of God, pray for us.

Chaste Guardian of the Virgin, pray for us.

Foster-Father of the Son of God, pray for us.

Zealous Defender of Christ, pray for us.

Head of the Holy Family, pray for us.

Joseph Most Just, pray for us.

Joseph Most Chaste, pray for us.

Joseph Most Prudent, pray for us.

Joseph Most Courageous, pray for us.

Joseph Most Obedient, pray for us.

Joseph Most Faithful, pray for us.

Mirror of Patience, pray for us.

Lover of Poverty, pray for us.

Model of Workmen, pray for us.

Glory of Domestic Life, pray for us.

Guardian of Virgins, pray for us.

Pillar of Families, pray for us.

Comfort of the Afflicted, pray for us.

Hope of the Sick, pray for us.

Patron of the Dying, pray for us.

Terror of Demons, pray for us.

Protector of the Holy Church, pray for us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, Spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, Have mercy on us.

V/. He has made him lord of his household, R/. And prince over all his possessions.

Let us pray.

O God, who, in your loving providence, chose Blessed Joseph to be the spouse of your most Holy Mother, grant us the favour of having him for our intercessor in heaven whom on earth we venerate as our protector. You, who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer to St Joseph by Pope Francis for the Year of St Joseph

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.

CONCLUSION

Dear Confreres, may St Joseph inspire us to be tender and loving persons, to be kind and effective instruments of God's love. Let us cultivate a heart like that of St Joseph, ever ready to dream for the Lord, ever ready to listen to His voice, and ever ready and prompt to put His Word into action. Let us pray for our various needs through the intercession of St Joseph, especially for more Salesian Brother vocations to our Province. May he intercede for us and for our Province.

St Joseph – Pray for us!

Yours affectionately in the Lord,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

