

Matthew's Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus. Through Joseph, Jesus descends from the royal line of King David. The coming of the Messiah is the climax of Israel's history. While the genealogy shows the continuity of God's providential plan, the listing of the women Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, is unexpected. "[This] culminates in the supreme "irregularity" of the Messiah's birth of a virgin mother" (Note). So, what are we to make of Joseph, the husband of Mary?

Joseph loved Jesus with a father's heart. He was courageous in becoming the stepfather of Jesus. Joseph placed his trust in God and followed the instructions of the angel of the Lord: "You are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).

Blessed Pius IX declared Joseph the "Patron of the Catholic Church," Pius XII named him as "Patron of Workers," and Pope John Paul II declared him as "Guardian of the Redeemer." And Pope Francis, starting on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, declared the next 12 months as the Year of Saint Joseph.

Amidst the crisis of the pandemic, we have a deeper awareness of how our lives are interconnected. Pope Francis explains: "our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show, yet in these very days are surely shaping the decisive events of our history. ... How many people daily exercise patience and offer hope, taking care to spread not panic, but shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday ways, how to accept and deal with a crisis by adjusting their routines, looking ahead and encouraging the practice of prayer. How many are praying, making sacrifices and interceding for the good of all?"ⁱ Joseph is one of those ordinary people who is present in the life of Jesus and yet hidden as we know so little about him. "Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation."ⁱⁱ

Joseph helped to shape Jesus into the person he became. This is what every father is called to do for their children. "By making his life a sacrificial service to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose. [Joseph] employed his legal authority over the Holy Family to devote himself completely to them in his life and work. He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman sacrifice of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home."ⁱⁱⁱ

Every loving father helps to teach their child about the love of God by their own example. "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)... The history of salvation is worked out 'in hope against hope' (Rom 4:18), through our weaknesses. 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."^{iv} For Jesus and for every child, God takes the ordinary and helps a child to get an initial sense of the extraordinary, the infinite love of God the Father for every human.

Joseph also provides a model for dealing with the unexpected twists and turns of life. "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."^v We need not be held hostage to the unexpected, with God's help we can chart a new course and embrace the challenges.

"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.”^{vi} As we embrace the continuing challenges of life amidst the pandemic, Pope Francis offers a simple prayer to guide us forward. “Go to Joseph.”^{vii}

ⁱ Meditation in the Time of Pandemic (27 March 2020): L’Osservatore Romano, 29 March 2020, p. 10.

ⁱⁱ Pope Francis, Patris Corde, Proclaiming the Year of St Joseph

ⁱⁱⁱ Homily (19 March 1966): Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, IV (1966), 110

^{iv} Pope Francis, Patris Corde, Proclaiming the Year of St Joseph, #2.

^v Ibid #4.

^{vi} Ibid #2.

^{vii} Ibid #1