



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall
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Catechesis on Saint Joseph: 12. *Saint Joseph, Patron of the Church*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we conclude the series of catecheses on the figure of Saint Joseph. These catecheses are complementary to the Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, written on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church by Blessed Pius IX. But what does this title mean? What does it mean that Saint Joseph is “patron of the Church”? I would like to reflect on this today with you.

In this case too, the Gospels provide us with the most correct key to interpretation. In fact, at the end of every story in which Joseph is the protagonist, the Gospel notes that he takes the Child and His mother with him and does what God has ordered him to do (cf. *Mt* 1:24; 2:14, 21). Thus, the fact that Joseph’s task is to protect Jesus and Mary stands out. He is their principal guardian: “Indeed, Jesus and Mary His Mother are the most precious treasure of our faith” [\[1\]](#) (Apostolic letter *Patris corde*, 5). And this treasure is safeguarded by Saint Joseph.

In the plan of salvation, the Son cannot be separated from the Mother, from the one who “advanced in the pilgrimage of faith and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son even to the

Cross” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58), as the Second Vatican Council reminds us.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph are in a sense the primordial nucleus of the Church. Jesus is Man and God; Mary, the first disciple, is the Mother; and Joseph, the guardian. And we too “should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping” (*Patris corde*, 5). And here there is a very beautiful trace of the Christian vocation: to safeguard. To safeguard life, to safeguard human development, to safeguard the human mind, to safeguard the human heart, to safeguard human work. The Christian — we could say — is like Saint Joseph: he must safeguard. To be a Christian is not only to receive the faith, to confess the faith, but to safeguard life, one’s own life, the life of others, the life of the Church. The Son of the Most High came into the world in a condition of great weakness: Jesus was born like this, weak, weak. He wanted to be in need of being defended, protected, cared for. God trusted Joseph, as did Mary, who found in him the bridegroom who loved and respected her and always took care of her and the Child. “In this sense, Saint Joseph could not be other than the Guardian of the Church, for the Church is the continuation of the Body of Christ in history, even as Mary’s motherhood is reflected in the motherhood of the Church. In his continued protection of the Church, Joseph continues to protect *the child and his mother*, and we too, by our love for the Church, continue to love *the Child and His mother*” (ibid.).

This Child is the One who will say: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*). Therefore, every person who is hungry and thirsty, every stranger, every migrant, every person without clothes, every sick person, every prisoner is the “Child” whom Joseph looks after. And we are invited to safeguard these people, these our brothers and sisters, as Joseph did. That is why he is invoked as protector of all the needy, the exiled, the afflicted, and even the dying — [we spoke about this last Wednesday](#). And we too must learn from Joseph to “safeguard” these goods: to love the Child and His mother; to love the Sacraments and the people of God; to love the poor and our parish. Each of these realities is always *the Child and His mother* (cf. *Patris corde*, 5). We must safeguard because, with this, we safeguard Jesus, as Joseph did.

Nowadays it is common, it is an everyday occurrence, to criticise the Church, to point out its inconsistencies — there are many — to point out its sins, which in reality are our inconsistencies, our sins, because the Church has always been a people of sinners who encounter God’s mercy. Let us ask ourselves if, deep in our hearts, we love the Church as she is, the People of God on a journey, with many limitations, but with a great desire to serve and to love God. In fact, only love makes us capable of speaking the truth fully, in a non-partisan way; of saying what is wrong, but also of recognising all the goodness and holiness that are present in the Church, starting precisely with Jesus and Mary. Loving the Church, safeguarding the Church and walking with the Church. But the Church is not that little group that is close to the priest and commands everyone, no. The Church is everyone, everyone. On a journey. Safeguarding one another, looking out for each other. This is a good question: when I have a problem with someone, do I try to look after them, or

do I immediately condemn them, speak ill of them, destroy them? We must safeguard, always safeguard!

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to ask for the intercession of Saint Joseph precisely in the most difficult times in your life and in that of your communities. Where our mistakes become a scandal, let us ask Saint Joseph to give us the courage to speak the truth, ask for forgiveness, and humbly begin again. Where persecution prevents the Gospel from being proclaimed, let us ask Saint Joseph for the strength and patience to endure abuse and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Where material and human resources are scarce and make us experience poverty, especially when we are called to serve the last, the defenceless, the orphans, the sick, the rejected of society, let us pray to Saint Joseph to be Providence for us. How many saints have turned to him! How many people in the history of the Church have found in him a patron, a guardian, a father!

Let us imitate their example, and let us pray all together for this today: Let us pray to Saint Joseph with the prayer that I put at the end of the Letter *Patris corde*, entrusting to him our intentions and, in a special way, the Church that suffers and is in trial. And now, you have in your hands in various language — in four, I think — the prayer; and I think that it will also be on the screen, so that together, each one can pray to Saint Joseph, in their language.

Hail, guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the 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 to be a father,
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.

[1] S. Rituum Congreg., Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (8 December 1870): ASS 6 (1870-71), 193; cf. Pius IX, Lett. Ap. *Inclytum Patriarcham* (7 July 1871): *lo. cit.*, 324-327.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Nigeria and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

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Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds*. In a world that continues to be lacerated by deep and apparently irreconcilable conflicts, [that is] sick, may each one of you be a sign of reconciliation that sinks its roots in the Word of the Gospel.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: Our catechesis on Saint Joseph now concludes with a reflection on his role as "Patron of the Universal Church". This title, bestowed on Saint Joseph 150 years ago by Blessed Pius IX, is based on the witness of Scripture. In the Gospels, Joseph is consistently presented as the guardian of the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus. Just as Joseph protected the Holy Family, so too he continues to love and protect the Body of Christ, which is the Church, as well as the poor, the sick and the dying whom the Lord calls the least of his brothers and sisters. Saint Joseph teaches us that we too must love and protect the Church and Christ's poor. At a time when it is easy to criticize the Church, this means frankly acknowledging that we are a people of sinners graciously redeemed by God's mercy, while at the same time bearing witness to the Risen Christ's presence in our midst, the transformative power of his grace in the sacraments, and the holiness which is the unfailing gift of his Spirit. Together with so many saints throughout history, let us commend ourselves and the needs of the Church to the protection of Saint Joseph, asking him, in the words of today's prayer, to "guide us in the path of life... and defend us from every evil. Amen".