**THE YEAR OF ST JOSEPH 2021**

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**St Joseph’s Hiddenness**

The chaos in our culture is one reason why Pope Francis has designated this year as the Year of St Joseph. In an Apostolic Letter, *Patris corde,* marking the 150th Anniversary of the declaration of St Joseph as Universal Patron of the Church, Pope Francis noted that the year of the pandemic has exposed the value of the hidden and often unappreciated workers who quietly serve us every day.

“Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble,” [wrote the Holy Father](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html). “St Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all.”

It is this hiddenness of St Joseph that is, paradoxically, his most conspicuous attribute.

St Joseph’s entire life was committed to quiet, hidden, unassuming service. This should provide great hope to fathers everywhere, who wonder whether they are “making a difference” by quietly serving their families in seemingly unremarkable ways: going to work every day, playing with, or teaching their children, and simply being a quiet, steady, protective presence within the home. The answer – so long as they are doing their work in a spirit of humble obedience to God’s will – is “yes”! A thousand times yes.

Our culture lionizes the rich, the wealthy, and the powerful. This, however, is not God’s way. It may be true that we, too, need our politicians, businessmen, entertainers, and all the rest And yet, the message of all the Scriptures, and especially the Gospels, is that salvation is not found among the princes of the world. “Salvation,” Christ says to the woman at the well in the Gospel of John, “is from the Jews.” (John 4:22) And who were the Jews? A small, hidden, unassuming, and largely inconsequential people in the ancient world.

The greatest saint of all time – Mary, the Mother of God – was a peasant woman, chosen for the incomparably great task of bearing the incarnate God. And the second greatest saint – her husband and Christ’s foster-father – was a humble carpenter, who is not recorded as saying a single word in all of the Scriptures. No great deeds, and no great words. And yet, as Pope Francis notes, “After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse.”

**The Need for Fathers in Times of Turmoil**

Some have argued that, just as the greatest source of spiritual confusion in our contemporary culture is the abandonment of belief and trust in God our Father, so too the greatest source of social confusion is the crisis in human fatherhood.

Tragically, many fathers today do not take seriously the weight of the responsibility that is placed on their shoulders. In far too many cases, fathers turn their backs on their wives and children in order to pursue their own aims and pleasures. Even when they have not literally abandoned their children, leaving them fatherless, they have been spiritually absent, failing to provide the love, guidance, support, and example that children need for their spiritual and personal development.

The same is also true about the crisis within our Church. There is pressure from the world for the Church to change fundamental doctrine related to life and family. These doctrines are the bulwark standing between the agents of death and so many unborn children and other vulnerable people. They are also the best means of protecting the family against the degradations of the sexual revolution, which have torn so many families apart, and sown so much heartache.

At such a time, we need strong fathers – priests and bishops – who are willing to courageously defend their spiritual children. Instead, many priests and bishops have betrayed their spiritual fatherhood, abandoning their role as teachers, and making compromises with the world, even (and it is terrible to admit) diabolically abusing the children entrusted to their care.

Now, more than ever, we need men who are willing to step up to the plate, and to imitate the fatherhood of St Joseph. Fathers must look to St Joseph to learn how they can serve their wives and children with the quiet, hidden, self-effacing strength with which this great saint – the Universal Patron of the Catholic Church – served Mary and Jesus. Priests and bishops, similarly, must imitate St Joseph, looking to him for an example of service, humility, obedience, and holiness.

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