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The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

In troubled times we turn to Saint Joseph

The publication date for this issue of the Leadership Briefing is Friday, March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph. I want to wish everyone a blessed feast day—especially during this special anniversary year.

December 8, 2020, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, was the 150th anniversary of Pope Pius IX’s designation of St. Joseph as “Patron of the Catholic Church.” In recognition of this anniversary, Pope Francis has proclaimed December 8, 2020–December 8, 2021 as the Year of Saint Joseph.



There are many reasons for honoring St. Joseph in this way. The husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus was a righteous man who obeyed without hesitation the instructions given to him by God’s angel on at least four different occasions recorded by the evangelists Mathew and Luke in their accounts of the early life of Jesus.

In his Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde* (With a Father’s Heart), Pope Francis offers a powerful reflection on the silent strength and courage of this “righteous man.” St. Joseph is exactly the kind of man we need in these troubled times. After living through the devastating effects of the pandemic; the continuing scourge of racism, numerous incidents of violence and social unrest; political turmoil and deep divisions in our nation and even in our Church—we need the calm, courageous witness of St. Joseph more than ever.

We need St. Joseph to show us how to be attentive to God’s will in the midst of chaos, uncertainty and fear. And we need to respond immediately, without hesitation or

questioning, as he did, saying his own “Fiat”—which was uttered silently but with the clear and unmistakable force of actions which spoke louder than words.

A link to the full text of *Patris Corde* is available below (following “A Reflection on the Seven Characteristics of St. Joseph”). I urge you to read the Holy Father’s letter prayerfully. It is beautifully written by Pope Francis “with a father’s heart” to all of us, his daughters and sons in Christ.

This Year of Saint Joseph is a time to heal the deep wounds in our society by calling attention to the dignity and human rights of every man, woman and child. It’s a time to rebuild our economy according to principles and policies that truly serve our people and the common good. Finally, this year is a time for building bridges and reconciling our differences as individuals, families and communities who have too long been divided—politically, economically and socially.

May this great saint, the Patron of the Catholic Church, be close to us this year and always as we work to imitate his virtues and incorporate into our lives his tender, obedient and creatively courageous spirituality. St. Joseph, pray for us.

Abstinence from meat not required on March 19 due to Solemnity of St. Joseph

The Solemnity of St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is celebrated annually on March 19. This year, that happens to be on a Friday in Lent.

According to Church law, abstaining from meat is not required on a solemnity, including during Lent. Therefore, Catholics throughout the Church, including in central and southern Indiana, are not obligated to abstain from meat on March 19.

Catholics in central and southern Indiana may want to receive a plenary indulgence on the Solemnity of St. Joseph this year, which falls in a year dedicated to the saint proclaimed last December by Pope Francis. There are many ways to meet the necessary conditions to receive the indulgence. Learn more about it at yearofstjoseph.org/indulgences.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee Releases a Pastoral Message on the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

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NEWS

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Administrative Committee has issued the following message today (March 9) on the global COVID-19 pandemic. The USCCB's Administrative Committee is led by the president of the Conference, and is made up of all the chairmen of the Conference's committees and a representative from each Episcopal Region of the United States and operates as the board of directors.

The full text follows:

This month we mark one year since the pandemic dramatically changed life in our country, ushering in immense suffering. Many have endured extraordinary hardships: sickness, death, mourning, a lack of food, unstable housing, loss of work and income, struggles with education, separation, abuse, isolation, depression, and anxiety. We witnessed racial injustices, the diminishment of the poor and the elderly, and painful divisions in our political life. Yet we know, as the Psalms remind us, that we find comfort in God's promise that gives us life (Ps 119:50).

We also saw countless acts of sacrifice by health care workers, first responders, chaplains, those who work in our soup kitchens and homeless shelters, mail carriers, agricultural and grocery store workers, friends and even strangers. Countless acts of kindness were offered by so many people, which served to remind us that we are all in this together. For all these acts of sacrifice, we are very grateful. We are also very grateful to our priests, deacons, religious, teachers, catechists, and lay ecclesial ministers who have ministered to the People of God during these difficult times.

In the pandemic, God has once more revealed us to ourselves. As Pope Francis reminded us in St. Peter's square last year, we are not as powerful or as in control as we thought.^[1] Rather than being ashamed of this powerlessness, or crushed by the fear of what we cannot control, our interconnectedness and dependence on God has been revealed. As Christians,

this is a very familiar lesson: St. Paul reminds us to bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). And that law is the law of love.

The pandemic has also revived our sense that we are a global community, and that each of us is indeed each other's keeper. While the growing availability of vaccines is a clear sign of hope that this pandemic, too, will pass, that hope must be given to every human being on the planet by making the vaccines universally available. Richer nations and pharmaceutical companies must work together to ensure that no nation, no person is left behind.

There is so much to learn from this global suffering. We must build on the kindness and openness that we have witnessed on the local level by creating more social structures that not only heal the fractures and isolation felt by so many during this pandemic but will prevent such divisions from occurring again. As Pope Francis has implored, "Let us dream, then, as a single human family,"^[2]to a horizon where we are more caring of one another. Let us keep this sense alive and continue the work of promoting the common good

Renewed by this season of Lent, we, the members of the Administrative Committee, place our confidence in the Lord, who suffered, was crucified, and is resurrected. We join our brother bishops in urging everyone to continue to keep God's love alive in their hearts and in their families and communities. And we look forward to welcoming the Catholic faithful back when we all may safely participate physically in the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass and gather once more in our parishes.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Reflections on the Seven Characteristics of St. Joseph From *Patris Corde (With A Father's Heart)* by Pope Francis

Characteristic #1. A beloved father. Pope Francis writes that: "The greatness of St. Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus." We know that Joseph was a good carpenter, a responsible citizen and a righteous man. But his greatness is found in his relationships not in his ambition or achievements. Joseph is a witness to the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and courage. He shows us how we should live in a world that too often encourages us to live only for ourselves often at the expense of those who are weaker and more vulnerable than we are.

Characteristic #2. A tender and loving father. Pope Francis tells us that “In Joseph, Jesus saw the tender love of God.”

Tenderness is a concept that Pope Francis uses frequently to describe God’s merciful love for all of us, His children. St. Joseph reflects the fatherhood of God—just as Mary represents the fullest possible expression of God’s maternal care for His creation. There is nothing harsh or indifferent in the portrait of St. Joseph we have been given by the evangelists, especially Matthew and Luke. At the same time, there is nothing inappropriately “soft” or weak in Joseph’s character.



Characteristic #3. An obedient father. Pope Francis writes: “In every situation, Joseph declared his own ‘fiat,’ like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.” In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells us to pray “Thy will be done,” to be obedient to our Father in heaven and, by extension, to all who have legitimate authority over us. St. Joseph always said ‘yes’ to God’s will no matter how confusing or unreasonable it seemed at the time.

Characteristic #4. An accepting father. Pope Francis observes that: “Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence toward women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man.” Joseph’s acceptance of Mary, and of his supportive role in the history of our salvation, has much to say to us today. Acceptance doesn’t come easily to us who are often “set in our ways.” Joseph shows us how to respect, and care for, those who are different from us in any way.

Characteristic #5. A creatively courageous father. Pope Francis says that “Joseph was the true ‘miracle’ by which God saved the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph’s creative courage.” Joseph’s courage in the face of scandal, murderous threats and the displacement of his family is a sign of his confidence in God and his determination to protect his family come what may. Pope Francis speaks about the “creative courage” of St. Joseph because in every threatening circumstance he was required to improvise and to make the best of the situation he found himself in.

Characteristic #6. A working father. Pope Francis reminds us that “St. Joseph was a carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family. From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labor.” Given the difficulties we face today with joblessness and a severely challenged

economy, St. Joseph “the worker” is an important reminder that work is essentially connected to human dignity.

Characteristic #7. A father in the shadows. Pope Francis writes that: “Being a father entails introducing children to life and reality. Not holding them back, being overprotective or possessive, but rather making them capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying freedom and exploring new possibilities.” Joseph was not an “absent father,” but he was also not controlling or overprotective. Today we need St. Joseph’s example more than ever as fathers in our society struggle to overcome stereotypes and establish themselves as strong but sensitive models for their children.

For the complete text of the Holy Father’s Apostolic letter, visit
www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html

My Prayer for You

Let us make our prayer to St. Joseph in the words of Pope Francis:

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.

+ Charles C. Thompson