

Five Lenten reflections, based on The APOSTOLIC LETTER

PATRIS CORDE

**OF THE HOLY FATHER
Pope FRANCIS**



**ON THE 150th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE PROCLAMATION OF SAINT JOSEPH
AS PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH**

1. A Father's Heart

This is the title of the Apostolic Letter. Why did Pope Francis chose this theme for our Church in 2021 during these times of Pandemic?

Passage from *Patris Corde*:

“ Now, one hundred and fifty years after his proclamation as Patron of the Catholic Church by Blessed Pius IX (8 December 1870), I would like to share some personal reflections on this extraordinary figure, so close to our own human experience. For, as Jesus says, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34). My desire to do so increased during these months of pandemic, when we experienced, amid the crisis, how “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. Doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests, men and women religious, and so very many others. They understood that no one is saved alone...”

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”. 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. Saint 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.”

Reflection by Canon Stuart Wilson:



Guido Reni,
Saint Joseph and the Christ Child,
1640

In our painting by Guido Reni, we see the father love of Saint Joseph towards Jesus. What do you notice?

- the look of St Joseph towards Jesus - a Father's heart?
- the look of Jesus towards St Joseph
- the fruit Jesus is holding
- why is St Joseph wearing a 'purple' shirt, but wrapped in golden cloak?
- the plain background doesn't distract the viewer
- St Joseph's hands are worn

2. Obedience

Is obedience still valued in today's society and in our faith? Do we need obedience? Who do we need to be obedient to? What does obedience mean during Lent?

Passage from *Patris Corde*:

'As he had done with Mary, God revealed his saving plan to Joseph. He did so by using dreams, which in the Bible and among all ancient peoples, were considered a way for him to make his will known.

Joseph was deeply troubled by Mary's mysterious pregnancy. He did not want to "expose her to public disgrace", so he decided to "dismiss her quietly" (Mt 1:19). In the first dream, an angel helps him resolve his grave dilemma: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:20-21). Joseph's response was immediate: "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (Mt 1:24). Obedience made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary.

In the second dream, the angel tells Joseph: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Mt 2:13). Joseph did not hesitate to obey, regardless of the hardship involved: "He got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod" (Mt 2:14-15).'

Reflection by Canon Stuart Wilson:



Phillippe de Champaigne,
The Dream of Saint Joseph,
1642

- In our painting by Philippe de Champaigne, we see the Angel appearing in St Joseph's dream. What do you notice?
- why is Our Lady reading Scripture?
 - why is the angel hovering both over St Joseph *and* Mary
 - note the carpenter's tools by Joseph's feet
 - Joseph is barefooted, sign of humility
 - both Joseph and Mary are obedient here
 - note the colour tonalities of the clothes Mary and Joseph wear

3. Creative Courage

**Pope Francis' words of 'creative courage' are inspiring. How creative are you?
What is courage for you? Combining the words, what does it mean?**

Passage from *Patris Corde*:

'If the first stage of all true interior healing is to accept our personal history and embrace even the things in life that we did not choose, we must now add another important element: creative courage. This emerges especially in the way we deal with difficulties. In the face of difficulty, we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even think we had.

As we read the infancy narratives, we may often wonder why God did not act in a more direct and clear way. Yet God acts through events and people. Joseph was the man chosen by God to guide the beginnings of the history of redemption. He was the true "miracle" by which God saves the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph's creative courage. Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging where Mary could give birth, Joseph took a stable and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God come into the world (cf. Lk 2:6-7). Faced with imminent danger from Herod, who wanted to kill the child, Joseph was warned once again in a dream to protect the child, and rose in the middle of the night to prepare the flight into Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-14).

A superficial reading of these stories can often give the impression that the world is at the mercy of the strong and mighty, but the "good news" of the Gospel consists in showing that, for all the arrogance and violence of worldly powers, God always finds a way to carry out his saving plan. So too, our lives may at times seem to be at the mercy of the powerful, but the Gospel shows us what counts. God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence.

If at times God seems not to help us, surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions ourselves.'

Reflection by Canon Stuart Wilson:



Rest on the Flight into Egypt,
Painted by Luc Olivier Merson (1846-1920)
Painted in 1879

Our painting by French painter Luc Olivier Merson, depicts the rest on the flight to Egypt. What do you see?

- where is the setting
- the meaning of the sphinx
- the infinity of the horizon
- where is Mary?
- what is the source of light?
- where is St Joseph? Sleeping close to the donkey
- how is this a painting about obedience?
- note the smoke of the fire going upwards very prominently
- the sphinx is covered in sand - end of the pagan days?
- restrained colour palette by the artist. Why?

4. A Father in the Shadows

Pope Francis says that fathers are not born but made. In Lent we are re-made too if we are open to this... What is the 'new' life and reality you are being introduced to? Do I welcome Jesus in my own home?

Passage from *Patris Corde*:

"Fathers are not born, but made. 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. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person. Children today often seem orphans, lacking fathers. The Church too needs fathers. Saint Paul's words to the Corinthians remain timely: "Though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers" (1 Cor 4:15). Every priest or bishop should be able to add, with the Apostle: "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (ibid.). Paul likewise calls the Galatians: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (4:19).

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.'

Reflection by Canon Stuart Wilson:



Grace before the Meal,
Painted by Fritz Von Uhde (1848-1911)
Painted in 1885

Our painting by German painter Fritz Von Uhde shows Jesus being welcomed into a family home and saying grace alongside the family:

- Jesus is barefooted vs. The family father wearing clogs
- who is the man on the right? Family or a homeless man?
- is the table big enough?
- the playful cat on the left underneath the cupboard
- a mirror in the back of the room. Mirror in art is symbolic for wisdom, why?
- the entrance door is left slightly open
- the family father is very humble
- the circular halo around Jesus is similar to the roundel around the lamp

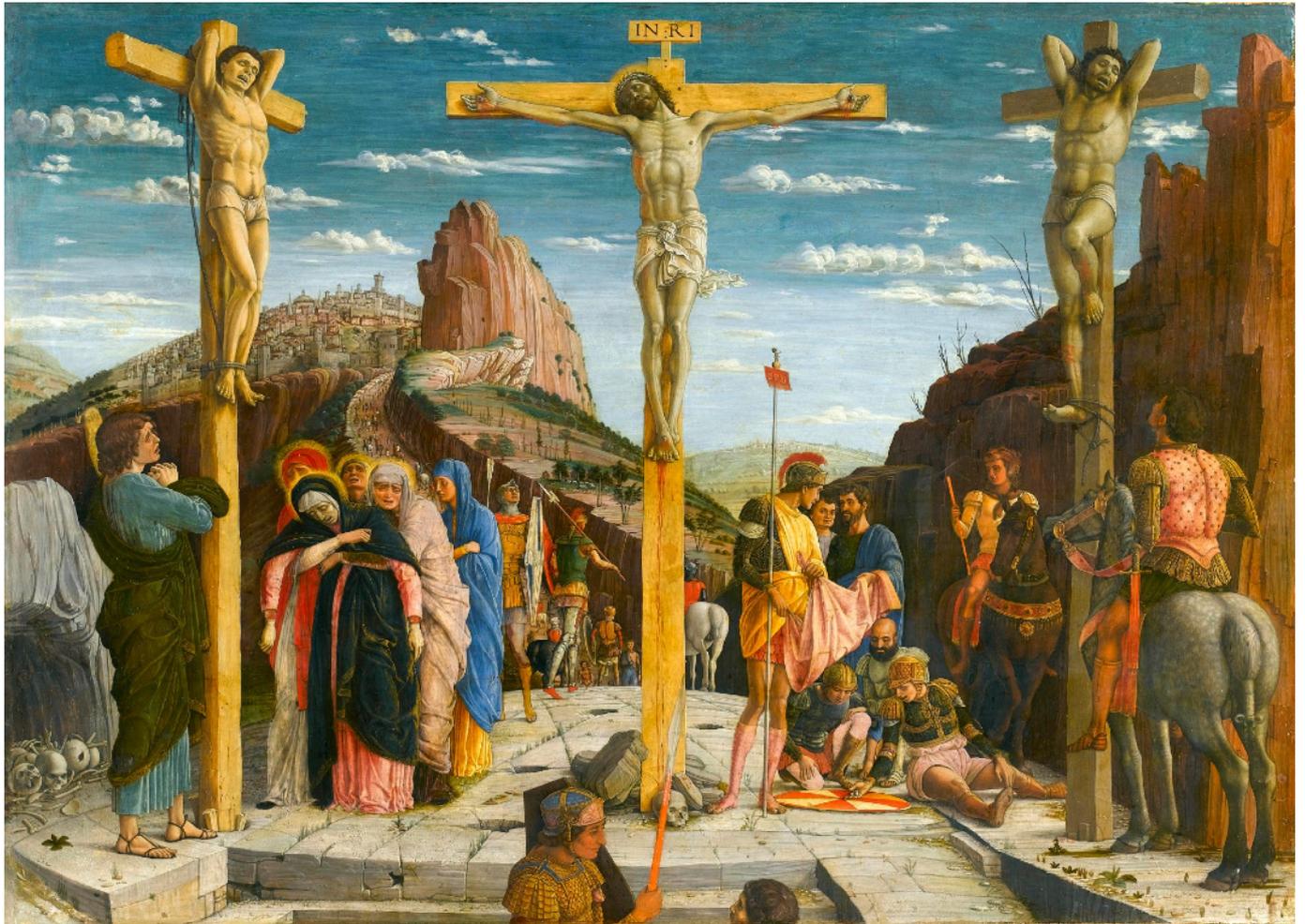
5. Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift
As we near Holy Week where we will contemplate on how Jesus gave Himself to us, what is the gift we can bring to others? What is self-gift?

Passage from *Patris Corde*:

”Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust. Our world today needs fathers. It has no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs. It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction. Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. The priesthood and consecrated life likewise require this kind of maturity. Whatever our vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self will not come to fulfilment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case, instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness and frustration.

When fathers refuse to live the lives of their children for them, new and unexpected vistas open up. Every child is the bearer of a unique mystery that can only be brought to light with the help of a father who respects that child’s freedom. A father who realizes that he is most a father and 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. When he becomes like Joseph, who always knew that his child was not his own but had merely been entrusted to his care. In the end, this is what Jesus would have us understand when he says: “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Mt 23:9).”

Reflection by Canon Stuart Wilson:



The Crucifixion of Christ,
Painted by Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506)
Painted in 1457

Our painting by Andrea Mantegna, executed in 1457, shows Christ crucified. Holy Week is now shortly upon us.

- which person you identify the most with in this scene?
- who do you identify the most with?
- the city of Jerusalem on the left: Jesus was welcomed in the city on Palm Sunday
- the same city rejected him and crucified Jesus outside the walls of the city
- note the grotto on the left with the skeletons
- note the green grass shoots between the stones at the foot of the cross
- it is a sunny day with small cloud formations
- do you have a cross hanging in your house?
- you have a special corner in your home reserved for prayer for Holy Week?
- does this painting horrify you, or fill you with hope?