

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Cor Ecclesiae Series*

With a Father's Heart

*Small Group Study Guide to
Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter Patris Corde*

Catholic Information Service
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council



“After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse. My Predecessors reflected on the message contained in the limited information handed down by the Gospels in order to appreciate more fully his central role in the history of salvation. Blessed Pius IX declared him “Patron of the Catholic Church”, Venerable Pius XII proposed him as “Patron of Workers” and Saint John Paul II as “Guardian of the Redeemer”. Saint Joseph is universally invoked as the “patron of a happy death”. 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*).



When Pope Francis declared the Year of St. Joseph on December 8, 2020, he drew attention to the fact that St. Joseph has always been worthy of devotion in the eyes of the Church. God chose St. Joseph to care for Jesus and Mary, and he has been honored by the Church for the dynamic and vital role he played in the salvation of the world ever since.

The Holy Father notes that, “After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse.” St. Joseph was an important figure in the life of Christ, and he remains an important figure in the life of the Church. Additionally, God desires that St. Joseph be a foundational figure in the life of every man. In an age where men are seeking out models of authentic masculinity, God has given us a model to aid us.

St. Joseph speaks to the heart of every man because he is a man of action. However, as we’ll see, Joseph was also a man of deep faith and courage. St. Joseph’s example shows us that a life lived for God will yield true greatness. As Pope St. Paul VI once preached, “St. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies; he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things — it is enough to have

the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic.”¹ No matter your age or your stage in life, St. Joseph has something to teach you. As Pope St. John Paul II said, “The Church also trusts in [St. Joseph’s] noble example, which transcends all individual states of life and serves as a model for the entire Christian community, whatever the condition and duties of each of its members may be.”²

In this guide you will work through Pope Francis’ Letter on St. Joseph, *Patris Corde*, and begin to see how St. Joseph’s model can help raise us all to a deeper and more courageous faith. Regardless of your state and stage in life, God desires virtuous and genuine followers who want to be good men for others. In an age of confusion, Jesus has given us his own earthly father as our guide.

-Vivat Jesus

Session 1: A Beloved Father

Opening Prayer

*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.*

(Take a quiet moment)

*Holy Spirit, we ask that you enter our conversation
and give us the grace to share openly and
authentically with one another. We ask this
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read

Patris Corde 1



The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus. In this way, he placed himself, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, “at the service of the entire plan of salvation”.

Saint Paul VI pointed out that Joseph concretely expressed his fatherhood “by making his life a sacrificial

service to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose. He 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 oblation 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”.

Thanks to his role in salvation history, Saint Joseph has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people. This is shown by the countless churches dedicated to him worldwide, the numerous religious Institutes, Confraternities and ecclesial groups inspired by his spirituality and bearing his name, and the many traditional expressions of piety in his honour. Innumerable holy men and women were passionately devoted to him. Among them was Teresa of Avila, who chose him as her advocate and intercessor, had frequent recourse to him and received whatever graces she asked of him. Encouraged by her own experience, Teresa persuaded others to cultivate devotion to Joseph.

Every prayer book contains prayers to Saint Joseph. Special prayers are offered to him each Wednesday and especially during the month of March, which is traditionally dedicated to him.

Popular trust in Saint Joseph is seen in the expression “*Go to Joseph*”, which evokes the famine in Egypt, when the Egyptians begged Pharaoh for bread. He in turn

replied: “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do” (*Gen* 41:55). Pharaoh was referring to Joseph the son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery because of the jealousy of his brothers (cf. *Gen* 37:11-28) and who – according to the biblical account – subsequently became viceroy of Egypt (cf. *Gen* 41:41-44).

As a descendant of David (cf. *Mt* 1:16-20), from whose stock Jesus was to spring according to the promise made to David by the prophet Nathan (cf. *2 Sam* 7), and as the spouse of Mary of Nazareth, Saint Joseph stands at the crossroads between the Old and New Testaments.

The whole Church recognizes St. Joseph as a patron and guardian. For centuries many different features of his life have caught the attention of believers. He was a man ever faithful to the mission God gave him. St. Josemaría Escrivá

The Crux



There are many ways we can serve Christ and His Church. St. Joseph’s primary way of serving Jesus was through his fatherhood. As Pope Francis points out, Joseph devoted himself to both Jesus and Mary completely in his life and work. By his example of devoted fatherhood, St. Joseph stands as a model for how we can live out our vocations in the service of Jesus and Mary.

The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father’s only Son. This vocation takes a personal form since each of us is called to enter into the divine beatitude. (CCC 1877)

Furthermore,
in Joseph,
the apparent
tension between
the active and the
contemplative life
finds an ideal
harmony that is
only possible for
those who
possess the
perfection
of charity.
St. John Paul II

For in one Spirit
we were all
baptized into one
body, whether
Jews or Greeks,
slaves or free
persons, and we
were all given
to drink of
one Spirit
(1 Cor 12:13)

There is a temptation to believe that our biggest impact in this world will be outside of our homes. As men, there is a natural desire to dive into our work to produce positive results for the Kingdom. It is a good desire to want to build up the body of Christ out of love for God. However, St. Joseph shows us that for those of us who are fathers or serve in fatherly roles to others, our biggest impact will be through our *fatherhood*. Later in *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis reminds us that, “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, he becomes a father to that person.” It is St. Joseph who shows us how fatherhood whether natural or spiritual, embraced out of love, can do more for the Church than any other type of work.

Pope Francis also points out that St. Joseph goes beyond being a model of Christian fatherhood. St. Joseph is also *our* spiritual father. He remains the foster father of Christ in heaven, and

because we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church, he is our spiritual father as well. As St. Josemaría Escrivá once said, “[St. Joseph] protects those who revere him and accompanies them on their journey through this life — just as he protected and accompanied Jesus when he was growing up.”³

Devotion to St. Joseph as a model and spiritual father is not new in the life of the Church. It is gaining popularity in our time because many men are searching for the strong and tender spiritual fatherhood that St. Joseph provides.

Conversation Starters

(Choose from the following to help start your conversation)

1. What does it mean to be a man in our present culture?
2. Who are the men that you admire and why? What attributes or virtues do you admire in them? (See page 56 for explanation of virtues)
3. What are some aspects of St. Joseph's masculinity that surprise you? Why?
4. What is an area in your life that you need to cultivate or change in order to follow St. Joseph's example of masculinity? What are some concrete steps you can take to make that change?

5. Are there any specific things you can do to increase your devotion to St. Joseph? What do you think about the idea of accepting St. Joseph as your spiritual father? Why?

Call to Action

As you begin to learn and grow in your relationship with St. Joseph, incorporate a new devotion to him. Pope Francis reminds us that Wednesdays are traditionally dedicated to St. Joseph. **Dedicate yourselves to praying the Litany of St. Joseph every Wednesday [at the same time as a group] until your next meeting, asking him to be a model of masculinity and to be your own spiritual father.**

Closing Prayer

Let us pray for the grace to live out St. Joseph's example of masculinity as we walk with St. Joseph as our spiritual father.

Request intentions from the group and conclude with the Litany of Saint Joseph found on page 7.