

With a Father's Heart
Session 5: A Creatively Courageous 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,
turned it into
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 5

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.

That kind of creative courage was shown by the friends of the paralytic, who lowered him from the roof in order to bring him to Jesus (cf. Lk 5:17-26). Difficulties did not stand in the way of those friends' boldness and persistence. They were convinced that Jesus could heal the man, and "finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you'" (v. 19-20). Jesus recognized the creative faith with which they sought to bring their sick friend to him.

The Gospel does not tell us how long Mary, Joseph and the child remained in Egypt. Yet they certainly needed to eat, to find a home and employment. It does not take much imagination to fill in those details. The Holy Family had to face concrete problems like every other family. like so many of our migrant brothers and sisters who, today too, risk their lives to escape misfortune and hunger. In this regard, I consider Saint Joseph the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty.

At the end of every account in which Joseph plays a role, the Gospel tells us that he gets up, take the chie and his mother, and does what God commanded him (ct. Mt 1:24; 2:14.21). Indeed, Jesus and measure of our faith.

In the divine plan of salvation, the Son is inseparable from his Mother, from Mary, who "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son until she stood at the cross.

We should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping. The Son of the Almighty came into our world in a state of great vulnerability. He needed to be defended, protected, cared for and raised by Joseph. God trusted Joseph, as did

Mary, who found in him someone who would not only save her life but would always provide for her and her 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.

In other words, St Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart and which guides his every thought and action.

Pope Benedict

St. Joseph was 'a just man,' a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care. May he always guard, protect and enlighten families.

St. John Paul II

That child would go on to say: "As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Mt 25:40). Consequently, every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is "the child" whom Joseph continues to protect. For this reason, Saint Joseph is invoked as protector of the unfortunate, the needy, exiles, the afflicted, the poor and the dying. Consequently, the Church cannot fail to show a special love for the least of our brothers and sisters, for Jesus showed a particular concern for them and personally identified with them. From Saint Joseph, we must learn that same care and responsibility. We must learn to love the child and his mother, to love the sacraments and charity, to love the Church and the poor. Each of these realities *is always the child and his mother*.

Let us allow ourselves to be filled' with St. Joseph's silence! In a world that is often too noisy, that encourages neither recollection nor listening to God's voice, we are in such deep need of it.

Pope Benedict XVI

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

The Crux

God put a tremendous burden on St. Joseph's shoulders from the beginning of his time as Mary's husband and Jesus's father; however, Joseph was specially selected for the task of protecting and guiding the Holy Family. Though Joseph may not have fully known it at the time, he was the only man for the job, and God solidified this reality by entrusting Jesus and Mary to him.

Yet, in the middle of the chaos of traveling for a census, finding a place for his child to be born, and fleeing to Egypt, one might wonder whether Joseph felt like he was living up to the task God had given him. It was not despite St. Joseph but through him that God worked out as purposes. God knew He was entrusting the Holy Family to a faithful and creatively courageous man who would step up when the moment came. Though St. Joseph may not have had a clear vision of what needed to be done on every occasion, he did his best and found solutions. Instead of despairing when new trials remerged, Joseph creatively moved in faith.

For men, there is a danger of becoming passive when we are met with unfamiliar circumstances. Instead of in, we can be paralyzed by the fear of the unknown. Prefer of failure. The remedy to fear and passivity is action through creative courage. Creative courage is active, it moves into the unknown with faith as its guide.

Our lives often have an uncertainty about them. Despite our best efforts at planning, there are times when God entrusts us with circumstances that seem beyond our abilities. Yet, like St. Joseph, in these moments we are not abandoned. In these moments we are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions." Just as in Joseph's life, these occasions in our lives opportunities to move in faith and be creatively courageous. We should have confidence that we have a spiritual father who has gone through similar situations, and we should make it a habit of going to him for guidance.

Conversation Starters

(Choose from the following to help start your conversation)

1. How does having a strong daily prayer life help us find creative solutions?
2. Think of a time in your own life that you have felt God was distant, how might God be calling you to creative courage in these situations?
3. What are some of the difficulties that you see in our world that will need our creative courage in order for us to find a solution? What about in your community? What about in your own life?

4. In the healing of the paralytic, we see creative courage and brotherhood in action. What are some current circumstances that God is calling you to creative courage and what role should brotherhood play? Do you trust your brothers to build you up to be courageous?

Call to Action

The closer we grow in our relationship with God, the deeper and more authentic our relationships with one another will become. Before your next meeting, make time to visit a church or chapel and spend 15 extra minutes praying for God to give you faith like St. Joseph.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray for the grace to follow 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.

In