

JOSEPH, THE JUST: A MODEL FOR FAITHFUL LIVING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

As the world population continues to balloon, humanity continues to face various challenges ranging from unbelief, materialism, relativism, to indifference and apathy. Coupled with this is the lack of exemplary models to inspire the young ones to good behaviour and acceptable conduct in society. Having the year 2021 declared as the Year of St. Joseph offers us another opportunity to examine the life of this just man with the hope of finding in him a pathway to a better life for the people of our time. To do this effectively the biblical paradigm offered by Prophet Micah 6:8 is used to evaluate the life of Joseph, the husband of Mary and foster-father of Jesus. Using this biblical paradigm, we know that Joseph practiced justice, loved tenderly, and walked humbly with God. His life is thus a source of inspiration for the people of our time. This is particularly helpful because facing the challenges of his relationship and the demands of his call to be faithful to God, Joseph was called to make a tough decision just as many people today. His choice borne out of faith in God gives us a road map to a better world and better relationship with one another.

Introduction

The Year 2021 is being observed as the Year of St. Joseph following Pope Francis's declaration in 2020. There is a lot to learn from

Joseph, the husband of Mary and foster-father of Jesus. This article focuses on that passage in Matthew where Joseph was described as just. “*Ἰωσήφ δὲ, ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, δίκαιος ὢν, καὶ μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι, ἐβουλήθη ἄθρα ἀπολῦσαι ὑτὴν.* Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. (Mt 1:19) Joseph is not often linked with the prophetic tradition, yet, as a man who fulfilled the demands of the prophets to a life of justice and righteousness, Joseph invites and challenges us to embrace the same calling by living simply and in fidelity to God’s will. The Prophet Micah thus provides us with the framework to study Joseph anew. In Micah 6:8 we read: “This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.” These three themes also capture very concrete virtues in the life of Joseph. These same virtues while appearing to be seemingly commonplace are hard to come by. The decision of Joseph to divorce Mary quietly or informally bears eloquent testimony to his integrity and the fairness which he accorded Mary.

In this paper, we shall examine the conduct of Joseph bearing in mind the criteria set forth by Prophet Micah in Chapter 6:8. Matthew calls Joseph upright or a righteous man. The Greek word *δίκαιος* is translated righteous. In Biblical parlance, it connotes the state of being just, of being at right with God. Another way to understand this is that for Jew, an upright person is one who is faithful to the Law, that is the law of Moses. So, the expression is not lost on Matthew, himself a Jew. For him and for the Jews of his time, being just must mean being observant of the law of God, particularly that which respected adultery, it means being wholly good as demanded by the Law. However, in Pauline theology, being just means being made right, it is not what a person achieves by himself or for himself. It is what God does for us. We must, therefore, situate Joseph’s righteousness in God. Few people were called righteous or just in the Bible. They include Noah, (Gen 6:9) John the Baptist (Mk 6:20), Simeon (Lk2:25), and Cornelius (Acts 10:22). Psalm 112 further paints a clear picture that sheds light on what Joseph did and why he did it. “For all time to come the upright will be remembered. Bad news holds no fear for him, firm in his heart, trusting in Yahweh. His heart held steady; he has no fears...” (Ps 112: 6-7) The sudden realization that his betrothed

was pregnant was enough to unsettle most men, but not Joseph. His heart held steady because walking always with God, he was taught the truth that sets a man free.

Criteria for good living: Prophetic demands and Guidelines

Prophet Micah is considered one of the Twelve Minor Prophets of the Hebrew Bible and was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea. Micah was from Moresheth-Gath, in southwest Judah. He prophesied during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. This was a period of much turmoil orchestrated by the activities of bad and unfaithful leaders. The period was one of good march to growth and prosperity and promptly followed by decay and decline a pattern that is quite visible in the reigns of Jotham (good, 2 Kings 15:32–34); Ahaz (evil, 2 Kings 16:1–4); and Hezekiah (good, 2 Kings 18:1–7). In this environment, therefore, it is not surprising that much of Micah’s message to Israel and Judah would center on the issues of injustice, especially towards the poor. He also accused the nation of her mistreatment of women and children and at the same time castigated the government for living off the people. Prophet Micah’s message is clear and simple: let us live as God wants, to act with justice, to love with kindness, and to walk humbly with God. The conversion prophet Micah demanded is not theoretical, it is integral. It requires a complete turning around to live as God wants only then will justice and charity be productive.

Doing Justice

Among the acts of the upright person is the practice of justice or doing justice. Doing justice demands concrete activity. It means to give each person his or her due, to be fair to people. Since the Law specifies this behavior, it is not surprising that those who act in this fashion are referred to as just: Noah, Simeon, Cornelius, and John the Baptist. The practice of justice is an observable act. Knowing is not enough, doing is far more important. Joseph, the husband of Mary seems to know this demand so well, he was not going to flout it. Deuteronomy 22:23–24 states the course of action for a woman found to be adulterous. The evil is expected to be banished from among the people. Joseph, being an upright man cannot continue to associate with her betrothed. But following the Law is

one thing, what happens to the one the Law affects? This is where fairness comes in? Uprightness is not just about doing what the Law says is right, it must also be about doing that which is fair? What would be fair treatment for Mary in this situation? Here, the second of the criteria set forth by Micah comes in – to love tenderly or to show loving-kindness.

Loving Tenderly

By their nature, virtues are not mere principles guiding actions, but *ethos* that shape human life. They become vital to good living to the extent that they are concrete experiences. Hence, virtue is behavior showing high moral standards. Virtues are practical attitudes and habits and for the Greeks, virtue is equivalent to excellence. Aristotle defines moral virtue as a disposition to behave in the right manner and as a mean between extremes of deficiency and excess, which are vices.” Consequently, virtues are acquired through habit and practice and not through reasoning or instruction. Karl Rahner describes virtue as “any perfectly developed capacity of man’s spiritual soul...”¹ He also asserts that virtue “is the power (ability, skill, faculty) to realize moral good, and especially to do it...”²

Loving has become an integral part of human relationships. Love has thus been categorized according to its nature and goal. While some have identified eight types of love, three of them have become famous and often found in any literature on love. They are Eros, Philia, and Agape. Eros is the romantic love characterized principally by strong feelings for the other. It is found between friends. Philia on the other hand is affectionate love, it is different from eros because it is not characterized by romantic attraction. It is found between friends or family members. Agape is selfless love. Loving tenderly may involve affectionate love, characterized by a deep concern for the good of others, but it reaches its peak in Agape. It is compassionate love, a love that puts one in the stead of the other, feeling completely like the other, one is thus moved to relieve their pains and problem, even at personal cost. It is the kind of love Jesus envisaged and proposed for cultivation by his disciples when he said “No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (Jn 15:13-14). It is a love that is merciful and

tender and the Hebrew word “*hesed*” means just that, “loving mercy”.

The close parallel between Micah 6:8 and Deuteronomy 10:12 is worth noting. While the two passages seem to be the same, sometimes, experts have interpreted the passages differently. Why is this so?

“This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

“And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God ask of you? Only this: to fear Yahweh your God, to follow all his ways, to love him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and all your soul, to keep the commandments and laws of Yahweh, which I am laying down for you today for your good.” (Deut. 10:12)

In Deuteronomy, it appears that bearing in mind the covenant relationship, the people were invited again to respond in love and be faithful just as God has been faithful. If God has loved them unconditionally, the people were in turn required to practice faithful love. Walking humbly with God means being faithful to his commandments and loving as God loves. Thus, Deuteronomy is about faithful love, and Micah 6:8 that mirrors it must be seen to be a call to practice faithful love, by loving tenderly. In both cases, it would appear as if the prophet would want us to know that this is what just living looks like. In essence, Prophet Micah was simply reminding the people what God had always wanted. In his response, Joseph showed both love and mercy, two qualities eminently found in God and ones which only God bequeaths to human beings. Pope Francis echoes this tender love as found in Joseph also when he said, in Joseph, Jesus saw the tender love of God. “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him” (*Ps* 103:13). In the synagogue, during the praying of the Psalms, Joseph would surely have heard again and again that the God of Israel is a God of tender love, who is good to all, whose “compassion is over all that he has made” (*Ps* 145:9).³

Walking Humbly with God

It should not surprise us that Micah included this requirement in his assessment of what a good relationship with God requires. For the Israelites of old as for many today, one is justified by keeping

the commandments, a position that Paul vehemently rejected as it would empty the cross of its power. Blenkinsopp explains it further by saying that to the Israelites, the importance attached to the sacrifice shows what they thought God expected of them. He said: “what must I do to approach God? For the normative, state religion of Israel, the answer is clear. God can only be approached, meaning in effect sin can only be removed, through the sacrificial system.”⁴ To Micah, it is clear that it is not about us, it is not about what we do or can do for ourselves. In graphic details, the Prophet states God’s case against his people, showing unambiguously how he had treated them with mercy and compassion. What man does is nothing compared to what God does. “with what shall I enter Yahweh’s presence and bow down before God All-high? Shall I enter with burnt offerings, with calving one-year-old? Will he be pleased with rams by the thousand, with then thousand streams of oil? Shall I offer my eldest son for my wrongdoing, the child of my boy for my sin? (Mic 6: 6-7) It was as if realizing that the first offering was not acceptable, it was improved upon in the next instance, still, that was not yet pleasing, necessitating a further increase an improvement, even then, it does not appear to be an offering yet pleasing to God. Hence, the acceptable conduct is to do what God wants. “You have already been told what is right and what Yahweh wants of you. Only this, to do what is right, to love loyalty and to walk humbly with your God.” (Mic 6:8) Blenkinsopp rendition of the same passage is even more incisive “What God demands of you is to fulfill the requirements of justice, be faithful to commitments, and live your life in humble and attentive openness to God.”⁵ We find echoes of the same requirements in Psalm 15, where the Psalmist insist that those who can stand with God or find a home with him are those who live blamelessly, who acts uprightly (v.2), who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbor (v.3), who stands by an oath at any cost (v.5)

This takes us back to Matthew 1:19, “*Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally.*” Joseph the upright man, chose not to do his own will but act uprightly by doing what pleases God. He chose not to discredit Mary and by so doing exercised an uncommon candor and compassion. In essence, he loved mercy, loving Mary tenderly,

would not allow him to give her up to disgrace. He thus qualifies to walk with God. We find some echoes in Wisdom literature especially in Proverbs when a young man is admonished to “stay away from harlots and dangerous women (Prov 23:27) Indeed faced with the situation of Mary, Joseph had no other option than to conclude that Mary must go. That was what justice demands. At the same time, the wise one understands that God, himself is the just one and the arbiter of justice. “The wicked do not know what justice means, those who seek Yahweh understand everything.” (Prov 28:5) No wonder, Joseph chose to do what God wants, with the certainty that in the end, all will be well. As Proverbs says, “To be afraid of human beings is a snare, however, trusts in Yahweh is secure.” (29:25) In the final analysis, while Micah lists walking humbly with God as the last of his criteria, it must be understood as the basis of that relationship. Only the person who walks with God can do justice and love kindness. If Joseph had not learned to walk with God, faced with the situation of Mary, it would have been difficult for him to make the decision he made. His natural decision would have been to please the world and save face for himself.

To “walk” with God is not about a walk in the garden, but about faithful living. The Psalms are filled with the admonition to walk with God and the reward of walking with God. Psalm 1 says: “Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners...”⁶

Walking with God pays a rich dividend and Joseph was about to find out as he chose to do what is most pleasing to God. Another aspect of Joseph’s response to the difficulty of his situation has become enshrined in the famous song “Trust and Obey”: “When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word, what a glory he sheds on our way! While we do his goodwill, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey.” Because God is the all-knowing one, it behooves us to listen to him as Joseph did, but much more important to do what He expects of us. Human beings are called to be not just hearers, but also doers of God’s words.⁷ Walking with God guarantees safety as attested to by Jesus “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the

house. But it did not collapse; it has been set solidly on rock.”⁸ No wonder, the problem that would have unsettled and destroyed many homes, was easily solved because Joseph listened to God, did what God ordered and by so doing became the foster father of the Incarnate Son of God. By so doing, Joseph also became a friend of God and God revealed his mystery, the mystery of his love for mankind to him. The vehicle of God’s revelation to Joseph was a dream. Four times in the narrative about the pregnancy of Mary and the birth of Jesus, God revealed his will to Joseph in dreams, which among the ancient people was one of the ways of knowing God’s will.⁹ Following each of the dreams, Joseph did what the Lord required of him. “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (*Mt* 1:24). Obedience helped him to understand what had happened and to spare Mary. According to Jacque Gauthier, “Joseph does not want to stand in the way of God’s project, even as he might feel inadequate in the face of so great a responsibility. The mystery overwhelms him. He makes an act of faith in reversing his earlier decision.”¹⁰ In response to the second dream, we read that “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). His obedience was also swift after the third dream because again, “He got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel” (*Mt* 2:21). The same attitude was evident when he heard that Archelaus reigned in place of his father, he followed the warning he got in a dream. (*Mt*.2:22-23) Clearly, then we can say that Joseph was never afraid to give his “fiat” and by so doing uniting himself to the will and plan of God for the salvation of the world.

Challenges Facing the Modern Man

The modern man faces a lot of challenges especially challenges that tend to rob him off of his prestige, identity, and status in life. As head of the family, a man’s sense of identity becomes seriously challenged when he is unable to provide for his family or be there for them. The challenges of life today dictate that men become the breadwinners of their families. This sometimes means working long hours and far away from the family. The family becomes separated, and it is difficult to stitch together the fabrics of family life. Unemployment has also been recognized as proving a grave

danger to family life because when the father of the home is unemployed, the wife bears an extra burden and may be further exposed to more dangers and temptations. The Internet and Social Media have become a crucial threat to family life today. Social Media is a veritable means of communication but as much as it brings people together, it also separates them. Members of the family today can be found living in the same house, yet emotionally detached from one another because they are already receiving validation, comfort, and love from others through one element of Social Media or the other. Today, many children are born out of wedlock. The experience of Joseph thus provides a guide for me to cope in a similar situation. When not born out of wedlock, separation in various forms often means that some children are raised by parents other than their biological ones. Joseph provides inspiration and a guide for the modern man.

A father is a provider, a protector, an example, and an inspiration. A father provides a sturdy anchor that holds the family together and helps the children to have firm roots. These we find in preeminent fashion in the life of Joseph. Pope Francis describes Joseph well in his apostolic Letter “*Patris Corde*,” “With a father’s heart”: that is how Joseph loved Jesus, whom all four Gospels refer to as “*the son of Joseph*”. Matthew and Luke, the two Evangelists who speak most of Joseph, tell us very little, yet enough for us to appreciate what sort of father he was, and the mission entrusted to him by God’s providence.”¹¹ Apart from his election by God for such an important and exalted task, the obedience of Joseph played an important role in his fatherhood and care of Jesus. Having accepted to take Mary home, he also accepted the child in her womb and gave him a name, accepting not just in principle but in fact that Jesus was his son. This was not just an ordinary or casual event, but a significant one because “As we know, for ancient peoples, to give a name to a person or a thing, as Adam did in the account in the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:19-20), was to establish a relationship.”¹² That relationship may have brought him immense joy and fulfillment, but it also brought him intense pain and stress. To protect the infant Jesus from Herod’s sword, he had to take him away by night to a distant country (Mt 2: 13-18) in obedience to God’s will. As a father, he fulfilled his obligation to protect his family. “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.”¹³ Benedict XVI in one of his trips to Africa said that “To be a father mean above all to be at the service of life and growth.”¹⁴ Fathers at home must rise to the occasion and accept their responsibilities as God-given and natural that the same time. As natural, they cannot delegate it to another because that other person cannot adequately stand in the place of a father. As God-given, fathers enter into a unique relationship with God who begets us all, with Him, they are fathers, for Him, they are caretakers. Hence, a father’s obligation is not just to his children, but also to God.

Joseph again, experienced a father’s pain and anguish when Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem and his parents, Joseph and Mary searched for him for three days as they thought he was lost only to find him in the Temple, discussing with the doctors of the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:41-50). In the few instances of Jesus’ life where we encounter Joseph, no Gospel writer wrote that he spoke anything. He was content to be in the background and let God’s voice be heard. Hence, Pope Francis asserts that “Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet, and hidden presence – an intercessor, 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...”¹⁵ No wonder St. Joseph occupies an enviable position in the Catholic Church, as attested to by popular prayers to him, the incredible number of Churches named after him, the number of nations that proclaimed him as their national patron saint, and most importantly his designation as the patron saint of the universal church bear eloquent testimony to the place of Joseph in Catholic life.

In the whole suffering from the absence of father figures in the home, Joseph comes eloquently recommended for emulation. Joseph as the earthly father of Jesus taught him to be obedient to his parents (*Lk* 2:51) following God’s command, that parents are required to teach their Children (cf. *Ex* 20:12). We know that Jesus was outstanding in his practice of obedience to God. To be able to do this, Joseph must have devoted time and energy to the

upbringing of the young Jesus. He was present in the life of Jesus; he was not an absent father. No wonder, Pope Francis asserts that “Saint Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood” and that in this way, “he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation.”¹⁶

Another area of human life, where Joseph is worthy of emulation is in the treatment of women. In our time, this has become a serious problem to the peace and stability of many families. Pope Francis sums it up when he said that:

Today, in our world where psychological, verbal, and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he decides to protect Mary’s good name, her dignity, and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment.¹⁷

Another challenge today is the appropriation of knowledge. In a world that has exploded due to the availability of information at the disposal of humanity, sometimes, knowledge has not been used well for the benefit of all, especially the less privileged of society. Today, many crave knowledge to dominate. It was quite clear that Joseph did not understand fully the mysteries unfolding in his life in which he has been called to play a crucial role. In such a situation, acquisition of knowledge must give way to the docility of the spirit, and humble acceptance of God’s will. Consequently, according to Pope Francis, “The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that *explains* but *accepts*. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning.”¹⁸

Another challenge that by Joseph’s life we can find ways to do something better is conquering indecision. Sometimes, due to the enormous nature of some challenges or problems, many people can easily become fixated, unsure of the next step, and in the process allowing indecision to become their decision. In Joseph, we see a very decisive man, “not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive.”¹⁹ He arrived at the level of readiness through a life of total surrender to the will of God.

Hence, Pope Francis teaches that “In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit’s gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations, and disappointments.”²⁰

The challenge of employment has plagued humanity and the increasing technological advancement of humanity seems to be exacerbating this challenge. Robots are increasingly taking over jobs from humans and many now go without any source of livelihood. Joseph was otherwise known as the Carpenter, he busied himself in this simple job and used it to provide for his family. There is something dignifying about his job and all jobs as Jesus was known also as the “carpenter’s son”.

From the Genesis account of Creation, we know that humanity has been entrusted with the care of creation, tilling the earth and safeguarding its riches for the use of mankind, both present and future generation. Work, then, according to Pope Francis, “is a means of participating in the work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom, to develop our talents and abilities, and to put them at the service of society and fraternal communion.”²¹ Work offers people the opportunity to develop themselves, provide for their families and contribute to the development of society. Hence, as it has been observed, “a family without work is particularly vulnerable to difficulties, tensions, estrangement, and even break-up. How can we speak of human dignity without working to ensure that everyone can earn a decent living?”²²

Working persons, whatever their job may be, are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us. The crisis of our time, which is economic, social, cultural, and spiritual, can serve as a summons for all of us to rediscover the value, the importance, and necessity of work for bringing about a new “normal” from which no one is excluded. Saint Joseph’s work reminds us that God himself, in becoming man, did not disdain work. The loss of employment that affects so many of our brothers and sisters and has increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, should serve as a summons to review our priorities. Let us implore Saint Joseph the Worker to

help us find ways to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work²³

Lastly, another challenge worth noting is the nature of a father's relationship with his children. Sometimes, parents have become friends with their children thinking it is the best approach to parenting. At other times, parents have presented themselves as the all-knowing, disciplinarians who do not tolerate any deviant behavior lest the children become spoiled. Pope Francis presents Joseph as a father in the shadows, a term not too found in the literature. Wielding together insights from Jan Dobraczynski and reflecting on the wilderness experience of the Israelites, the Pontiff concludes that, "In his relationship to Jesus, Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father: he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way. We can think of Moses' words to Israel: "In the wilderness... you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you traveled" (*Deut.* 1:31). Similarly, Joseph acted as a father for his whole life."²⁴

A shadow accompanies a body or a person. In the right light, the shadow is seen but always as distinct from the person. The father as a person, therefore, exercises an intricate and essential influence on his child or children. Hence, he must not be overbearing, overprotective, or possessive. Parents need to be told that:

A possessive love ultimately becomes dangerous: it imprisons, constricts, and makes for misery. God himself loved humanity with a chaste love; he left us free even to go astray and set ourselves against him. The logic of love is always the logic of freedom, and Joseph knew how to love with extraordinary freedom. He never made himself the center of things. He did not think of himself but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus.²⁵

Parents are called to a life of heroic love of their children, that love must not suffocate the beloved, otherwise, parents especially father will lose their identity as protectors of their families, especially of their children. "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, a charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction."²⁶

Joseph is a good model for the people of our time; we are constantly admonished to assert ourselves, Joseph chose the hidden life, it is thus not surprising that the scriptures record no word uttered by him. By living under the shadow of Mary and Joseph, he was still able to point out for us the path less traveled that leads to God and contentment, that path of humility.

What most of these challenges point to is man's lack of faith. Without faith, human beings are like a rudderless ship being tossed about in the sea of life. It is faith that grounds a person's life and gives meaning to one's life. Dermot Lane says "Faith is a decision to enter into a personal relationship with God. This relationship is one of love, trust, and confidence addressed to God as personal. More accurately, faith is, as Paul Tillich liked to point out, "the acceptance of being accepted by God."²⁷ The faith of Joseph shone brightly in the different events the gospels narrate about him. A man of faith is someone in communion with God, someone who already enjoys divine support or grace. It has been said that God equips the people he chooses for special tasks with special graces. This is the view of Thomas Aquinas (ST III 98, 5 ad 3). This gift of faith that Joseph enjoys helped him to share in the life and faith of Mary. John Paul in *Redemptoris Custos* asserts that "Joseph is the first to share in the faith of the Mother of God and that in doing so he supports his spouse in the faith of the divine annunciation . . . It is a path along which — especially at the time of Calvary and Pentecost — Mary will precede perfectly."²⁸ It is thus clear that Joseph was intimately united with Mary, the mother of Jesus. John Paul II concludes by quoting Paul VI in his encyclical when he said that:

The total sacrifice, whereby Joseph surrendered his whole existence to the demands of the Messiah's coming into his home, becomes understandable only in the light of his profound interior life. It was from this interior life that "very singular commands and consolations came, bringing him also the logic and strength that belong to simple and clear souls, and giving him the power of

making great decisions — such as the decision to put his liberty immediately at the disposition of the divine designs, to make over to them also his legitimate human calling, his conjugal happiness, to accept the conditions, the responsibility and the burden of a family, but, through an incomparable virginal love, to renounce that natural conjugal love that is the foundation and nourishment of the family.²⁹

Conclusion

We must go back to our starting point. Joseph the just is a model for all humanity. In our time and age bereft of good examples, at a time when many children are deprived of a father-figure in their lives, at a time when many families have become single parents' families with most headed by single mothers, Joseph calls us to a life of rendering fairness to all, so that with heart with tender love, we can walk humbly with God. The life of Joseph is not just an example for men in general or fathers in particular, it is for all people. The people of our time need the heroic witness of faithful children of God. Joseph is one such example. Having become all things for his Son, Jesus Christ, we are also challenged to follow his path and become models for children who look towards us. For John Paul II, reflecting on the life of Joseph and his role in salvation history will help the Church to discover ever anew her own identity within this redemptive plan. This indeed is good news for the modern man. The people of today need to hear this good news, Joseph, it could be said lived like anyone of us, and he triumphed. His personality is particularly helpful because facing the challenges of his relationship and the demands of his call to be faithful to God, Joseph was called to make a tough decision just as many people today. The decisions he made, showed his faith in God, his love for humanity, and his total surrender to the divine plan for his life. His decisions borne out of faith in God give us a road map to a better world and better relationship with one another. The place Joseph is forever tied to that of Mary and Jesus and that is a good place to be, that even makes Joseph a sure bet for the people of today. This much Benedict XVI opined when in one of his Angelus addresses, he said:

Saint Joseph announces the portents of the Lord, giving testimony to the virginity of Mary, the gratuitous action of God, and protecting the earthly life of the Messiah. Thus, we venerate the legal father of Jesus [...], because in him the new man is outlined, one who looks with trust and courage to the future, who does not seek his project but entrusts himself totally to the infinite mercy of Him who fulfills the prophecies and opens up the time of salvation.³⁰

Like the Joseph of old, who went ahead of his brothers to prepare the grounds for them, (Gen 37:2; 41:46), the new Joseph, Joseph the just man, the husband of Mary and foster-father of Jesus is our brother, who came before us, walking the path of righteousness, shows us not just the way, but the one who is the Way (Jn 14:6), and anyone who follows him will not walk the path of darkness. (Jn 8:12).

Endnotes

¹ Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*. Great Britain: Burns & Oates, 1993.

² Ibid.

³ Francis, *Patris Corde, Apostolic Letter*, December 8, 2020, n.2.

⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A history of Prophecy in Israel Revised and Enlarged*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, 96.

⁵ Ibid, 97.

⁶ Psalm 1:1 from The Catholic Study Bible New American Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁷ Cf James 1: 22

⁸ Matthew 7: 24.

⁹ Cf. *Gen* 20:3; 28:12; 31:11.24; 40:8; 41:1-32; *Num* 12:6; *1 Sam* 3:3-10; *Dan* 2, 4; *Job* 33:15.

¹⁰ Jacques Gauthier, Saint Joseph, Man of faith, Translated from the French by C. Anthony Ziccardi, New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 2014, 20.

¹¹ Francis, Patris Corde, *Apostolic Letter*, December 8, 2020

¹² Ibid, Introduction.

¹³ Francis, 7

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, Yaounde, March 18, 2009.

¹⁵ Francis, Introduction.

¹⁶ Francis, Patris Corde, no 3, SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989), 8: AAS 82 (1990), 14.

- ¹⁷ Francis, Patris Corde no 4, *Homily at Mass and Beatifications*, Villavicencio, Colombia (8 September 2017): AAS 109 (2017), 1061.
- ¹⁸ Francis, Patris Corde, no. 4.
- ¹⁹ Francis, Patris Corde, no 4.
- ²⁰ Francis, Patris Corde, no 4.
- ²¹ Francis, Patris Corde, no. 6.
- ²² Francis, Patris Corde, no. 6.
- ²³ Francis, Patris Corde, no 6.
- ²⁴ Francis, Patris Corde, no 7.
- ²⁵ Francis, Patris Corde, no 7.
- ²⁶ Francis, Patris Corde no 7.
- ²⁷ Dermot A. Lane, *The experience of God: An Invitation to do theology*, New York: Paulist Press, 1981, 73.
- ²⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, *Apostolic Exhortation*, August 15, 1989, 5.
- ²⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, no 26.
- ³⁰ Benedict XVI, Angelus Address of December 19, 2010.