



Solemnity of St Joseph

Centenary of Little Sisters of the Poor Glendalough Home and Opening of the Holy Family Villa Independent Living Units

Homily

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**Friday 19 March 2021
Little Sisters of the Poor, 2 Rawlins Street, Glendalough**

The feast of Saint Joseph, so important every year for the Little Sisters of the Poor and for all of you who live with them, takes on special significance today both because this year we celebrate the centenary of the opening of the home here at Glendalough and also because Pope Francis has proclaimed this year, 2021, to be a year specially dedicated to the memory of this great saint.

As we thank God for the wonderful gift which this home, and it really is a home, has been and continues to be for the people of our Archdiocese, thanks to the generous commitment of so many sisters, and their associates, over the last one hundred years, we have a special reason to reflect on Saint Joseph who, together with Mary, provided a loving and nurturing home for Jesus.

To mark the beginning of this special year Pope Francis has written an apostolic letter, *Patris Corde*, which means “With a Father’s Heart”. It is the father-hood of Saint Joseph which is at the centre of Pope Francis’s reflection: it is a reflection which is sorely needed in our present times.

In his letter, the Pope speaks of Saint Joseph as a beloved father, as a tender and loving father, as an obedient father, as an accepting father, as a creatively courageous father, as a working father, and as a father in the shadows. In thinking of Saint Joseph in these ways I believe that everyone of us, whether we be a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a spouse, a religious sister, a priest or deacon or religious brother, or someone who lives his or her life in some other way, often perhaps in solitude, can find ourselves reflected in Saint Joseph himself. It is as if Pope Francis sees in Saint Joseph someone who expresses almost every dimension of the Christian journey of life and faith which we all must undertake; that everyone can find in Saint Joseph something to admire and something to strive for.

As I thought about the Pope’s letter, the two aspects of Saint Joseph which struck me particularly were Saint Joseph the *obedient* father and Saint Joseph the *accepting* father.



It seems to me that being accepting and being obedient are very closely related in our Christian understanding of our relationship with God. When Joseph, together with Mary, hurried back to Jerusalem to look for their twelve-year-old son who had failed to join the caravan on the journey home, they eventually found him in the Temple. When he told them that they should not have worried because they should have realised he would be about his Father's business, the gospel writer tells us that Mary and Joseph did not understand. This should not surprise us. From the moment when Mary and Joseph first became aware of the extraordinary way in which God had stepped into their lives, they must have been on a difficult journey of faith themselves as they sought to understand just what God was doing by calling them to care for Jesus as his mother and, as far as everybody was concerned, his father. To know that Jesus had been given to them, entrusted to them, by God was one thing. To understand just what this meant and would mean, and how they were meant to respond to this overwhelming reality in their lives, would have been another thing all together. How often must the two of them have discussed this together. How often must the two of them, together and each on his or her own, have spent long hours in prayer seeking to understand God's plan for them. How often must they have been surprised and confused and worried, and yes, often delighted, as Jesus grew into a child, a young adolescent and an adult who would eventually leave home to begin a ministry which, it would eventually have become clear, would bring him to his death. How much must they have relied on each other and drawn on their common faith to help them accept and be obedient to God's plan as it unfolded before their eyes.

Each one of us would know from our own experience that it is not always easy to understand, let alone accept and embrace in faith, what God is doing in our lives and what God is asking of us in our journey. Like Joseph and Mary, we do not always understand. In our times of confusion and doubt, we can look to Joseph and Mary, not only for an example to follow but also for their prayerful support, as we seek to be accepting of, and obedient to, the call of God.

As Pope Francis reminds us in his letter, *"only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments"*. But just as God says to Joseph, *"Son of David, do not be afraid,"* so he also says to us, *"Do not be afraid"*. *"We need"* says Pope Francis, *"to set aside all anger and disappointment and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish"*. The prayer of Saint Joseph for us, united with the prayer of Mary his wife and our mother, will surely help us to open our hearts to God, trusting that God, who loves us beyond our understanding, is always leading us forward to the place he is calling us to be.

Pope Francis concludes his letter with a prayer and so let me conclude these few words with that same prayer:

*Hail guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

*Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father
and guide us in the path of life.*



*To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.*

*Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil.
Amen.*