



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

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Catechesis on Saint Joseph - 1. *Saint Joseph and the environment in which he lived*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

On 8 December 1870, Blessed [Pius IX](#) proclaimed Saint Joseph Patron of the Universal Church. One hundred and fifty years since that event, we are living a special year dedicated to Saint Joseph, and in the Apostolic Letter, *[Patris corde](#)*, I gathered together some reflections on him. Today, like never before, during this time marked by a global crisis made up of several factors, he can offer us support, consolation and guidance. This is why I have decided to dedicate a series of catecheses to him, which I hope may further help us to let ourselves be enlightened by his example and by his witness. For a few weeks, we will talk about Joseph.

There are more than ten people in the Bible who bear the name Joseph. The most important among them is the son of Jacob and Rachel who, through various vicissitudes, went from being a slave to becoming the second most important person in Egypt after the Pharaoh (cf. *Gen 37-50*). The name Joseph is Hebrew for “may God increase, may God give growth”. It is a wish, a blessing based on trust in providence and refers especially to fertility and to raising children. Indeed, this very name reveals to us an essential aspect of Joseph of Nazareth’s personality. He is a man full of faith, in his providence: he believes in God’s providence, he has faith in God’s providence. His every action, as recounted in the Gospel, is dictated by the certainty that God “gives growth”, that God “increases”, that God “adds”: that is, that God provides for the continuation of his plan of

salvation. And in this, Joseph of Nazareth is very similar to Joseph of Egypt.

The main geographical references regarding Joseph: Bethlehem and Nazareth, also assume an important role in our understanding of him. In the Old Testament, the city of Bethlehem is called *Beth Lechem*, that is, “House of bread”, or also Ephrathah, after the tribe that settled in that territory. In Arabic, however, the name means “House of meat”, probably because of the large number of flocks of sheep and goats in the area. Indeed, it was not by chance that when Jesus was born, the shepherds were the first witnesses of the event (cf. *Lk 2:8-20*). In the light of the story of Jesus, these allusions to bread and meat refer to the mystery of the Eucharist: Jesus is the living bread descended from heaven (cf. *Jn 6:51*). He will say of himself: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (*Jn 6:54*).

Bethlehem is mentioned several times in the Bible, as far back as the Book of Genesis. Bethlehem is also linked to the story of Ruth and Naomi, told in the short but wonderful Book of Ruth. Ruth gave birth to a son named Obed, who in turn gave birth to Jesse, the father of King David. And it was from the line of David that Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, descended. The prophet Micah foretold great things about Bethlehem: “But you, O Bethlehem of Eph’rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel” (*Mi 5:2*). The evangelist Matthew would take up this prophecy and connect it to the story of Jesus as its evident fulfilment.

In fact, the Son of God did not choose Jerusalem as the place of his incarnation, but Bethlehem and Nazareth, two outlying villages, far from the clamour of the news and the powers of the time. Yet Jerusalem was the city loved by the Lord (cf. *Is 62:1-12*), the “holy city” (*Dn 3:28*), chosen by God as his dwelling (cf. *Zech 3:2; Ps 132:13*). Here, in fact, dwelt the teachers of the Law, the scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and the elders of the people (cf. *Lk 2:46; Mt 15:1; Mk 3:22; Jn 1:19; Mt 26:3*).

This is why the choice of Bethlehem and Nazareth tells us that periphery and marginality are preferred by God. Jesus was not born in Jerusalem, with all the court... no, he was born in a periphery and he spent his life in that periphery until the age of thirty, working as a carpenter like Joseph. For Jesus, the peripheries and marginality were favoured. To fail to take this fact seriously is the same as not taking seriously the Gospel and the work of God, who continues to manifest himself in the geographical and existential peripheries. The Lord always acts in secret in the peripheries, even in our souls, in the peripheries of the soul, of feelings, perhaps feelings of which we are ashamed; but the Lord is there to help us move forward. The Lord continues to manifest himself in the peripheries, both the geographical ones and the existential ones. In particular, Jesus goes in search of sinners; he goes into their homes, speaks with them, calls them to conversion. And he is also rebuked for this: “But look at this Teacher”, say the doctors of the law, “Look at this Teacher: he eats with sinners, he gets dirty”. He also goes in search of those who have done no evil but have suffered it: the sick, the hungry, the poor, the least. Jesus always goes towards the

peripheries. And this should bring us great trust because the Lord knows the peripheries of our heart, the peripheries of our soul, the peripheries of our society, of our city, of our family, that is, that slightly obscure part that we do not show, perhaps out of shame.

In this respect, the society of that time is not very different from ours. Today, too, there is a centre and a periphery. And the Church knows that she is called to proclaim the good news starting from the peripheries. Joseph, who is a carpenter from Nazareth and who trusts in God's plan for his young fiancée and for himself, reminds the Church to fix her gaze on what the world deliberately ignores. Today Joseph teaches us this: "Do not look so much at the things that the world praises, look into the corners, look in the shadows, look at the peripheries, at what the world does not want". He reminds each of us to give importance to what others discard. In this sense he is truly a master of the essential: he reminds us that what truly matters does not attract our attention, but requires patient discernment to be discovered and appreciated. To discover what matters. Let us ask him to intercede so that the whole Church may recover this insight, this ability to discern, this ability to evaluate what is essential. Let us start again from Bethlehem, let us start again from Nazareth.

Today I would like to send a message to all the men and women who live in the most forgotten geographical peripheries of the world, or who experience situations of existential marginality. May you find in Saint Joseph the witness and protector to look to. We can turn to him with this prayer, a "home-made" prayer, but one that comes from the heart:

Saint Joseph,
 you who have always trusted God,
 and have made your choices
 guided by his providence
 teach us not to count so much on our own plans
 but on his plan of love.
 You who come from the peripheries
 help us to convert our gaze
 and to prefer what the world discards and marginalises.
 Comfort those who feel alone
 and support those who work silently
 to defend life and human dignity. Amen.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from The Netherlands, Denmark and the United States of America. In this month of

November, let us pray for our deceased loved ones, and for all who have died, that the Lord in his mercy will welcome them into the Kingdom of heaven. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of Christ. May God bless you!

Lastly as usual my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds*. Today's liturgy recalls Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, a woman of faith and ardent charity. May the example and intercession of this illustrious Saint of charity help each of you to live a virtuous life, going towards the poor and those in need, with an open mind.

Appeals of the Holy Father

Tomorrow in Italy we will celebrate the first National Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse, promoted by the Episcopal Conference. I hope that this initiative may be an opportunity for reflection, awareness and prayer to support the human and spiritual recovery of victims. It is the overriding duty of all those who have any educational responsibility in the family, in the parish, in schools, in recreational and sporting places, to protect and respect the adolescents and young people entrusted to their care, because it is precisely in these places that most abuse occurs.

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My thoughts are with the workers of Borgo Valbelluna and the area, who are concerned about their future employment. In the face of their pressing problems, I join the bishops and parish priests of the area in expressing my closeness. I make a heartfelt appeal that in this situation, as in other similar ones that place so many families in difficulty, the logic of profit should not prevail, but that of fair and solidarity-based sharing. The person and his dignity must always be placed at the centre of every employment issue; when you do not earn your bread, you lose your dignity! We must pray a lot for these people.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In this year of Saint Joseph, today we begin a new series of catecheses on the humble carpenter of Nazareth, the foster-father of the child Jesus and the patron of the Universal Church. In Hebrew, the name Joseph evokes God's power to bring about growth and new life. Joseph teaches us to trust in God's providence quietly at work in our world. His life is principally associated with two small towns, Bethlehem and Nazareth, reminding us that God's preferential love is for the poor and those on the margins of life. God chose Bethlehem, the city of David, as the place where his Son was to be born under the watchful care of Joseph, who

was himself of the house of David. By his life and example, Saint Joseph reminds us that, in our own day, the Church is called to proclaim the good news of Christ's coming, beginning with the existential peripheries of our world. The poor and forgotten in our midst can look to him as a sure guide and protector in their lives. Let us ask Saint Joseph to intercede for the Church, that we may always set forth anew from Bethlehem, in order to see and appreciate what is essential in God's eyes.