

## Holy Family

Pope Francis has inaugurated a Year of St. Joseph to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the day Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph the patron of the universal church. For our diocese, this is doubly delightful because the first Catholic Mass in the city of St. Joseph also took place 150 years ago. Pope Francis released an apostolic letter this month “to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal.” Among the events of Joseph’s life, Pope Francis recalls today’s gospel: “In the Temple, forty days after Jesus’ birth, Joseph and Mary offered their child to the Lord and listened with amazement to Simeon’s prophecy concerning Jesus and his Mother (cf. Lk 2:22-35).”

The pope’s letter gives seven different ways to think about Saint Joseph. First, he was “a beloved father:” the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus, sacrificing himself for the sake of us all.

Second, he is “a tender and loving father.” Joseph saw Jesus grow daily “in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor” (Lk 2:52). Pope Francis says that Joseph “teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.”

Third, Joseph is “an obedient father.” Joseph was troubled by Mary’s mysterious pregnancy, but an angel told him not to be afraid. Joseph obeyed what God asked of him, and he taught Jesus to be obedient to his parents.

Fourth, Joseph was “an accepting father.” He accepted Mary unconditionally. Pope Francis writes, “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 makes a decision to protect Mary’s good name, her dignity and her life. In [Joseph’s] hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment.”

Fifth, Joseph was “a creatively courageous father.” Pope Francis says that creative courage “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.”

Sixth, Joseph is “a working father.” He “was a carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family. From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labor.”

Seventh, Joseph was “a father in the shadows.” “Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father: he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way.”

May Joseph inspire each of us to love our families, sacrifice for others, obey the will of God, and practice creativity with the gifts God places in our hands, willingly working in the shadows for the sake of the glory of God.