

## Like a Father

By Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFM Cap.

**W**e are almost in the middle of the Year dedicated to Saint Joseph, announced by Pope Francis to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his proclamation as Patron of the universal Church. In the middle not just because we are almost half way through this singular time of grace and for which the Holy Father has granted special indulgences (cf. Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary 8 December 2020), but also because this month of April links the month of March, in which the Church invites us to look to Joseph as the husband of Mary and the father of Jesus, with the month of May in which we are invited to look to him as the “Patron of Workers.”

The Pontiff’s goal in his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* is clear. He invites us to look to this saint, outside his closed niche, and to see him as a powerful intercessor because of his special relationship and love with God who became man. He holds him up as an example to all Christians in every walk of life, as a role model who is very relevant to today’s world that gives such importance to appearances and power.

Saint Joseph is “the man who goes unnoticed,” whose “daily presence is discreet and hidden” (PC), in his family he is the authority who knows how to be authoritative without becoming authoritarian

(cf. Paul VI, Homily of 19 March 1966), he was “an obedient father” because “in every situation, Joseph declared his own ‘fiat’” and above all, “he is the expression of God’s tender love” (cf. PC), that tenderness that every father should manifest: not only those who become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but all those who become so “whenever they accept responsibility for the life of another” (idem).

It is this very paternity that the Church “needs.” The same paternity that the devotees of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina still recognise in him, 52 years since his death and almost 20 since his canonisation, but still calling him, almost always, Padre Pio (Father Pio). The same paternity that our saint practised in the confessional, weighing tenderness with severity and always careful not to cause discouragement in the penitent.

That is why Pope Francis underlines how “it is so important to encounter God’s mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience His truth and tenderness” and explaining particularly to priests how “the evil one makes us see and condemn our frailty, whereas the Spirit brings it to light with tender love. Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us. Pointing fingers and judging others are frequently signs of an inability to accept our own weaknesses,



our own frailty” (idem).

Lastly- but not in importance – Saint Joseph and Padre Pio teach us by their lives the value and true meaning of chastity that is more than: “simply a sign of affection, but the summation of an attitude that is the opposite of possessiveness. Chastity is freedom from possessiveness in every sphere of one’s life. Only when love is chaste, is it truly love. 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” (idem).

Let us make good use of this year. Let us reap all the benefit we can from Saint Joseph and Saint Pio too, without setting limits to their generosity, embracing fully Pope Francis’ thought: “The proper mission of the saints is not only to obtain miracles and graces, but to intercede for us before God” and to help “all the faithful to strive for holiness” and to understand that “their lives are concrete proof that it is possible to put the Gospel into practice” (idem). ❖

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