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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place in the Paul VI Hall, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian, the Pope concluded his cycle of catechesis on Saint Joseph, focusing on the theme, "Saint Joseph, patron of the universal Church" (Bible reading: *Mt 2: 13-15*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful in attendance.

The general audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the apostolic blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we conclude the cycle of catecheses on the figure of Saint Joseph. These catecheses are complementary to the Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, written on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church by Blessed Pius IX. But what does this title mean? What does it mean that Saint Joseph is "patron of the Church"? I would like to reflect on this today with you.

In this case, too, the Gospels provide us with the most correct key to interpretation. In fact, at the end of every story in which Joseph is the protagonist, the Gospel notes that he takes the Child and His mother with him and does what God has ordered him to do (cf. *Mt 1:24; 2:14,21*). Thus, the fact that Joseph's task is to protect Jesus and Mary stands out. He is their principal guardian: "Indeed, Jesus and Mary His Mother are the most precious treasure of our faith"[1] (Apostolic letter *Patris corde*, 5). And this treasure is safeguarded by Saint Joseph

In the plan of salvation, the Son cannot be separated from the Mother, from the one who “advanced in the pilgrimage of faith and faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the Cross” (Lumen Gentium, 58), as the Second Vatican Council reminds us.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph are in a sense the primordial nucleus of the Church. Jesus is Man and God; Maria, the first disciple and the Mother; and Joseph, the guardian. And we too “We should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping.” (*Patris corde*, 5). And here there is a very beautiful trace of the Christian vocation: to safeguard. To safeguard life, to safeguard human development, to safeguard the human mind, to safeguard the human heart, to safeguard human work. The Christian — we could say — is like Saint Joseph: he must safeguard. To be a Christian is not only to receive the faith, to confess the faith, but to safeguard life, one’s own life, the life of others, the life of the Church. The Son of the Most High came into the world in a condition of great weakness: Jesus was born like this, weak, weak. He wanted to be defended, protected, cared for. God trusted Joseph, as did Mary, who found in him the bridegroom who loved and respected her and always took care of her and the Child. “In this sense, Saint Joseph could not be other than the Guardian of the Church, for the Church is the continuation of the Body of Christ in history, even as Mary’s motherhood is reflected in the motherhood of the Church. In his continued protection of the Church, Joseph continues to protect the child and his mother, and we too, by our love for the Church, continue to love *the Child and His mother*” (ibid.).

This Child is the One who will say: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”. (*Mt 25:40*). Therefore, every person who is hungry and thirsty, every stranger, every migrant, every person without clothes, every sick person, every prisoner is the “Child” whom Joseph looks after. And we are invited to safeguard these people, these our brothers and sisters, as Joseph did. That is why he is invoked as protector of all the needy, the exiled, the afflicted, and even the dying – we spoke about this last Wednesday. And we too must learn from Joseph to “safeguard” these goods: to love the Child and His mother; to love the sacraments and the people of God; to love the poor and our parish. Each of these realities is always the Child and His mother (cf. *Patris corde*, 5). We must safeguard, because with this we safeguard Jesus, as Joseph did.

Nowadays it is common, it is an everyday occurrence, to criticise the Church, to point out its inconsistencies — there are many — to point out its sins, which in reality are our inconsistencies, our sins, because the Church has always been a people of sinners who encounter God’s mercy. Let us ask ourselves if, in our hearts, we love the Church as she is, the People of God on the journey, with many limitations, but with a great desire to serve and to love God. In fact, only love makes us capable of speaking the truth fully, in a non-partisan way; of saying what is wrong, but also of recognising all the goodness and holiness that are present in the Church, starting precisely with Jesus and Mary. Loving the Church, safeguarding the Church and walking with the Church. But the Church is not that little group that is close to the priest and commands everyone, no. The Church is everyone, everyone. On the journey. Safeguarding one another, looking out for each other. This is a good question: when I have a problem with someone, do I try to look after them, or do I immediately condemn them, spit on them, destroy them? We must safeguard, always safeguard!

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to ask for the intercession of Saint Joseph precisely at the most difficult times in the life of you and of your communities. Where our mistakes become a scandal, let us ask Saint Joseph to give us the courage to speak the truth, ask for forgiveness, and humbly begin again. Where persecution prevents the Gospel from being proclaimed, let us ask St Joseph for the strength and patience to endure abuse and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Where material and human resources are scarce and make us experience poverty, especially when we are called to serve the last, the defenceless, the orphans, the sick, the rejected of society, let us pray to Saint Joseph to be Providence for us. How many saints have turned to him! How many people in the history of the Church have found in him a patron, a guardian, a father!

Let us imitate their example, and for this reason, we pray today: Let us pray, all together, to Saint Joseph with the prayer that I have placed at the conclusion of the Letter *Patris corde*, entrusting to him our intentions and, in a special way, the Church that suffers and is in trial. And now, you have in your hands in various language — in four, I think — the prayer; and I think that it will also be on the screen. So together, each one in their own language, let us pray to Saint Joseph.

Hail, guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted His only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.

Blessed Joseph, to us too,

show yourself to be a father,
and guide us in the path of life.

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

[1] S. Rituum Congreg., Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (8 December 1870): ASS 6 (1870-71), 193; cf. Pius IX, Lett. Ap. *Inclytum Patriarcham* (7 July 1871): *lo. cit.*, 324-327.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Nigeria and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!
