

Editorial

Justice Incarnated: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives on St Joseph

With the Apostolic Letter *Patris corde* ("With a Father's Heart"), Pope Francis recalls the 150th anniversary of the declaration of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. To mark the occasion, the Holy Father has proclaimed a "Year of Saint Joseph" from 8 December 2020 to 8 December 2021. While scripture does not offer a detailed account of St Joseph, the magisterial documents also to a greater extent continued the same patrimony. However, over the centuries, started various devotional forms in the Catholic Church, which in turn resulted entitling St Joseph as the "Patron of the Catholic Church," "Patron of Workers," "Guardian of the Redeemer," and the "patron of a happy death." More than such forms of piety, amidst the pandemic crisis, as also Pope Francis accentuates in his Apostolic Letter, it is high time to unveil the unnoticed and forgotten chapters in the life of St Joseph and thereby explore their implications in various levels of the ecclesial life. Undoubtedly, it is a wake-up call not only to unravel the life, personality and the redemptive role of St. Joseph but also to investigate the theological, philosophical, spiritual and psychological dimensions thereof.

Francis Thonippara makes a historical survey of magisterial as well as other church documents on St Joseph and thereby highlights various papal interventions over the centuries in this regard. Though since Pope Pius IX until today, popes were keen to propagate devotion to St Joseph, it was Pope Leo XIII who initially published an encyclical in 1889 in honour of St Joseph. Author also reminds that it is an opportune time to develop a Josephology along the side of the already flourishing Mariology in the Catholic Church. Kurian Kachappilly philosophically analyses St Joseph as the icon of perfect

charity, reflecting along the line of *Patris Corde* § 7, “The logic of love is always the logic of freedom.” In the life of St Joseph, one observes a perfect blending of divine as well as human love, which helped him to exercise unconditional charity in his life. He is of the opinion that unlike many people, who adopt the façade of ‘bad faith’ in order to escape the anguish of boundless freedom, Saint Joseph, the just man, exercised his total freedom with responsibility, empowered by perfect charity.

Benny Thettayil reflects upon the apophatic silence of St Joseph and thus unveils the mystic dimension of Joseph’s life on the background of scripture. The Upanishadic portrayal of the Absolute as incomprehensible and transcendent remains true in the life of St. Joseph as well. Though mysterious are the ways Joseph was led, amidst uncertainties and life’s riddles, the way he responded to them, made him a silent monk of a father. Josin Kaithakulam makes a theological and philosophical reading of St Joseph as a worker par excellence and thereby analyses the often discussed topic of dignity of labour. The author visualizes the dignity work and the expected right attitude to work, to love work and to become lovable by work. Understanding work differently, St Joseph considered it a vocation, moreover a calling, rather than mere a work/job.

Joy Philip Kakkanattu investigates the adjective used for St Joseph, namely ‘righteous’ (*dikaios* in Greek, and *zaddiq* in Hebrew) and affirms that this term alone defines who St Joseph is, on account of its theological depth. Moreover, the author draws the reader’s attention to how Joseph in his quality of *zaddiq* was prefigured in the Old Testament, particularly in the biblical figures Noah, Patriarch Joseph, Abraham, Moses and so on and outlines his unique role in the redemptive mystery of God. Mary Ann Madhavathu analyses how St. Joseph has been venerated and exalted in the East Syrian tradition, more than any other Old and New Testament saints. Under six subtitles, the author sheds light on how this tradition emphasising upon the unique relationship between Joseph and Mary, epitomizes them as a perfect example of all earthly relationships. To do so, the author depends upon the liturgy of the East Syrian tradition and apostolic teachings. In all these, accordingly, the church emphasizes upon the unique role of St Joseph in the divine economy of salvation.

Mathew Thekkemuriyil discusses St Joseph as a uniquely different man in the patriarchal society on account of his faith, humility, courage and obedience. The author portrays St Joseph as a father,

guru, protector, a male feminist and explores the theological underpinnings of how he is a father in shadows, representing the presence of the divinity amidst human beings along the line of Pope Francis' *Patris Corde*. Joseph's life remains uniquely different on account of his vocation, charism and mission. Paul Kunjanayil makes a scriptural analysis of dreams with special focus on dreams of Joseph narrated in Mt 1:18-2:23. Dreams in the Bible are theophanic which unveiled the divine plan for human beings. In Joseph's case too, dreams contained the divine plan and he remains a perfect icon of the expected human response in the form of faith. Just as in the entire Bible, the evangelist Matthew also employs the Greek phrase *kat' onar* to denote dreams. Dreams in Mathew's gospel containing the Emmanuel theme and Kingdom of heaven theme, are proofs for God's providence in the birth of Jesus and the subsequent events, as well as God's salvific plan for the entire humanity.

Paulachan Kochappilly understands the dreams of Joseph from a different perspective, namely, a background for doing contextual theology. The author portrays how Joseph celebrated his life charged with the enlightening faith and empowering certainty, exemplifying the ways and means to encounter a perplexing context. Joseph challenges, as the author portrays, to dream the dreams of God and dare to do them willingly and joyfully. Peter Kochalumkal opines that it is because Joseph was an integrated person within oneself, towards God and fellow brethren, God qualified him the "just man." Joseph remained righteous in accomplishing the divine will for the salvation of the entire humanity. He remains a perfect example of fatherhood in the contemporary context too. The author specifically focuses on the virtues of Joseph and thus portrays him as paradigm of spirituality.

Thomas Prasobh Kolliyelil enumerates how the Eastern Liturgical traditions and the Syriac Fathers commemorate and honour St. Joseph. Though sources are less, the author has shed light on the Armenian, Byzantine, East Syrian and the West Syrian traditions in this regard. In the second part, the author elaborates how St Joseph has been depicted in the writings of two Syriac Fathers, namely, Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh. A detailed study has been made on Jacob of Serugh and the author concludes that the Eastern Churches as a whole honour St Joseph in line with the Fathers of the Church. Thomas Parayil makes a psychological analysis of St Joseph and affirms that he is a silent epitome of cognitive and affective elements of hope and faith. The author reflects upon the psychological aspects

of Joseph's deeds for Mary and Jesus making use of C.R. Snyder's Hope theory and Brené Brown's books on parenting. St. Joseph has also been presented as a reliable example of crisis management. Thus, the author presents the Holy Family and St Joseph as its head as the exemplary Christian family and lists out the psychological perspectives of effective parenting.

"In sacred science all things are treated of under the aspect of God; either because they are God Himself, or because they have an order to God as their beginning and end" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.1, a. 7, c.). If thus, it is an opportune time to develop a 'theology of St Joseph' or a 'Josephology.' Sacred Scripture portrays Joseph as the husband of the blessed virgin Mary, foster father of Jesus, head of the family consisting of Joseph, Mary and Jesus and moreover a just man. Based on the limited truths about Joseph in Sacred Scripture and responding to Pope Francis' call to reflect upon Joseph's central role in salvation history, these theological, philosophical, spiritual and psychological reflections attempt a 'Josephology.'

Shinto Puthumattathil
Paulachan Kochappilly

Editors