

Homily for Chrism Mass
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
March 31, 2021

Our first contact with the oil of the catechumens, with the holy Chrism, happened when we were baptized. The Christian journey for each of us began there and then, on the sacred day of our baptism.

Today, I am reminded of St. Augustine who said: “for you I am a bishop (a pastor) with you, after all, I am a Christian.” The apostle John often used “We” when referring to Christians. Yes, all together we are the family of faith rooted in our common baptism when we were anointed for the first time with the precious holy chrism which made us a priestly people, a people with the mission to “sing the goodness of the Lord,” to praise and worship the one and triune God.

The Gospel today brings us to the manifestation of Jesus in Nazareth. Let me focus only on the first verse: “Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did.” Pope St. Paul VI once spoke about “the school of Nazareth.”

This school is extremely important for us because this is “where Jesus was brought up” for more than 30 years in the company of Mary and Joseph: the holy family of Nazareth. In his visit to Nazareth in 1964, Pope St. Paul VI outlined the main features of the spirituality of Nazareth as a school of the Gospel: first, the lesson of silence that teaches us “recollection, reflection, and eagerness to heed the good inspirations and words of true teachers, silence that teaches us the value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of interior life, of secret prayer seen by God alone.” Also, the lesson of family life in Nazareth teaches us “its harmony of love, its simplicity and austere beauty, its inviolable character...” and is it not true that a positive dimension of this terrible COVID-19 emergency has been the rediscovering of family life, the role of parents as the first teachers of the faith?

Another feature of the school of Nazareth is work. The “carpenter’s son” work is an affirmation of the dignity of labor.

Silence, family life, work, all motivated by love, can inspire us all, priestly people, in our quest for the holiness of life.

Once a year on Holy Thursday morning or as close as possible to it, the bishop concelebrates with the other priests to enhance our communion, to manifest our unity and fraternity. In continuity with the spirituality of Nazareth, we are blessed to be enriched by the Year of St. Joseph and today, I join Pope Francis in asking St. Joseph to reveal his fatherhood to us priests, for he made his life a sacrificial service to the mystery of the Incarnation, especially in its beginnings.

Now, I will draw from the Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, the profile of Joseph as father. I find that taking a long look at St. Joseph, we find a paradigm for the integration of our own paternity as priests and bishops.

St. Joseph can teach us to be tender and loving fathers. First, let us consider tenderness in regard to our own frailty and weaknesses. Whereas the evil one tries to condemn us, God's truth does not condemn but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains, and forgives us. Joseph teaches us that God can work even through our fears, our frailties, and our weaknesses.

St. Joseph was an obedient father and Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to always do the will of the Father.

St. Joseph was an accepting Father. He was not passively resigned but courageously proactive. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations, and disappointments. Joseph's attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak.

St. Joseph was a creatively courageous father. The way he dealt with difficulties allowed new resources to emerge in his great care of the Mother and the Child. Pope Francis tells us: "we must love to love the child and the mother, to love the sacraments and charity, to love the Church and the poor. Each of these realities is always the child and his mother."

St. Joseph is a father in the shadows, the earthly shadow of the heavenly father. Fathers are not born but made. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person. Joseph found happiness not in mere sacrifice but in self-gift; in him we never see frustration but only trust.

Let us make ours, brother priests, the very last sentence of Pope Francis' Letter on St. Joseph: we need only ask St. Joseph for the grace of graces: our conversion.

And together let us ask him: Blessed Joseph, show yourself a father to us.

Our fulfilment as ministers lies in living pastoral charity which traditionally, we have called it *the cura animarum*, the care for the flock. You are to be commended for responding to this immense crisis of the pandemic: working together with all the parishes and serving beyond the call of duty. The care of souls is a unique call no one has defined better than St. Augustine when he described his daily duties as:

"The turbulent have to be corrected, the faint-hearted cheered up, the weak supported, the Gospel's opponents need to be refuted, the insidious enemies guarded against, the unlearned need to be taught, the indolent stirred up, the argumentative checked; the proud must be put in their place, the desperate set on their feet, those engaged in quarrels reconciled; the needy have to be helped; the oppressed to be liberated. The good to be encouraged, the bad to be tolerated;

all must be loved. The Gospel terrifies me.” Brothers, this is the reality you and I are committed to and today we say *fiat*, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Amen.