

Letting Easter surprise us

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Although Jesus had, on more than one occasion, foreshadowed his coming death and resurrection, his disciples were slow to believe that this would actually happen, or understand what this actually meant. (It is always something of a consolation to know that Jesus' closest companions took a while to understand. That is the nature of discipleship: something that gradually unfolds and takes a lifetime to understand and live.)

Little wonder that the resurrection was such a surprise and something rather unexpected for the disciples. One of the difficulties about the whole Easter story is that we are too familiar with it; we know how the story ends; the unexpected ending doesn't catch us by surprise. It can at times fail to surprise us. Yet if we have lived a thorough Lent, Easter ought to surprise us. In Lent we have ploughed, with the Holy Spirit's help, the ground of our lives and have let it lie fallow for the grace of God to fall graciously upon it. Lent is about transformation; about us co-operating with God's grace to renew the living spring of our baptism with us.

Every moment of human life is subject to the play of multiple rhythms of time, some daily, others weekly, monthly, yearly or seasonal. For us there is another, more fundamental, rhythm. It's the calendar of faith, the annual cycle of feasts and seasons by which the Church celebrates the mystery of Jesus Christ. The proper name for this is the 'Liturgical Year'.

We are coming to the high-point of the most intense part of that annual pilgrimage of faith, the Easter Triduum. It is so important that nothing can get in its way. The season that began in 'ash' will give way to the Easter 'flame' of the newly lit Pascal Candle, and the 'living spring' of our baptism. All we see from then on is by this Easter light.

Year of St Joseph

As Easter does, Pope Francis has once again surprised us by announcing the Year of St Joseph, although if we were attentive it comes not as much of a surprise. In his apostolic letter entitled *Patris corde* (With a Father's Heart) Pope Francis describes St Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

The letter marks the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX's declaration of St Joseph as patron of the Universal Church. To celebrate the anniversary

Pope Francis has proclaimed a special "Year of St Joseph", beginning on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2020 and extending to the same feast in 2021.

Pope Francis wrote 'With a Father's Heart' against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic which, he says, has helped us see more clearly the importance of "ordinary" people who, though far from the limelight, exercise patience and offer hope every day. In this, they resemble St Joseph, 'the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence', who nonetheless played 'an incomparable role in the history of salvation'.

The whole letter is worth an Easter read. It speaks to us of a faithful missionary disciple who welcomed the will of God; was a creatively courageous father, an example of love; one who teaches the value, dignity and joy of work; one 'in the shadows', centred on Mary and Jesus.

With the coming of Easter, our attention in the Archdiocese must now centre on the coming Plenary Council and its preparation. It is rather providential that the first session will take place during the Year of St Joseph.

After all, 150 years ago the Catholics of Adelaide joyfully welcomed the news of St Joseph being made the patron of the Universal Church. Imbued from the inside out by the experience of who Joseph was, they

saw how 'practical' and 'close' St Joseph was to them, especially through the emerging 'Sisters of St Joseph' and other pioneering people of faith.

May we, 150 years later, rise, as did they, to the challenges of our time under the careful encouragement of the one who is our model of being a protector, defender, and comforter.

At the conclusion of his letter, after he quotes a fond prayer to St Joseph, the Pope adds another prayer to him, which he encourages all of us to pray together:

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed 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 a father
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage,
and defend us from every evil.
Amen.

I am sure that just as Easter came as a surprise to the Apostles and first disciples of Jesus, so too may this Easter find us surprised by hope, and may we be surprised many times this year under the guidance of St Joseph. I wish you a blessed Easter to all. May we always be Easter people and may our song always be Alleluia.

God is good, good indeed.

The Pope's apostolic letter can be found at www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html