
Pope at audience: “The world needs men and women in the second row”

“The world needs these men and women: men and women in the second row, but who support the development of our life, of every one of us, and who with prayer, and by their example, with their teaching, sustain us on the path of life”, the Pope said on Wednesday 24 November during the general audience in Paul VI Hall. In unscripted remarks, Francis thus explained the role of Saint Joseph in the second catechesis dedicated to him. “The person of Joseph, although apparently marginal, discreet, and in the background, is in fact a central element in the history of salvation”, said the Holy Father, noting that “Joseph lives his role without ever seeking to take over the scene.” **“If we think about it – the Pope observed - our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines.”** “... How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small ways, and in everyday ways, how to accept and deal with a crisis by adjusting their routines, looking ahead and encouraging the practice of prayer”, the Pope exclaimed: “How many are praying, making sacrifices and interceding for the good of all.” “everyone can find in Saint Joseph, the man who goes unnoticed, the man of daily presence, of discreet and hidden presence, an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of difficulty”, assured the Holy Father: “He reminds us that all those who are seemingly hidden or in the ‘second row’ are unparalleled protagonists in the history of salvation.” *“In the Gospel of Luke, Joseph appears as the guardian of Jesus and of Mary. And for this reason, he is also the Guardian of the Church”*, the Pope explained in unscripted remarks: “if he was the guardian of Jesus and Mary, he works, now that he is in heaven, and continues to be a guardian, in this case of the Church.” “Please do not forget this”, is Francis’ impromptu appeal:

“Today, Joseph protects the Church,

and by continuing to protect the Church, he continues to protect the child and his mother.” For Francis, “this aspect of Joseph’s guardianship is the great answer to the story of Genesis. When God asks Cain to account for Abel’s life, he replies: ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’. With his life, Joseph seems to want to tell us that we are always called to feel that we are our brothers and sisters’ keepers, the guardians of those who are close to us, of those whom the Lord entrusts to us through many circumstances of life.” Apropos of this, the Pope corrected the renowned definition by Zygmunt Bauman: *“A society such as ours, which has been defined as “liquid”, as it seems not to have consistency ... I will correct the philosopher who coined this definition and say: more than liquid, gaseous, a properly gaseous society. This liquid, gaseous society finds in the story of Joseph a very clear indication of the importance of human bonds.”* “Indeed, the Gospel tells us the genealogy of Jesus, not only for a theological reason, but also to remind each one of us that our lives are made up of bonds that precede and accompany us”, Francis argued, and then added in unscripted remarks:

“The Son of God chose to come into the world by way of such bonds, the way of history: he did not come down into the world by magic, no. He took the historic route we all take.”

“I think of the many people who find it difficult to find meaningful bonds in their lives, and because of this they struggle, they feel alone, they lack the strength and courage to go on”, the Pope said as in a virtual embrace and went on to conclude the catechesis “with a prayer to help them, and all of us, to find in Saint Joseph an ally, a friend and a support. ‘Saint Joseph, you who guarded the bond with Mary and Jesus, help us to care for the relationships in our lives. May no one experience that sense of abandonment that comes from loneliness. Let each of us be reconciled with

our own history, with those who have gone before, and recognise even in the mistakes made a way through which Providence has made its way, and evil did not have the last word. Show yourself to be a friend to those who struggle the most, and as you supported Mary and Jesus in difficult times, support us too on our journey. Amen.”

M.Michela Nicolais