

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception this year the Holy Father, Pope Francis inaugurated a holy year in honour of St. Joseph. It marks the 150th anniversary of the declaration of St. Joseph as the patron of the universal church.

The apostolic letter that the Pope issued is entitled in Latin, “Patris Corde”, a Father’s heart. And in this letter the Pope describes different characteristics of the fatherhood of St. Joseph. And so on this Feast of the Holy Family I would like to take a look at the Holy Father’s description of St. Joseph.

The fourth chapter is entitled, “An accepting father”. In accepting the word of the angel revealed to him in a dream Joseph takes Mary as his wife. He may not have understood everything but he accepts his role as husband and the protector of her child who is not his own.

The Pope writes,

“The spiritual path of Joseph traces for us is not one that explains, but accepts. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning... Just as God told Joseph: “Son of David, do not be afraid!”, so he seems to tell us: “Do not be afraid!” We need to set aside all anger and disappointment, and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish. Not with mere resignation but with hope and courage. In this way, we become open to a deeper meaning. Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from stony ground. Even if our heart condemns us, “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”

The Gospel for this Feast of the Holy Family is the account of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple. Forty days after his birth Jesus is taken by his parents to the Jerusalem temple to be presented to God. And the family is approached by two prophets who say some wonderful and some ominous things about their little baby.

What is meaning of their words? What are Mary and Joseph to do with them? How are they to interpret them? In particular the word to Mary “And a sword will pierce your own soul”. They do not explain them. They accept them.

As I preach these words to you today I do so to an almost empty church before a cell phone acting as a video camera. We are in very uncertain and inexplicable times. But how do we face this moment? With anger? Disappointment? Despair?

Can the Holy Family inspire us today to meet this moment instead with faith?

As the Holy Father says to meet this moment not with mere resignation but with hope and courage.