

MARCH 2021

### **In tough times, go to St. Joseph**

By Sister Constance Veit, LSP

This month, we Little Sisters and our Residents and staff will observe two major COVID milestones.

On March 11 we will have been in lockdown for a full year and on March 19 we will finish the vaccination process at our residence in Washington, DC, with a compliance rate of nearly 100 percent among those who live and work here.

As I got my second vaccine, I was almost ecstatic. I wanted to sing the old standard, Happy Days Are Here Again!

Reality quickly set in, however. Nothing in our daily routine would change, at least for the foreseeable future. Our days are still ruled by an insidious virus and the dictates of health experts and bureaucrats. I wanted to cry out with the psalmist, “How long, O Lord? How long will you hide your face from us?” (cf. Ps 13:1).

But then in his mercy God brought light into my darkness.

I’ve been reading *Patris Corde*, the apostolic letter written by Pope Francis to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Joseph’s designation as patron of the universal Church. I believe that our Holy Father wrote this letter specifically for the times we are living. His reflections have been helpful to me and I’d like to share them with you.

Referring to Joseph’s reaction to Mary’s unexpected pregnancy, Pope Francis calls him an “accepting father” who can help us to accept life as it is, even when we don’t understand. “The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us,” he wrote, “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.”

St. Joseph did not look for shortcuts, Pope Francis writes, but confronted reality with open eyes, accepting personal responsibility for it. “Joseph is not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives,” the pope adds, “acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit’s gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.”

Pope Francis also calls St. Joseph a “creatively courageous father.” In the face of difficulty, he writes, “we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even know we had.”

The pope suggests that Joseph turned challenges and problems into possibilities by always trusting in divine providence.

“If at times God seems not to help us,” our Holy Father writes, “surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative and to find solutions ourselves” rather than expecting God to intervene directly.

God trusts us to be creative and take initiative! While I find this an exciting concept, when it comes to COVID I wish God would just swoop down and take it all away!

But I guess that’s not how he has envisioned the COVID trajectory. So I turn again to St. Joseph, looking for encouragement in these trying times.

The pope writes of the “Christian realism” exemplified by Joseph. He shows us that believing does not mean finding facile and comforting solutions. “Reality, in all its mysterious and irreducible complexity, is the bearer of existential meaning, with all its lights and shadows.”

He cites St. Paul’s well-known words, “All things work together for good, for those who love God” (Rom 8:28) and St. Augustine’s addition to this phrase, “even that which is called evil.” Faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad, concludes Pope Francis.

God told St. Joseph, “Do not be afraid.” As I turn to St. Joseph, he tells me, “Do not be afraid. Set aside your fears, your frustrations and disappointments and embrace the way things are – both the positives and the negatives – not with mere resignation, but with hope and courage.”

Pope Francis assures us that if we follow St. Joseph’s example, we will be open to the deeper meaning of our current circumstances. “It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed,” the Holy Father writes. “God can make flowers spring up from stony ground.”

Besides our COVID milestones this month, we will also be celebrating the feast of St. Joseph (March 19). And the day after is the first day of spring – I think I’ll plant some flowers.

*Sr. Constance Veit is director of communications for the Little Sisters of the Poor.*