



# With a Father's Heart

*Small Group Study Guide to  
Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter Patris Corde*

*Imprimatur:*  
Archbishop William E. Lori, S.T.D.  
Archbishop of Baltimore  
18 January 2023

The Imprimatur is an official declaration that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

Copyright © 2023 by Knights of Columbus Supreme Council. All rights reserved. English translation of *Patris Corde* © 2020 *Dicastero per la Comunicazione* - Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Excerpts from the English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church for use in the United States of America Copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. – Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with Permission. English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica copyright © 1997, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Cover image: *Saint Joseph and the Christ Child* (ca. 1670-1675), Bartolomé Estebán Murillo (1618-1682), The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Write:

Catholic Information Service  
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council  
PO Box 1971  
New Haven, CT 06521-1971

[www.kofc.org/cis](http://www.kofc.org/cis)  
[cis@kofc.org](mailto:cis@kofc.org)  
203-752-4267  
800-735-4605 fax

Printed in the United States of America

*The Knights of Columbus presents  
The Cor Ecclesiae Series*

# With a Father's Heart

*Small Group Study Guide to  
Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter Patris Corde*

Catholic Information Service  
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council

First, St. Joseph embraced his role as “Guardian of the Family.” He protected our Blessed Mother, Mary, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. He guided them through danger and kept them from harm’s way. We, too, must be guardians of the family — because Catholic families need defenders. In this time when the family faces many challenges and a hostile culture, we must do our part to help men build strong marriages and raise faithful children.

Second, St. Joseph served as “Guardian of the Truth.” The truth that Joseph protected had a name: Jesus Christ, who is the truth incarnate. We, too, must defend this truth. We live in a time of bigotry and intolerance. Key truths — about life, marriage, the nature of the family, and the meaning of freedom — are increasingly denied and even vilified. Yet, this makes our commitment to truth all the more important. Now is the time to inspire our fellow Catholics to stand for what’s right. St. Joseph is our guide. Let us pray for his intercession. And let us make his creative courage our own, for the sake of the family, and the truth.

*Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly*

# Table of Contents

## Introductory Materials

The Cor Ecclesiae Series .....	ii
How To Use This Series .....	iii
How to Lead a Small Group .....	vi
Introduction to <i>Patris Corde</i> .....	x

## Patris Corde

Session 1 – A Beloved Father .....	1
Litany of Saint Joseph .....	7
Act of Consecration to St. Joseph .....	9
Memorare to St. Joseph .....	10
Prayer to St. Joseph, the Worker .....	10
The Virtues: A Catholic Understanding .....	11
Sources .....	21
Resources .....	22

## The *Cor Ecclesiae* Series

---

The *Cor Ecclesiae* Series provides study and discussion guides for essential and timely Church documents so that individuals and groups can grow closer to Jesus Christ in the heart of the Church (*Cor Ecclesiae*). The Church passes on what she has received, and, as both teacher and mother, offers to the faithful authentic teaching and guidance for living in the world today. In a particular way, the writings of the popes, endowed with the authority of Christ, teach us the faith which is to be believed and put into practice. This series will offer you the opportunity to read, discuss, and pray with texts that the Church has given us to better understand our faith, ourselves, and the world around us. It is our hope that the *Cor Ecclesiae* series will draw you to a greater understanding of the Catholic faith passed down to us through the Church and ultimately lead you to encounter the heart of Jesus.

# How To Use This Series

---

The *Cor Ecclesiae* Series is meant to be used by any group that is hoping to grow in their faith while developing the bonds of community. This series is designed in particular for use in a Knights of Columbus Cor Meeting, but each discussion guide is suitable for various settings, ministries, and groups. This study can even be done by an individual, but it will be most effective in the environment of community. Authentic friendships support us in our spiritual growth just as they do in other aspects of our lives.

Before your group dives in, choose a facilitator. This facilitator should be a member of the group. The facilitator can alternate each meeting, or it can stay the same throughout. If you are the facilitator, please review the “How to Lead a Small Group” section before your first meeting. Depending on which study you are doing, there may be some sessions that will require additional coordination and planning (e.g. coordinating with a priest or deacon if available). Make sure the facilitator looks through those sections and plans accordingly.

Keep in mind, this study alone cannot build your faith community. The *Cor Ecclesiae* Series will offer opportunities for firmer bonds to be created, but it is up to your group to openly share and support one another as you navigate the study. In order to create the right

environment, your meeting should include more than this study. Provide hospitality (coffee, a meal, snacks, recreation time) at every meeting and allow the main part of your meeting to be centered around one of guides from the *Cor Ecclesiae* Series. Plan to set aside 30-45 minutes to complete one full session during your meeting, with 20-30 minutes of fellowship before or after the study.

*In this Patris Corde Study Guide you will find an outline for 7 sessions. This Study Guide is written in particular for men; however, the reflections and questions can be adapted for use by other groups. Each session is broken up into six parts.*

- 1. Opening Prayer:** The study portion of your meeting should open in prayer. We have provided a prayer for your group to say together, but feel free to have someone lead and pray aloud from their heart.
- 2. Read:** This section introduces the main text for the session's lesson. Here, you can either designate a reader, or take turns reading each paragraph aloud. Feel free to read with your pen and underline/circle phrases or points that strike you. Please keep in mind that this study guide functions as a summary of the Magisterial text. The study focuses on the main points and unpacks them to make them applicable to your everyday life. Our "With A Father's Heart Study" contains almost the entirety of the text from Pope Francis's Apostolic Letter. You can read this section ahead of time in order to familiarize yourself with the





text. If you would like to read the entire document, visit [vatican.va](http://vatican.va) or visit [kofc.org/shopcis](http://kofc.org/shopcis) to purchase the full text.



- 3. The Crux:** This section unpacks the selected readings and applies them to everyday life. The goal is to take the new concepts you are unpacking and implement actionable steps that will help you grow in your faith. Like the previous section, you can either designate a reader, or take turns reading aloud.
- 4. Conversation Starters:** Here your group will find questions that are meant to be a starting point for discussion. Your group may not get through all of the questions and that is OK. The aim is to get your group openly and authentically sharing about how the text is impacting them. Your group has the freedom to discuss other parts of the text that may not be mentioned in the questions as well.
- 5. Call to Action:** Each session will challenge your group to take on a spiritual practice or devotion together. These are concrete applications that are intended to build up your faith and the community you are creating.
- 6. Closing Prayer:** Each meeting will end with prayer. Once everyone's intentions are said, we provide you with a closing prayer.

# **How to Lead a Small Group Session**

A small group session is an opportunity for a group to gather and discuss their thoughts, questions, and takeaways from a shared conversation that begins and ends with prayer.

The task of a small group leader is to facilitate and direct the conversation, elicit contributions from all willing participants, resolve any conflicts that may arise, and summarize what is discussed.

As a small group leader, you are not asked to teach, but to make sure the conversation stays focused and respectful and includes all participants.

A small group is successful when there is meaningful discussion that helps people connect with each other and apply the concepts and themes to their daily life. You do not have to cover 100 percent of the material or questions. This is a framework for you to build upon that best meets the needs of the group you are leading.

## *General Tips to Lead a Small Group Session*

**Review and reflect before the session.** As the small group discussion leader, make sure you review and reflect on the reading ahead of the session to familiarize yourself with the content.

**Bring pens and paper.** Consider providing paper and writing implements for the participants.

**Ask questions that invite the men to reflect on their experience.** These small groups are designed for reflection, not a quiz on the content. Avoid yes-or-no questions unless you have a thought-provoking follow-up question. Make it comfortable for men to share their personal stories, but don't try to force them to do so.

**Listen well.** To facilitate a discussion, a leader must understand what everyone is saying. Sometimes it's easy to begin formulating your own response while another person is speaking, but that can compromise how well you are listening.

**Rephrase, repeat, summarize, clarify.** Together with listening skills, use these techniques to ensure each contribution to the discussion is heard and understood. Sometimes rephrasing a participant's idea to a sentence or two will help others in the room understand his or her contribution. Summarizing the course of the discussion occasionally will also help ensure that everyone

processes what has been said as a group and encourage them to take the discussion to the next level.

**Include all participants.** In any group discussion, some members will speak up willingly, perhaps even dominating the conversation, while others will tend to be quiet. Not everyone processes information the same way or at the same speed. Some may need you to encourage them to share. Respect those who take time to process and who may not be as inclined to share.

**Adapt the questions.** Be aware throughout the small group discussion that the people in the group might be in diverse vocations or different stages in their lives. In such instances, adapt the question or encourage the participants to adapt their reflections accordingly.

**Return to questions later if the answer is not known.** If a particular question arises in a session involving Church teaching and the correct answer is not known, you can simply state you will ask your chaplain or pastor, or look to the Catechism, for clarification and share the answer during the next session.

**Keep emotional discipline and mediate conflict.** Some topics can be sensitive, so be prepared to diffuse anger and redirect the discussion in a constructive way. Diffuse the situation and help the disputing members find common ground or principles. If necessary, simply table the issue that is causing the tensions and move along to a new topic.

**Know when it's time to advance the discussion.**

Moving a discussion forward too soon can lead to missing some good observations or contributions, but keeping a discussion going on too long can make the session boring or repetitive. Be mindful of how the discussion is progressing; when it seems to stall, it's time to move it forward.

**Seek help when necessary.** Sometimes, questions and situations occur that require outside assistance. A participant might have a particularly difficult question, require fraternal correction, or argue against Church teaching. In situations like this, it is best to talk to the participant out of the group setting. Most importantly, remember that it is best to reach out to your pastor for help in a situation you are uncomfortable with.

**End with an invitation.** If there are more group sessions to come, re-invite the members of the group and remind them of the date and time. These personal invitations offer the small group another opportunity to develop their faith. An invitation is especially important following your last small group.



“After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse. My Predecessors reflected on the message contained in the limited information handed down by the Gospels in order to appreciate more fully his central role in the history of salvation. Blessed Pius IX declared him “Patron of the Catholic Church”, Venerable Pius XII proposed him as “Patron of Workers” and Saint John Paul II as “Guardian of the Redeemer”. Saint Joseph is universally invoked as the “patron of a happy death”. Now, one hundred and fifty years after his proclamation as Patron of the Catholic Church by Blessed Pius IX (8 December 1870), I would like to share some personal reflections on this extraordinary figure, so close to our own human experience. For, as Jesus says, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (*Mt 12:34*).



---

When Pope Francis declared the Year of St. Joseph on December 8, 2020, he drew attention to the fact that St. Joseph has always been worthy of devotion in the eyes of the Church. God chose St. Joseph to care for Jesus and Mary, and he has been honored by the Church for the dynamic and vital role he played in the salvation of the world ever since.

The Holy Father notes that, “After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse.” St. Joseph was an important figure in the life of Christ, and he remains an important figure in the life of the Church. Additionally, God desires that St. Joseph be a foundational figure in the life of every man. In an age where men are seeking out models of authentic masculinity, God has given us a model to aid us.

St. Joseph speaks to the heart of every man because he is a man of action. However, as we’ll see, Joseph was also a man of deep faith and courage. St. Joseph’s example shows us that a life lived for God will yield true greatness. As Pope St. Paul VI once preached, “St. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies; he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things — it is enough to have

the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic.”<sup>1</sup> No matter your age or your stage in life, St. Joseph has something to teach you. As Pope St. John Paul II said, “The Church also trusts in [St. Joseph’s] noble example, which transcends all individual states of life and serves as a model for the entire Christian community, whatever the condition and duties of each of its members may be.”<sup>2</sup>

In this guide you will work through Pope Francis’ Letter on St. Joseph, *Patris Corde*, and begin to see how St. Joseph’s model can help raise us all to a deeper and more courageous faith. Regardless of your state and stage in life, God desires virtuous and genuine followers who want to be good men for others. In an age of confusion, Jesus has given us his own earthly father as our guide.

*-Vivat Jesus*



# Session 1: A Beloved Father

## Opening Prayer

*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.*

(Take a quiet moment)

*Holy Spirit, we ask that you enter our conversation  
and give us the grace to share openly and  
authentically with one another. We ask this  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Read**

*Patris Corde 1*



---

The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus. In this way, he placed himself, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, “at the service of the entire plan of salvation”.

Saint Paul VI pointed out that Joseph concretely expressed his fatherhood “by making his life a sacrificial

service to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose. He employed his legal authority over the Holy Family to devote himself completely to them in his life and work. He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home”.

Thanks to his role in salvation history, Saint Joseph has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people. This is shown by the countless churches dedicated to him worldwide, the numerous religious Institutes, Confraternities and ecclesial groups inspired by his spirituality and bearing his name, and the many traditional expressions of piety in his honour. Innumerable holy men and women were passionately devoted to him. Among them was Teresa of Avila, who chose him as her advocate and intercessor, had frequent recourse to him and received whatever graces she asked of him. Encouraged by her own experience, Teresa persuaded others to cultivate devotion to Joseph.

Every prayer book contains prayers to Saint Joseph. Special prayers are offered to him each Wednesday and especially during the month of March, which is traditionally dedicated to him.

Popular trust in Saint Joseph is seen in the expression “*Go to Joseph*”, which evokes the famine in Egypt, when the Egyptians begged Pharaoh for bread. He in turn

replied: “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do” (*Gen* 41:55). Pharaoh was referring to Joseph the son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery because of the jealousy of his brothers (cf. *Gen* 37:11-28) and who – according to the biblical account – subsequently became viceroy of Egypt (cf. *Gen* 41:41-44).

As a descendant of David (cf. *Mt* 1:16-20), from whose stock Jesus was to spring according to the promise made to David by the prophet Nathan (cf. *2 Sam* 7), and as the spouse of Mary of Nazareth, Saint Joseph stands at the crossroads between the Old and New Testaments.

The whole Church recognizes St. Joseph as a patron and guardian. For centuries many different features of his life have caught the attention of believers. He was a man ever faithful to the mission God gave him. St. Josemaría Escrivá

## The Crux

---



There are many ways we can serve Christ and His Church. St. Joseph’s primary way of serving Jesus was through his fatherhood. As Pope Francis points out, Joseph devoted himself to both Jesus and Mary completely in his life and work. By his example of devoted fatherhood, St. Joseph stands as a model for how we can live out our vocations in the service of Jesus and Mary.

The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father’s only Son. This vocation takes a personal form since each of us is called to enter into the divine beatitude. (CCC 1877)

Furthermore,  
in Joseph,  
the apparent  
tension between  
the active and the  
contemplative life  
finds an ideal  
harmony that is  
only possible for  
those who  
possess the  
perfection  
of charity.  
St. John Paul II

For in one Spirit  
we were all  
baptized into one  
body, whether  
Jews or Greeks,  
slaves or free  
persons, and we  
were all given  
to drink of  
one Spirit  
(1 Cor 12:13)

There is a temptation to believe that our biggest impact in this world will be outside of our homes. As men, there is a natural desire to dive into our work to produce positive results for the Kingdom. It is a good desire to want to build up the body of Christ out of love for God. However, St. Joseph shows us that for those of us who are fathers or serve in fatherly roles to others, our biggest impact will be through our *fatherhood*. Later in *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis reminds us that, “Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, he becomes a father to that person.” It is St. Joseph who shows us how fatherhood whether natural or spiritual, embraced out of love, can do more for the Church than any other type of work.

Pope Francis also points out that St. Joseph goes beyond being a model of Christian fatherhood. St. Joseph is also *our* spiritual father. He remains the foster father of Christ in heaven, and

because we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church, he is our spiritual father as well. As St. Josemaría Escrivá once said, “[St. Joseph] protects those who revere him and accompanies them on their journey through this life — just as he protected and accompanied Jesus when he was growing up.”<sup>3</sup>

Devotion to St. Joseph as a model and spiritual father is not new in the life of the Church. It is gaining popularity in our time because many men are searching for the strong and tender spiritual fatherhood that St. Joseph provides.

### **Conversation Starters**

*(Choose from the following to help start your conversation)*

1. What does it mean to be a man in our present culture?
2. Who are the men that you admire and why? What attributes or virtues do you admire in them? (See page 56 for explanation of virtues)
3. What are some aspects of St. Joseph's masculinity that surprise you? Why?
4. What is an area in your life that you need to cultivate or change in order to follow St. Joseph's example of masculinity? What are some concrete steps you can take to make that change?

5. Are there any specific things you can do to increase your devotion to St. Joseph? What do you think about the idea of accepting St. Joseph as your spiritual father? Why?

### **Call to Action**

As you begin to learn and grow in your relationship with St. Joseph, incorporate a new devotion to him. Pope Francis reminds us that Wednesdays are traditionally dedicated to St. Joseph. **Dedicate yourselves to praying the Litany of St. Joseph every Wednesday [at the same time as a group] until your next meeting, asking him to be a model of masculinity and to be your own spiritual father.**

### **Closing Prayer**

Let us pray for the grace to live out St. Joseph's example of masculinity as we walk with St. Joseph as our spiritual father.

**Request intentions from the group and conclude with the Litany of Saint Joseph found on page 7.**

## **Litany of Saint Joseph**

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, hear us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

Christ, hear us.

Christ, graciously  
hear us.

God the Father in heaven,

God the Son,

Redeemer of the world,

God the Holy Spirit,

Holy Trinity, one God,

have mercy on us.

have mercy on us.

have mercy on us.

have mercy on us.

Holy Mary,

Saint Joseph,

Illustrious son of David,

Light of Patriarchs,

Spouse of the Mother of God,

Guardian of the Redeemer,

Pure Guardian of the Virgin,

Provider for the Son of God,

Zealous defender of Christ,

Servant of Christ,

Minister of salvation,

Head of the Holy Family,

Joseph, most just,

Joseph, most chaste,

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

pray for us.

Joseph, most prudent,  
Joseph, most brave,  
Joseph, most obedient,  
Joseph, most loyal,  
Mirror of patience,  
Lover of poverty,  
Model for workers,  
Glory of family life,  
Guardian of virgins,  
Cornerstone of families,  
Support in difficulties,  
Comfort of the sorrowing,  
Hope of the sick,  
Patron of exiles,  
Patron of the afflicted,  
Patron of the poor,  
Patron of the dying,  
Terror of demons,  
Protector of the Holy Church,

pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.  
pray for us.

Lamb of God, you take away  
the sins of the world,  
Lamb of God, you take away  
the sins of the world,  
Lamb of God, you take away  
the sins of the world,

spare us, O Lord.

hear us, O Lord.

have mercy on us.

He made him master of his house, and ruler of all his  
possessions.



*Let us pray.*

O God, who in your inexpressible providence  
were pleased to choose Saint Joseph  
as spouse of your most holy Mother,  
grant, we pray,  
that we, who revere him as our protector on earth,  
may be worthy of his heavenly intercession.  
Who live and reign for ever and ever.  
R. Amen.

### **Act of Consecration to St. Joseph**

O dearest St. Joseph, I consecrate myself to your honor  
and give myself to you, that you may always be my father,  
my protector, and my guide in the way of salvation.

Obtain for me a greater purity of heart and fervent love  
of the interior life.

After your example my I do all my actions for the greater  
glory of God, in union with the Divine Heart of Jesus and  
the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

O Blessed St. Joseph, pray for me, that I may share in  
the peace and joy of your holy death. Amen

### **Memorare to St. Joseph**

Remember, O most chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who implored your help and sought your intercession were left unassisted. Full of confidence in your power I fly unto you and beg your protection.

Despise not O Guardian of the Redeemer my humble supplication, but in your bounty, hear and answer me. Amen

### **Prayer to St. Joseph, the Worker**

O Glorious St. Joseph, model of all those who are devoted to labor, obtain for me the grace to work conscientiously, putting the call of duty above my natural inclinations, to work with gratitude and joy, in a spirit of penance for the remission of my sins, considering it an honor to employ and develop by means of labor the gifts received from God, to work with order, peace, moderation and patience, without ever shrinking from weariness and difficulties, to work above all with purity of intention and detachment from self, having always death before my eyes and the account that I must render of time lost, of talents wasted, of good omitted, of vain complacency in success, so fatal to the work of God. All for Jesus, all through Mary, all after thine example, O Patriarch, St. Joseph. Such shall be my motto in life and in death. Amen.

# **The Virtues: A Catholic Understanding**

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God's help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them. It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil. (CCC 1803, 1810-1811)

## **Habits**

Contemporary research on habits describes them as activities in which a person encounters a cue that begins a process that typically results in a reward. Habits enable people to do simple and even complex tasks with speed, skill, and little deliberative thought. Habits cover a wide range of activities as disparate as driving, playing a musical instrument, drinking coffee, and even moral habits such as courage or humility. Once habituated, a

person can not only complete the action with speed and skill, but also the completion of the activity, and thus achieving the reward, is accompanied by pleasure. Habits, through the process of repetitive practice, become part a of person's neurophysiology.

Habits, though, can be either good (understood as enabling a person to flourish) or bad (wounding a person and limiting their ability to flourish). Good habits are called virtues. Bad habits are called vices. Virtues enable freedom because they are established dispositions that enable a person to pursue what is good — “good” being understood as the flourishing of the person or the flourishing of others. Vices, on the other hand, diminish freedom, enslaving people to habitual actions that are destructive to a person's flourishing or the flourishing of others. The goal of virtues is nobility or excellence. Aristotle describes virtue or the mark of excellence as the ability “ . . . to do all this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way, which is not something easy that anyone can do. It is for this reason that good conduct is rare, praiseworthy, and noble.”

## **Prayer**

The habit of daily prayer, the ongoing participation in the grace (life of God) that we've received through the Sacraments, is the source of a person's ability to develop virtues. An excellent spiritual life cannot be achieved unless a person prays habitually. Those habits

of prayer can take many forms, be they contemplative prayer, meditation on Sacred Scripture, communal prayer (Mass and the various liturgies and sacraments of the Church), or traditional pieties of the Church (e.g. the Rosary, Divine Mercy Novena, various devotions to the saints). The grace offered in prayer is God's gift of Himself that enables a person to practice the good habits necessary to overcome the wounds of original sin and to overcome the specific sins a person may commit in his or her life. The sacrament of confession is an important avenue of grace to overcome the wounds and bad habits/vices that produce sinful behavior and result in further vices. The sacrament of Confession enables a life of growth in virtue.

## **Theological Virtues**

### ***Love/Charity***

Sacred Scripture tells us that love constitutes God's nature (1 *John* 4:8) and is therefore the greatest of the human virtues (1 *Corinthians* 13:13). It is the greatest virtue because when the human person loves authentically that person experiences the presence of God Himself (1 *John* 4:12). Love is the greatest of the theological virtues (faith and hope are the remaining theological virtues) and takes two forms, represented by the Greek terms eros and agape. Eros is the love of desire and agape is self-sacrificial love. Both aspects are present in the love of God presented in Scripture and both are present in an authentic human love. As a

theological virtue and habit, love is strictly speaking a gift of God to the human person. Prayer is the primary source of a person's ability to love.

### ***Faith***

Faith is an unearned gift from God. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that faith is the foundation of our justification. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that "faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (*Hebrews 11:1*) St. Paul also asserts that, "we live by faith and not by sight." (*2 Cor 5:7*).

The Catechism paragraph 1814 provides the following definition of faith as a theological virtue:

"Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God." For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith." Living faith "work[s] through charity."

The theological virtue of faith is nurtured through a habitual prayer life.

### ***Hope***

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11.

The Catechism paragraph 1817 provides the following definition of hope as a theological virtue:

“Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” “The Holy Spirit . . . he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”

The theological virtue of hope is a gift of God's grace and is strengthened and supported through habitual prayer.

## **Cardinal Virtues**

### ***Prudence/Practical Wisdom***

Practical wisdom (traditionally called the virtue of prudence) is the ability of the human intellect to make the right choice to accomplish a good goal. It is the key moral virtue because it works in conjunction with all the other virtues. One must have practical wisdom to be courageous, just, or self-controlled in a particular situation. Practical wisdom is the habit that enables a person to choose the excellent mean between two extremes. For example, when faced with danger or fear, a courageous person must have the practical wisdom

necessary to choose the middle path of courage which lies between cowardliness and recklessness. Courage is the mean between these extremes and courage requires practical wisdom to identify the excellent choice when a person encounters a dangerous or fear-filled situation. Practical wisdom is the intellectual capacity to “hit the moral bullseye” that exists between many poor moral choices in a specific situation.

Practical wisdom is focused on the choice that will produce virtue and is never aimed at achieving ignoble or bad goals. If a person is using their intellect to achieve a bad goal, for example robbing a bank, that intellectual capacity is not considered practical wisdom because practical wisdom concerns only figuring out the means to do what is good. Figuring out the way to do what is evil can be considered cleverness, but not practical wisdom, because it is not aimed at a good goal. Practical wisdom always includes being able to choose good means to pursue a good goal.

### ***Fortitude/Courage***

Courage is the moral capacity to do what is right, noble, or good when a person is confronted by danger or a situation in which the person encounters fear.

### ***Temperance/Self-Control***

Self-Control is the ability to make a good choice in the context of human pleasure. The virtue is traditionally called temperance because it is a habit of experiencing



pleasure in the right amount. The habit of temperance tempers or restrains human desire but does not eliminate it. Temperance or self-control usually refers to the ability to restrain desire for bodily pleasures associated with food, drink, or sex, but can also be applied to other external goods such as money, admiration, fame, power, etc. The virtue of chastity, as the Catechism tells us, comes under the cardinal virtue of temperance, which seeks to permeate the passions and appetites of the senses with reason. (CCC2341)

### ***Justice***

Justice is the habit of being able to give what is due to other people. It is considered the social habit because it guides a person to make excellent choices regarding actions that affect other people. The classical tradition considers it one of the most challenging virtues because justice requires the ability to pursue excellence regarding the concerns of others rather than focusing only on one's own concerns.

## **Other Key Virtues**

### ***Humility***

Humility is a virtue with a number of different dimensions. It is a form of self-knowledge that enables a person to understand his or her weaknesses and flaws. Humility is extolled as a virtue in both the Old and New Testaments because it is the virtue that represents proximity to God. The Psalms and the Beatitudes tell us that God is close to the lowly and the downtrodden.

C.S. Lewis describes humility as a form of self-forgetfulness. Truly humble people forget their own concerns and focus on those of others.

St. Augustine tells us that the vice that is most detrimental to humans is pride, which is the sin of disordered self-love in which love for self displaces all other loves, up to and including love for God. For St. Augustine, humility is the antidote to pride. Humility is the virtue diametrically opposed to pride and since pride is a form of disordered self-love, humility can be seen as a form of rightly ordered love. The humble person loves others more than self. Instead of being filled with the self-love of pride, the humble person is capacious, or empty internally. Humility is an emptiness that is ready to be filled by God's grace. Mary, as the Mother of God, is the paradigmatic example of this humility. In her emptiness, in her humility, she had space for the Holy Spirit and was able to welcome the only begotten Son of the eternal Father into her womb.

St. Augustine points to the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (*Luke 18:9-14*) as another example of humility as spiritual emptiness, which is paradoxically also spiritual excellence. The pharisee in his pride and arrogance is filled with self-love, has no interior room for God in his soul, and therefore cannot have an authentic relationship with God. The repentant tax collector, on the other hand, has a lowly and humble emptiness in which

God can come to dwell. As a result, the tax collector, rather than the pharisee, leaves the temple justified.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, humility is also a form of temperance that holds a person back from doing things that are beyond our talents.

### ***Obedience***

Obedience is the habit that enables a person to follow the will of another person rather than one's own will. It is founded on the virtue of humility. It is the humble person that will be able to forget his or her own concerns and follow the will of another. The definitive example of obedience is Jesus Christ in His relationship to God the Father. The Gospel of John lists a dozen instances where Jesus tells his followers that He has come for one purpose, which is to do the will of the Father. The obedience of Jesus is most evident in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he explicitly subjugates his own will to that of the Father when He freely accepts His cup of suffering. "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, still not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

### ***Magnanimity***

The roots of the English word magnanimity are found in the Latin terms *magna*, which means great, and *anima*, which is Latin for soul. Thus, the person of magnanimity is a person with greatness of soul. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that the magnanimous person is a person that is

worthy of great honors due to his or her virtue. Magnanimity is a person's habitual ability to recognize the gifts and talents given to him or her by God. It is the virtue that enables a person to pursue the great things that are possible to accomplish on the basis of those gifts. Aristotle tells us that magnanimity is the crown of the other virtues. One cannot be magnanimous without possessing the other virtues, but when you recognize you hold these virtues, you can take on the great and arduous tasks that will make your virtues even greater. The magnanimous person deserves honor for his or her virtue but will not be obsessed with honor because the magnanimous person recognizes that the virtues they possess (including the virtue of humility) are more valuable than any human honor.

St. Thomas asserts that magnanimity is a form of courage, which gives a person the strength of character necessary to accomplish great achievements.

## Sources

1. Pope St Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1969): *Insegnamenti*, VII (1969), p. 1268.
2. Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 30 (August 15, 1989)
3. St. Jose Maria Escriva, Homily, In Joseph's Workshop, 39, March 19, 1963

## Resources

To purchase the complete With A Father's Heart  
– Small Group Study with all seven sessions visit  
[\*\*KofC.org/shopcis\*\*](http://KofC.org/shopcis)

To access all of our St. Joseph resources visit  
[\*\*KofC.org/stjoseph\*\*](http://KofC.org/stjoseph)

A small group study guide on St. Joseph and Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, With a Father's Heart. This includes excerpts from *Patris Corde*, explanations and applications, as well as discussion questions and prayers.

Designed for use in men's ministry and is perfect for use in a Knights of Columbus Cor meeting, but it is usable and beneficial for anyone hoping to grow in their devotion to St. Joseph.

The *Cor Ecclesiae* Series provides study and discussion guides for essential and timely Church documents so that individuals and groups can grow closer to Jesus Christ in the heart of the Church (*Cor Ecclesiae*)

*“Faith seeks understanding”: it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens “the eyes of your hearts” to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation.*

– Catechism of the Catholic Church, 158.

### **About Catholic Information Service**

Since its founding, the Knights of Columbus has been involved in evangelization. In 1948, the Knights started the Catholic Information Service (CIS) to provide low-cost Catholic publications for the general public as well as for parishes, schools, retreat houses, military installations, correctional facilities, legislatures, the medical community, and for individuals who request them. For over 75 years, CIS has printed and distributed millions of booklets, and thousands of people have enrolled in its catechetical courses.

CIS offers the following services to help you come to know God better:

#### **Individual Booklets**

For our complete catalog and to order booklets and other resources, please visit [www.kofc.org/shopcis](http://www.kofc.org/shopcis) or contact CIS directly.

#### **Home Study Course**

CIS offers a free, graded home study course through the mail. In ten rigorous lessons, you will gain an overview of Catholic teaching. To learn more about the Home Study Course visit [www.kofc.org/cis](http://www.kofc.org/cis) or contact CIS directly.

#### **On-Line Courses**

CIS offers two free on-line courses. To enroll, please visit [www.kofc.org/ciscourses](http://www.kofc.org/ciscourses).

# CATHOLIC INFORMATION SERVICE®

**True Catholic Information. Not Mere Opinions.**

The primary and essential object of catechesis is..."the mystery of Christ."... [Catechizing] is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. ***Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.***

Pope St. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 5  
Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time

## About the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by Blessed Michael McGivney, is the world's largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 2 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Based on the founding principles of charity, unity and fraternity, the Knights of Columbus is committed to strengthening Catholic families and parishes and to practicing faith in action through service to all in need. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit [www.kofc.org](http://www.kofc.org).

Whether you have a specific question or desire a broader, deeper knowledge of the Catholic faith, CIS can help. Contact us at:

Knights of Columbus, Catholic Information Service  
PO Box 1971 New Haven, CT 06521-1971  
Phone 203-752-4267 • Fax 800-735-4605  
[cis@kofc.org](mailto:cis@kofc.org) • [www.kofc.org/cis](http://www.kofc.org/cis)



## Proclaiming the Faith In the Third Millennium