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*DEVOTION TO*

*By the Very Reverend*

*John A. Elbert, S.M.*



*DEVOTION TO SAINT JOSEPH*



*DEVOTION TO*  
*Saint Joseph*

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE DEVOTION TO  
SAINT JOSEPH AND FOR THOSE WHO  
WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HIM.

*By the Very Reverend*  
*John A. Elbert, S.M.*

— *Price* —

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The Grail

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## *DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH*

### *INTRODUCTION*

Throughout the Catholic world the month of March is specially given over to the devotion which recalls and honors the memory of St. Joseph. His personal feast day occurs on March 19. The great day of his "Solemnity" which honors him as a patron of the universal Church is kept on the Wednesday of the second week after Easter. It is therefore a variable date and usually falls in April.

There are general reasons for cultivating a deep devotion to Saint Joseph. All men have need of his powerful intercession with God. From the point of view of the Saint himself there is a wondrous distinction of a virtue and dignity unmatched by any creature except only the blessed Mother of God, which calls forth our sentiments of esteem and devotedness. Special reasons for seeking the intercession of Saint Joseph in these days are obvious. The world is more in need of his example now than ever before; the social world in our modern era requires beyond anything else, a Christian

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by Very Rev. John A. Elbert, S.M.

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concept of work and a Christian model of family life. Saint Joseph is a shining light in these basic phases of human living. Likewise, the Church, especially over the last one hundred years has been vividly conscious of the fact that in this great Saint, she has a sure refuge against the enemies of her temporal and spiritual welfare.

*FOUNDATION OF THE DEVOTION TO  
SAINT JOSEPH*

The grounds for our confidence in Saint Joseph can be sought in Scripture, in the history of his cult and in the special character of his virtues. Let us first recall, that devotion to Saint Joseph is as old as Christianity; it antedates the New Testament writings. Joseph was revered by Jesus and Mary!

*SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR DEVOTION TO  
SAINT JOSEPH*

The devotion to Saint Joseph has a universal character, one adapted to all times, to all places and to all persons. Such a devotion must have a solid ground in Scripture. As for the Blessed Virgin, so for Saint Joseph, Scripture says of him all that can be said and more than the

combined writings of all ages can say. In the Sacred Writings, Mary is designated as "full of grace"; Joseph is proclaimed the "just man". And these two freely chose each other in marriage so that the fulness of grace was joined to the plenitude of justice.

It may be said, that Scripture records no words of Saint Joseph; and that is correct. How then can we establish any solid scriptural foundation for a great devotion to the Foster Father of our Lord and Savior.

It must be remembered that Scripture records not only words but also actions. Moreover, we say rightly that actions speak louder than words. That saying can be applied, with due reverence, to the actions of God and those of his saints. It is even sometimes extremely difficult to interpret correctly the meaning of God's words; we can scarcely mistake the meaning of His actions.

A judgment on the actions of Saint Joseph, as these are recorded in Holy Writ, opens before us the wondrous horizon of a soul so conformed to the blessed will of God as to excite our utmost admiration. To recognize the will of God in the order of Providence and in the inspirations of grace, to accept that will despite human contrariety, is the sure mark of

the highest sanctity. Such is the unmistakable picture of Saint Joseph as presented in the Holy Scripture.

Saint Joseph's acts and procedures as seen in the Gospels are human enough to prove to us that he was a perfectly free agent; when his natural judgment does not reach because of the deep mysteries in which he is involved, that judgment is corrected by the divine inspiration, which he recognizes and immediately follows, his own will being put aside completely. Such conformity to God's will is found in greater measure only in the action of Mary when she said: "Be it done to me according to thy word." And it is seen, beyond human measure in the Incarnate Son of God when he said: "Father . . . not my will but thine be done."

Not only his own acts in the Gospel reveal his stature and spiritual character, but the actions of others in his regard.

Who are these "others" and what is their action?

*God* chose him to be the nearest, after Mary, in the circle of the Incarnation, that new world where God and man meet in personal union.

*Jesus*, Son of God, chose him to be the depository of divine authority, to whom He and his Mother were to render obedience.

*Mary* chose him as her husband; he was beloved of the Mother of God.

The Almighty God, the Son of God made man, the Blessed Mother of God, select him to be the nearest and the dearest in their human relations.

#### *THE HISTORY OF HIS CULT*

Another solid ground for devotion to Saint Joseph is found in the historical growth of his cult in the Catholic Church, guided and supported, as it is, by the official approval of the Popes, particularly those of the last centuries.

In this connection also it should be recalled that the devotion to Saint Joseph is not a foreign body in the organism of the Church. It was there germinally in all its potential beauty and extent from the very beginning. Saint Athanasius says that the stable of Bethlehem is "a figure of the Church, whose altar is the manger, whose vicar is Joseph, whose ministers are the shepherds, whose priests are the angels, whose High Priest is Jesus Christ and whose throne is the Blessed Virgin." Saint Joseph was there, in the background it is true, but shielding with the strength and constancy of his presence this infant Christian Church. Small wonder that the Vicars of Christ recog-

nize in him who was "Vicar of God," the prototype of their own great dignity and the power which can of itself protect a defenseless Church in the midst of a world of violence.

The public devotion to Saint Joseph, however, was a gradual development and may roughly be divided into three periods.

First, the period covering the earliest traces of public veneration as they are found in the Eastern Church.

Secondly, from the first manifestations in the West until about 1870.

Thirdly, from that date until the present.

The reasons for its slow beginnings must be sought in the history of dogma and in the homogeneous evolution of the doctrines and consequent devotional life that flowed from them.

In the Eastern Church we find the earliest recorded recognition of the sanctity of Saint Joseph among the Copts, already in the beginning of the fourth century. The feast of "Joseph the Carpenter" was inscribed in the Coptic calendars. Tradition claimed that a splendid oratory was dedicated to the Saint in the great basilica erected by Saint Helena at Bethlehem; this on the authority of Nicephorous Callistus. Greek menologies mention



Saint Joseph on December 25 or 26 with a commemoration of him on the Sunday before and the Sunday after Christmas.

In the West the name of Saint Joseph appears in the local martyrologies of the ninth and tenth centuries. The first known church dedicated to him was in Bologna, 1129.

The transition from merely private devotion to public honor and worship was greatly fostered by such eminent persons as Saint Bernard, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Gertrude and Saint Bridget of Sweden.

In the Western Church of the fourteenth century there appeared a remarkable work on Saint Joseph in the form of a long Latin poem, called *Josephina*, written by Peter d'Ailly who also composed an Office in honor of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph.

The disciple of Peter was the learned Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, who became an ardent proponent of the devotion of Saint Joseph. At the Council of Constance, it was he who suggested to the assembled prelates, that the devotion to the Saint could be the guarantee of peace for the Church which was then rent by schism as the result of three claimants to the papacy.

The earliest official approval of the cult of

Saint Joseph came from Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) who placed his feast in the missal and breviary for the universal church, but only as of simple rank. A few years later, Innocent VIII raised it to a double.

Pope Gregory XV in 1621 made the feast one of obligation. Later Urban VIII confirmed this ordinance in 1642. Clement IX made the office of Saint Joseph one of nine lessons and Clement X in 1670 made the feast a double of the second class. It was this Pope who wrote the beautiful hymn, "Te Joseph Celebrent,"\* which is known and used to this day. In 1714, Clement XI extended the feast as a double of the second class to the entire Church with a new Mass and Office.

Paul III, whose name is forever associated with the Council of Trent, gave approval to the feast of the Espousals. It was first accorded to the Franciscans, thereafter extended to other religious orders and finally permitted generally.

Innocent XI in 1689 accorded the feast of the Patronage of Saint Joseph to the Carmelites, to be celebrated on the third Sunday after Easter. This feast was first adopted in Spain

*\* A translation of this hymn is in the Appendix. See page 45.*

and thereupon it spread gradually throughout all dioceses.

The same Pope, Innocent XI, placed under the patronage of Saint Joseph all the lands subject to the Spanish Crown in the 17th century. Belgium in particular took to itself the privilege of having him for its beloved patron. It was Benedict XIII in 1726 who restored the name of Saint Joseph to the Litany of the Saints, after it had been omitted by an error, when the Breviary was reformed.

Among religious orders the Friars Minor were early distinguished for their devotion to Saint Joseph. Saint Vincent Ferrer and Isidore Isolano, Dominicans, worked zealously to spread the devotion in the first half of the sixteenth century; the latter also wrote a special office in honor of the Saint for the use of his Order. In the 15th and 16th centuries the Feast of Saint Joseph appears in the missals of the Augustinians, Dominicans and later in those of the Benedictines and Jesuits.

St. Theresa of Avila was one of the most devoted clients of Saint Joseph in the history of the Church. The Saint had cured her of an illness before she entered the Order of Carmel. She always considered it a duty of gratitude to spread devotion in his honor. Her own

Order become a centre whence radiated the cult of Saint Joseph. Saint Theresa herself confided fifteen houses of Carmel to his patronage. Through her influence, Saint Peter of Alcantara consecrated the Franciscan houses of that time to the Saint. Likewise through her words and writings the cult of Saint Joseph was spread through Spain, Portugal and later to France, Belgium and the New World.

In the early 17th century the Franciscans consecrated Canada to Saint Joseph and this early devotion no doubt served as the foundation for the later revival of the Saint's cult at the Oratory of Saint Joseph in Montreal, by the Blessed Brother Andre of the Congregation of the Holy Cross.

Among other great Saints and Servants of God who were distinguished for their personal and apostolic devotion to Saint Joseph, Saint Francis de Sales stands out. He dedicated his great treatise on *The Love of God* to Saint Joseph and communicated his ardent devotion to the whole order of the Visitation Nuns. Father Olier made Saint Joseph the patron of all his seminaries; so did Vincent de Paul. Saint John Baptiste de la Salle made him the patron of his Institute, the Society of Brothers of the Christian Schools. Saint Paul of the

Cross did likewise for the congregation of the Passionists.

Among all the Popes, however, it is Pius IX who contributed most to the spread of public recognition in honor of Saint Joseph. He foresaw the need for devotion to Our Lady and to Saint Joseph, if the world was to be snatched from impending ruin. Mary's reign and victory would need the support of a simple but intense devotion to her holy Spouse.

He spoke of Saint Joseph as the hope of the Church after our Blessed Lady and made him the patron of the Universal Church on December 8, 1870, at the same time raising the feast of March 19 to a double of the first class. This movement came as the direct result of a petition from a unified group of English Catholics, during the sessions of the Vatican Council.

By a special rescript, Pope Pius IX granted partial indulgences for every day and a plenary indulgence once, to those who observed the month of March in honor of the Saint. It was he who inserted the name of Saint Joseph into the prayer *A Cunctis* which is said in the collects of feasts of semi-double rite and in the suffrages of Lauds and Vespers. This Pope also extended the Feast of the Patronage to the entire Church and made it a double of the

second class, inserting the Credo into the Mass.

Leo XIII, successor to Pius IX, continued to advance the devotion to Saint Joseph. He permitted the votive office of the Saint to be said on certain days and perscribed the "Prayer to Saint Joseph" as part of the popular October Rosary devotions. In 1889, he wrote an encyclical letter in which he proposed Saint Joseph to all the faithful as a model of virtue and recommended that they place themselves under his special protection.

Blessed Pope Pius X in 1909 approved the Litany of Saint Joseph. Some years later he issued decrees in favor of devotion to the Saint and attached indulgences to the prayer in which we invoke Jesus, Mary and Joseph for a happy death. The same Pope raised the Feast of the Patronage to a double of the first class.

Benedict XV added to the Divine Praises the invocation "Blessed be Saint Joseph her most chaste spouse" and approved the special Preface for the Mass of his feasts. In 1920, he issued a *Motu Proprio* to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of

*\* A translation of the "Motu Proprio" is in the Appendix. See page 47.*

Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church and recommended the Saint as a model for the workingman.

Pius XI added the invocation to Saint Joseph, to several prayers for the dying in the official Ritual.

*THE EMINENT DIGNITY OF  
SAINT JOSEPH*

Personal holiness and dignity likewise provide a foundation for solid devotion. The holiness of a man is determined by the place which is assigned to him in the divine plan and the manner in which he carries out the assignment.

Saint Joseph has a unique place on three levels of creation: in the natural order; in the order of grace; in the order of the God-Man. Let us first consider Saint Joseph's place in the order of nature.

There are three levels or degrees of God's communication with men. These represent three steps of God's descent to man.

There is first the order of nature in which we can find God's reflection through being, life and intelligence. By them God comes to us and we, in turn, can ascend to Him through those channels of intelligence, life and being.

In the second place there is the order of grace in which man is raised to a new level and receives a new nature, something of God Himself, though we know not with certainty what it is. We do know that grace prepares us and makes us fit for the intuitive vision of God.

Thirdly, there is the order of the Hypostatic Union in which God comes in person to the human race. The Person to whom, as it were, our human nature is grafted, is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God.

These three orders evidently show an upward progression of God's gifts to man.

Angels and men belong to the first two levels. The God-Man alone belongs by essence to the third. Mary and Joseph, because of their intimate relations with the God-Man, participate in the order of the Hypostatic Union.

#### *SAINT JOSEPH'S PLACE IN THE ORDER OF NATURE*

The dignity of Saint Joseph is real in the order of nature. In that order the husband is the head of the family. Saint Paul states the situation clearly for all times when he says: "Let wives be subject to their husbands as to



the Lord; because a husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church..." Ephes. 5: 11-23. This basic order was not changed in the Holy Family. It gives Saint Joseph a dignity which makes us stand in wonder.

For all that pertained to the external forum, in the eyes of the people, of the Synagogue, of the ruling power, Joseph was in the foreground. He was directed to name the Child and therefore probably to perform the rite of circumcision. He received the warning to flee into Egypt. He was the guide and the teacher.

He assumes the chief role in that dramatic incident which shows us his astounding obedience, joined to a courage which we could not readily have divined. The long arm of a cruel and wicked king reached out on his trail as he took the Child and His Mother and fled into Egypt. Certainly, he knew fear, not for himself but for those whom God had confided to his care and protection. Humanly speaking, by his prompt action he saved the life of Jesus Christ. Obedience and courage flowered without apparent effort from the soul of this just man. The world will, on that account alone, be his debtor forever. He became the

savior of the Savior, as later he became the teacher of the Teacher.

Since God in becoming man willed to become a child, submit to the limitations of human nature in every stage of his mortal life, he needed to have a "father" to whom he was subject. Such is the fact, but the mystery is not lifted by this knowledge.

The fact is likewise that Joseph was the Head of the Holy Family and therefore *ruled* and *served* both Jesus and Mary. His command was real and the two waited on his word and cheerfully obeyed his orders.

Jesus developed in soul and in body; how? why? is enshrouded in mystery—here again we simply know the fact.

When the Son of God "became obedient," He "emptied" himself, starting life as we do, with no knowledge from experience. That void was filled as He grew in age and stature; and Joseph in great measure filled up that void. He taught Jesus. He guided Jesus.

Both of these duties he shared with Mary, but the official teacher according to the Law was the father, who was "bound to teach his son." We may well ask: What did he teach? Certainly the Law itself, then, too, his trade of carpenter; without a doubt also the Jewish

culture and tradition. No teacher ever had an assignment like that of Joseph. The manner in which he went about it, is our model.

Joseph was a man of the Law. There is no doubt that he made the prescribed journey to the Temple regularly. The Law required it annually three times, on great feasts, making allowance, however, for those who lived at a distance; now Nazareth was 100 miles from Jerusalem, a considerable journey in those days. There is no record of these journeys except when Jesus is involved. The one noted in the Gospel is probably the first of Jesus; he was 12 years old and was now "a man of the Law"; hence He also journeyed to Jerusalem. Here again we have the indirect lesson from Joseph without words: He had God in his own house but did not therefore consider himself exempt from the prescription of the Law.

The incident of being among the doctors of the Law involves some mystery; certainly it was not to show forth his knowledge to the spiritual leaders of Israel that Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem. In the story of the finding of Jesus, Joseph says nothing. Mary speaks for him: "Son, why hast thou done so to *us*?" And the strangest of all is the sequel, which does not follow the indication of his words.

For it is said: "He went down to Nazareth and was subject to *them*," not going about his Father's business, but subject to his father.

There have been many explanations for the loss of Jesus and His being found and for His words: "I must be about my Father's business." Saint Paul says that all Scripture was written for our instruction and consolation. If we apply this principle to the incident under consideration, we could possibly deduce that the mysterious words of Jesus were not meant primarily for Mary and Joseph but for us.

We needed this categorical assertion of His one essential relation, that to the Father, in order to provide a counterweight for the bewildering statement that follows: "And he went down to Nazareth and was subject to them." Apparently He did not go about His Father's business. Thereafter for thirty years of His short life of only thirty-three years, He lived in obedience, when He had come to teach men the way of salvation and "to be about his Father's business." But let us pause. Perhaps this *was* his Father's business, his Father's way of teaching man the most necessary means for attaining that eternal life which had been lost "through the disobedience of one man." Wherefore, the Son of God went down to

Nazareth and was subject to them, to Joseph and Mary.

Joseph is the Precursor of the early life of Christ and like the Baptist precursor, he decreases as Jesus increases. How well he could have said to the inhabitants of Nazareth as Saint John said to those who came to him: there has stood one in the midst of you whom you know not.

It is not sufficient to be physically near to Christ to be sanctified. The inhabitants of Nazareth had him for thirty years; they condemned Him; to them He was merely "the carpenter's son."

In the divine plan, however, Joseph was in the background. It was Jesus the Savior and Messiah who was at the heart and centre of the events which transpired before and after the birth of Christ.

Mary came next: to her, the first announcement was made; she was the dawn which heralded the Sun of Justice. She was and remained the Virgin Mother. She conceived by the power of God and brought forth a Son, who was Emmanuel, God with us.

The life, teaching and devotion of the Church follow the divine plan.

Until the Light which enlighteneth every man

that cometh into this world, had shone upon the earth for many years, even long after the splendor of the divine Motherhood had penetrated the hearts of all Christians, Joseph remained in the shadow of their light.

*SAINT JOSEPH'S PLACE IN THE  
ORDER OF GRACE*

The place of Joseph in the order of grace can be deduced from the general theological principle enunciated by Saint Thomas: "God gives to everyone the grace proportionate to that for which he is chosen." We know for what Saint Joseph was chosen.

A corollary to the theological principle enunciated above, is that grace is increased by union with God and by the frequency and the closeness of our relations with Him.

Joseph lived probably thirty years in the most intimate union and familiarity with the Source and Fountain Head of all grace. No other saint, except only the Mother of God, was ever so favored. How Saint Joseph must have increased from day to day in grace! Wherefore, it is not hard to understand that he surpassed all others, save only Her who was "full of grace" from the beginning of her life.

In seeking to appreciate the place of Saint Joseph in the order of grace, one always meets up with an objection. A difficulty arises from the words of our divine Savior concerning Saint John the Baptist.

Speaking of his Precursor our Lord says: "Amen I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Matt. 11: 11-12.

These words if taken in their absolute sense and literal meaning, would place John the Baptist above the Mother of God. The Church has never accepted them in that sense.

I do not pretend to understand the full meaning and background of these words. What does appear, however, is that Jesus was specifically speaking of John and comparing him with the prophets. There is no doubt that John being the Precursor, the one nearest to the promised Messiah, should be greater than the prophets, "more than a prophet" as Jesus said.

It could be also, that the words of Jesus refer to the order of grace. Now, Mary and Joseph lie beyond that order, in the very shadow of the Hypostatic Union. Hence they are beyond comparison with those who are only in the

order of grace, no matter how high they may stand therein. The least in that Kingdom, which is the world of the God-Man, is greater than even the highest in the order of nature and of grace.

Let us remember, however, that for an ardent devotion, there is no need on our part to decide between the merits of God's saints. The virtues of Saint Joseph stand by themselves and constitute a degree of holiness which can inflame our love and devotion.

#### *HIS LOVE OF GOD*

The primary virtue of Saint Joseph was of course his love of God. There we must seek the heart and core of the surpassing sanctity of Saint Joseph.

The deepest thought in viewing his life and action is this: He was the most selfless man that ever lived; in his case, that means the most holy man. This state of soul, namely, unselfishness, provides the condition for the highest sanctity. The unselfish man is not yet the greatest saint but he alone can become the greatest saint. When the soul is emptied of self there is a good chance of its being filled with God.



Selflessness is therefore only the negative element in sanctity but it is the element we can most readily judge in ourselves and others.

The love of God is the positive element. Humility grows out of selflessness. Obedience grows out of the love of God.

We perceive how this characteristic also stands out in the Baptist and we know how high he rates in the book of God. Saint Joseph like Saint John was not even destined to form part of the public retinue of the Messiah. Like him, he simply cleared a way for the Master. The two have much in common. One was "the friend of the Bridegroom"; the other, the Foster Father.

John the Baptist was content to "hear the voice of the bridegroom" . . . his sole reward on earth . . . Joseph was content to live and act by faith, toiling in the sweat of his brow to earn the daily bread for Him who could multiply the loaves; protecting from danger Him who could summon legions of angels; teaching Him who was the Eternal Wisdom; commanding Him by Whom all things were made.

These two humans are without doubt the greatest among the children of men, after the

Mother of God; for she was not in the class of those who prepared the way. SHE WAS THE WAY, by which He came.

The unselfishness which marks so clearly the life of Saint Joseph is not a barren thing but a quality fertile in good works. In general it consists essentially in helping others to help themselves. Specifically in Saint Joseph it consisted in helping Jesus until He was ready to *he* Himself; until the day when He left his father's house to conclude his Father's business.

So little is ever said directly of Joseph and even that little gives us no hint of any personal preferences or desires; His whole life and action were for Jesus and Mary. The Gospel record reflects that disposition. Saint Matthew says: "Coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, *that it might be fulfilled* which was said by the prophets: *He shall be called a Nazarene ... and the child grew ...*" Joseph is mentioned, but only in view of the Messiah. There are no details about him; only motives; these make saints.

Certainly there *were* details; there *were* words, but evidently the Holy Ghost did not consider them necessary to be transmitted; neither did Joseph; he left no account of the greatest events that ever happened on earth,

events in which he played so important a part and of which he was an eye witness.

Once his role is definitely established and his mission accomplished, Joseph retires into the background of God's great plan for the redemption and salvation of the human race.

At the presentation in the Temple, he was mentioned, though no message is addressed to him.

At the Epiphany, he is not even mentioned; "they found the child with Mary his mother" the Evangelist says, though it appears certain that Joseph was present. No doubt it was he who took charge of the treasures which the Wise Men brought, thus giving us a forecast of his charge over the treasury of heaven itself.

Saint Joseph's surpassing love of God also appeared in his obedience, hence in his perfect conformity to the will of God. He recognized that will just as easily when it was manifested through natural, even repugnant means and channels, as when it came by heavenly inspiration. He was no less prompt in obeying the decree of Caesar than accepting the voice of God in a dream.

After the exile in Egypt upon the divine command, Joseph was minded to return to Bethlehem; ordinary human prudence would have

dictated such a move. But here again God directed him by supernatural means; he was warned in sleep to direct his steps to Nazareth. Joseph was the perfect instrument in the hands of God. He put aside his own reasons, whatever these might be, and willingly embraced the will of God.

The obedience of Joseph produced a sanctity of the highest order and was a beautiful reflection of the obedience of Jesus Christ to the Father and to every representative of the Father's authority. Likewise, his obedience thrived in the presence of the obedience of Mary. As a consequence, there was in the holy family of Nazareth but one will, the holy will of God; the human wills of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were perfectly conformed to that divine will.

#### *HIS LOVE OF MARY*

Joseph was the husband of Mary, the guardian and protector of her name and of her virtue. He chose her from all the daughters of Juda as his beloved here on earth with the knowledge of her plan to remain forever a virgin, though without the full prevision of that tremendous mystery of the Incarnation and all that it would entail for Mary and for

himself. He offered her the protection of his strength, his entire devotedness, his whole life of selfless service; all this on the assurance of the faith he had in divine Providence and his faith in her whom God had confided to his loving care.

Joseph cooperated at every step with the designs of God upon this chosen creature, as a willing instrument in the great work of the Redemption of the world. Only by faith did he recognize dimly something of the grandeur that surrounded the destiny of the blessed Mother of God; and by his obedience he merited to share more closely in that role than any other creature.

Though Joseph was but an artisan and poor, a man unknown to the great world of his time, he was yet by birth and by personal character, one of God's noblemen. In the natural order he was of royal lineage, a member of the tribe to which the promises of the Messiah were given, of the family of David, the man after God's own heart. In the order of grace and by divine choice and because he was a man of the most eminent virtue he became the third member of the Holy Family, Foster-Father of Jesus and husband of the Immaculate Virgin. That is why the Holy Scripture de-

scribes him in words unequalled in the sacred record save when the inspired writer describes the Mother of God. Joseph was called the "just man" that is, a man endowed with every virtue.

As head of the Holy Family Joseph was Mary's superior. There can be no doubt that she rendered him every mark of respect, every honor that was due to his position as representative of the Eternal Father; that she submitted joyfully to his directives and that she served his needs. On the other hand it is equally certain that Joseph repaid her homage in the only way open to him, by a love born of deepest understanding, reverence and affection which flowered in reciprocal service. First and foremost he gave her in holocaust the willing sacrifice of his manhood, the sure protection of her name and her purity, with support and comfort throughout the days of his life.

Love, deep and tender, and unselfish devotedness characterize the relations of Joseph to Mary. He loved her above all creatures with a love that was rooted in nature and in grace; out of that love there flowered the service of heart and hand toward the accomplishment of the holy will of God.

Not to the angels, those perfect ministering spirits of the Most High but to a mortal man was it given to stand nearest to God when God came to earth in the form of a man; to Joseph was it given to minister to the Lord of heaven and earth in the weakness of his infancy, through every human service that love and obedience could render. And among mortals, he alone was permitted to be present under the same roof with Mary when the Infant Christ was born. How close that event brought him to the Virgin Mother! None of her many friends and relatives were chosen to be witnesses of the marvels that God had wrought in her when "nature stood in wonder" while the Virgin brought forth her first-born, who was also the only-begotten of the Father.

It was as the beloved husband of Mary that Joseph continued to share in the most intimate relations that any creature ever had with the Creator. He was indeed the trusted watchman of the Lord who guarded the treasures of his Master's house, the Son in whom He was well pleased and his Handmaid whom He had chosen to bring forth that Son unto the race of men. Joseph was gradually initiated into the mysteries of the birth, the hidden life, the exile in Egypt; he lived under the same roof

with the Virgin Mother, he shared with her his responsibilities in the support and education of the growing boy Jesus.

Thus Mary and Joseph became inseparable in the life of the Holy Family; so, too, have their names become inseparable in the devotions of the Church and of the faithful at large. The sacred record of the New Testament had already put forth that theme from the very beginning; at every point in that record their names are united. Saint Matthew says: "And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." And again: "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife." The Evangelist, Saint Luke, also joins these two when he says: "The angel Gabriel was sent to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph and the virgin's name was Mary." And later the same Evangelist tells us: "Joseph went to Bethlehem with Mary his spouse." And so well did Joseph grow in his high functions toward Jesus and Mary that he was found worthy to be called by the Immaculate Virgin herself, "father" of Jesus, a title lesser in glory only to that of Mother of God which belonged to her alone, a title which surpasses in dignity all other appellations that the mind of man can conceive.



From all this it is evident that Joseph's place in the divine plan was a place of honor, of confidence and of the greatest intimacy with Jesus and Mary. Correspondency eminent are his achievement and his reward both on earth and in heaven. It follows also that one so thoroughly imbued with the love and service of the holy Mother of God, his true spouse on earth, will communicate his own devotion to those who discover his place and role in the life of the Church and who strive to follow his heroic example. The Catholic doctrine and devotion hold that Joseph has charge of the treasures of God's bounty in heaven just as he had charge of the greatest of God's treasures on earth. Experience bears out this confidence in his power in matters both spiritual and temporal.

#### *HIS LABORS*

Among the Jews, labor was taught as a religious duty; every man was expected to have some trade or handicraft by which he could earn a livelihood. It does not therefore follow that labor was always in honor or that the laborer was highly regarded.

Saint Joseph was a laboring man and by his

daily toil he supported Jesus and Mary, supplying them with food, clothing and shelter.

Labor was for him the will of God and the direct means for his sanctification. There is no doubt but that he gloried in his toil and in the contribution which it made to the divine plan; Joseph applied himself to it, though he possessed the secrets of God and lived in the presence of Jesus and Mary. He did not seek to capitalize on his knowledge, his signal graces, his participation in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He lived and worked not for himself but only for Jesus and Mary. Therein he set forever the example of the genuine religious life.

Because of these virtues, Joseph is the model for the man of prayer and meditation, yet he did not engage in prayer and neglect to work. He must have devoted a full day to labor, for it was only by the work of his hands that he supported the Holy Family.

#### *HIS SUFFERINGS*

Spiritual writers speak much of the sufferings of Saint Joseph. They enumerate seven principal sorrows in life: The thought of being obliged to send Mary away; his failure to find

a fitting shelter for the Christ Child on Christmas night; his anguish at the Circumcision; the dark prophecy of Simeon concerning the sufferings of Mary; the flight into Egypt; his fear of continued pursuit of the Holy Child by Archelaus; the loss of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Overshadowing all his sufferings, however, is the greatness of his reward. He found God, in person, during his earthly sojourn; he needed not to wait for death and the release from Limbo. We might almost say he possessed heaven here on earth; for years he had the closest companionship of the Mother of God, the Lily of Israel, and was beloved of her.

Later he became the companion, the teacher of God, as the Child waxed strong under his watchful eye and diligent support.

The seven Archangels only stand in God's presence and wait upon His commands.

God stood in his presence and waited on his command!

Next to Mary he was the first to behold God in human form; and God in human vesture was the last to look upon him in life and in death. And who but God went with him to the grave?

*SAINT JOSEPH—PATRON OF  
A HAPPY DEATH*

We do not know when Saint Joseph died, nor do we know his age at the time of his death.

It is probable that he was not alive at the time when Jesus began his public ministry.

On the other hand, his memory was still fresh in the minds of his fellow townsmen of Nazareth, in the early days of our Lord's public life, since they referred to Jesus as the Carpenter's son, one, therefore, readily identified by the speakers and listeners.

The supposition that Joseph died before the Crucifixion is generally assumed by most writers from the fact that Jesus would hardly have confided his Mother to the care of Saint John, if Joseph had been alive.

The important thing for us to remember is that Saint Joseph is the patron of a happy death. We are sure that he died in the presence of Jesus and Mary.

*SAINT JOSEPH'S PLACE IN THE  
ORDER OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION*

The highest dignity of Saint Joseph stems from his relations with the Triune God. In

brief, he represented the Father's authority and exercised it. He was the protector, the support and the teacher of the Son. He was the beloved husband of the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the guardian of her name and virtue.

If Joseph from the beginning of his election, did not have the fulness of the divine revelation concerning the details of the mystery of the Incarnation and the coming of the Kingdom of God, such as Mary had them, he did have the requisite dispositions for gradually learning them. Being a just man he was endowed with a true sense for spiritual understanding. Fuller knowledge came from direct revelation of God's commands and from his daily contacts with Mary before and after the birth of Christ. He was specifically equipped with two essential dispositions, the love of God and the love of Mary.

We can readily see how the Mother of God shares in the surpassing estate of God's highest form of communication with the human race. The question before us is this: How does Saint Joseph enter into the world of the Hypostatic Union?

His claims rest on three considerations:

- 1) He was the husband of Mary.

- 2) He was the Foster Father of Jesus
- 3) He was the representative of the Heavenly Father on earth.

Putting it differently, we may say that Joseph enters within the shadow of God's very life by the ties of matrimony, by legal right and as God's Vicar. And if this is but the margin of the divine life, it does yet raise him above the level of every other order of God's dealings with men.

Jesus Christ alone is in the world of the Hypostatic Union. Mary is the connecting link between that world and the world of grace; She is the Mother of the God-Man.

As foretold by the Prophets the Son of God was born of a Virgin Mother (Isaias, 8). This Virgin Mother was espoused to a man named Joseph and contracted marriage with him, a true marriage, even though both parties had vowed virginity and maintained that vow in the marriage state.

Just as it required a creature "full of grace" to form the connecting link between the world of grace and the world of the Hypostatic Union, so it required "a just man," that is, a man possessing all virtues in a super-eminent degree to take on the role that Joseph was

called on to carry out, when God and Mary chose him for her husband.

Once we accept the will of God in the Incarnation, recognizing that the only-begotten Son became man to be for us the Way, the Truth and the Life, then the role of Joseph becomes a necessary part of that plan.

Jesus had to be protected, nourished and brought-up, under conditions that would issue in a normal human life, so that the Son of God Incarnate could truly be a Son of Man. Here lay the role of Joseph.

That role drew him into the intimate circle of the Hypostatic Union, by a different and lesser tie than the one of the divine Motherhood, but closer and deeper than any other, such as that of Precursor, Apostle, Evangelist.

In the natural and social order, he was the head of that family, whose flower and fruit deriving from the Godhead, sought a root of human birth in the womb of the Virgin and mutual affections and emotions from both the Mother and her human spouse.

God chose Mary to be the Paradise wherein He, by his power alone, would plant the Tree of Life. To Joseph God committed the care and custody of this Paradise.

It is not hard to believe that God would

choose a Virgin for this office. And such has always been the common tradition of the Church stemming from the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors, beginning with Saint Augustine.

The espousals of Mary and Joseph, according to the more probable tradition took place at Jerusalem. There is no solid reason to suppose that Joseph was an old man at that time. Quite the contrary. Up to the fifth century the tradition makes him a man in the early prime of life.

Joseph may rightly be called the Father of Jesus. We have the best precedent for doing so. Not merely those who were ignorant of the Virgin-birth, as the fellow townsmen of our Lord, used the term, but the Evangelist who knew of the mystery says: "His father and mother seeing Him, wondered." And what is more, the Virgin Mother herself when she addressed the child Jesus in the Temple said: "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." And Jesus Himself by the very distinction that He makes in his reply, between his Father in heaven and his earthly father acknowledges this paternity, which He places below his heavenly origin.

From a consideration of the facts we behold



in Joseph every requisite (save physical generation) and every right of a true father. Carnal paternity alone does not in our human estimation make a father. If a man begot children then neglected them, did not love, bring up, care for, support them, we would say of such a one: he is not a father to those children. And of the children we could properly say that to all intents and purposes they are fatherless.

By his paternal affection Joseph was a true father to Jesus. No father ever loved his son as Joseph loved Him. Hence Jesus found in him as much paternal love as any son can have, and responded to it by his own filial affection.

This paternal love was a product both of nature and of grace and of the special gift of the Heavenly Father.

By his solicitude toward Jesus, Joseph merited to be called father; for never did human father care for and watch over his offspring as did Joseph over Jesus.

By the work of his hands and the sweat of his brow he provided the food and sustenance by which Jesus waxed in age and stature, as the Gospel puts it.

By marriage he acquired real rights over

Mary and all that she had including the "blessed fruit" of her womb, Jesus.

In brief, we may say, that Joseph had all the rights of a father over Jesus in fact and before the law. Moreover, he exercised all these rights. He alone of all men could and did address Jesus on earth, as "my son." And so he addresses him in heaven; for heaven does not loosen our earthly bonds of parentage and sonship but makes them permanent.

The third great glory of Joseph and that which constitutes the very source of all his dignities, is the fact that he was, by God's choice, the representative of the Heavenly Father.

The Son of God came to earth as man; He was seen in his glory and in his weakness.

The Holy Spirit appeared at diverse times and under diverse forms.

To the Father are applicable the words of the Evangelist: "No man hath seen God at any time."

There were representatives of God on earth such as Moses, Aaron, the Judges, the Prophets. Each represented some attribute of His divinity, most often His justice, always His power and majesty. But never before or after, has a man represented God in His fatherhood. It is a

unique honor and a unique distinction belonging only to Saint Joseph.

Greater than merely representing the Fatherhood of God on earth is the fact that Joseph really exercised the rights of a father and that not in relation to men, creatures of God, children only by adoption; but he exercised those rights over the very Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He commanded the Son of God and was obeyed: This statement of what was a repeated fact in the life of Joseph, makes us stand in amazement; and thereafter, to wonder at the dignity which this just man possessed. This is meant by saying that Joseph, by his relations to Jesus and Mary, stands within the shadow of the Hypostatic Union. There can be no doubt that he who was the husband of Mary, the father of Jesus and the unique representative of the heavenly Father must be the greatest among the saints next to the very Mother of God.

*SAINT JOSEPH IN THE KINGDOM  
OF GOD*

From these considerations, something of the true greatness of Saint Joseph begins to appear. His eminent dignity stands out more clearly

if we compare his role with that of others, whether these be individuals or groups.

To Prophets for example, God committed the duty of announcing His Word and His promises and preparing remotely for the coming of His Son, the Messiah. To Joseph was given the Mother of God who was the Dawn that heralded the Sun of Justice. To him was given the fulfillment of all the promises of God and the riches of the treasures of His Kingdom. Wherefore, it is not difficult to see how Saint Joseph towers above all the prophets.

To holy Kings and Priest, God gave to rule over a portion of his Chosen People. To Joseph he confided the power to rule over the Mother of God and the Son of God on earth. Wherefore Saint Joseph's power is royal and sacerdotal above everything comparable that has appeared in this world.

In Saints and Martyrs of the New Law, God showed forth his wisdom, his courage and his power. To Joseph alone of all men did He confide his own authority over the creature who is above all creatures and—unfathomable mystery!—his own authority over the Incarnate Son of God.

Therefore, greater than priest and prophet, higher than king and ruler, more glorious than

apostle and martyr, is Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Immaculate Virgin, Foster Father of the Son of God and Head of the Holy Family.

Next to what God has done for Saint Joseph it is but a small matter that the Church makes him its universal protector; and what our private devotion can suggest and carry out, in order to give him the place that is due in human affairs, is as nothing compared to the dignities bestowed upon him when God singled him out as the man "whom the King had a mind to honor."

On his own part, Saint Joseph being chosen by God for dignities surpassing all human reckoning, fulfilled his role with such excellence that the Holy Ghost says of him: "He was a just man"; a short phrase, but full of meaning as a star is full of light.

The claims of Saint Joseph to a primacy among the Saints and Servants of God are not confined to his place in God's designs in this world only. They carry over into the world of everlasting glory, which we glimpse by faith "as through a glass in an obscure manner."

Grace is the only measure we know for the glory of the elect. The degree of grace at

death marks the degree of glory and power in heaven.

We have seen how the graces of Saint Joseph surpassed immeasurably all the graces of patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs. The logical conclusion is, then, that the glory of Joseph is unsurpassed by any of these.

We do not know what changes our passage from death to eternal life will make in us. What we do know, however, is that the glory of heaven will not reverse the powers of our nature, or reverse the workings of grace.

What has been good and desirable in our natural life will be preserved and enriched in heaven, not rooted out and destroyed; and what grace has accomplished in us on earth will be made perfect and enduring in heaven.

And if such is the case, then we can readily imagine what the glory and power of Joseph in heaven must be. For both by nature and by grace he was nearest to Jesus on earth, next to the Blessed Mother; he was one of the earthly Trinity—how near must he be to the Trinity in heaven!

a p p e n d i x NO. 1

*TE, JOSEPH, CELEBRENT*

*Let Angels chant thy praise, pure spouse of  
purest Bride,  
While Christendom's sweet choirs the gladsome  
strains repeat,  
To tell thy wondrous fame, to raise the pealing  
hymn,  
Wherewith we all thy glory greet.  
When doubts and bitter fears thy heavy heart  
oppressed,  
And filled thy righteous soul with sorrow and  
dismay,  
An Angel quickly came, the wondrous secret  
told,  
And drove thy anxious griefs away.  
Thy arms thy new-born Lord, with tender joy  
embrace;  
Him then to Egypt's Land thy watchful care  
doth bring;  
Him in the Temple's courts once lost thou dost  
regain,  
And 'mid thy tears dost greet thy King.  
Not till death's pangs are o'er do others gain  
their crown,*

*But, Joseph, unto thee the blessed lot was  
given  
While life yet endure, thy God to see and  
know,  
As do the Saints above in heaven.  
Grant us, great Trinity, for Joseph's holy sake,  
In highest bliss and love, above the stars to  
reign,  
That we in joy with him may praise our loving  
God,  
And sing our glad eternal strain.*

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## APPENDIX NO. 2

Inasmuch as the pronouncements of the Holy See are at present more or less inaccessible to the average person, the translations of the six most important documents relating to St. Joseph are offered in Part III, together with a sketch presenting certain features of devotion to the saint since 1545. Acknowledgment is made for permission to use reprints from the *CATHOLIC MIND*, published by the Society of Jesus.

### *MOTU PROPRIO*

*of Benedict XV, Pope, for the Celebration of the Fiftieth Year of the Proclamation of the Patriarch St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church.*

*Good and salutary indeed it was for the Christian people that Our Predecessor, Pius IX of immortal memory, solemnly declared the most chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary and guardian of the Incarnate Word, St. Joseph, to be the Patron of the Universal Church. But now that the fiftieth anniversary of this happy event will occur next December, we consider*

*it useful and opportune that it should be worthily celebrated by the whole Catholic world.*

*Casting Our glance over the past fifty years, We behold the wonderfully flourishing condition of pious institutions which bear witness to the manner in which devotion to the holy Patriarch has been gradually developing among the Faithful. When further, then, We consider the calamities afflicting the human race today, we cannot fail to realize how opportune it is to increase this devotion and to spread it ever more widely throughout Christian peoples.*

*In Our Encyclical, "On the Reconciliation of Christian Peace," following the cruel war, We indicated what was necessary to establish order and tranquillity everywhere. In particular consideration was given by Us to the civil relations which exist between nations and between individuals. Yet today the treatment of another cause of disturbance, much more serious, becomes imperative. There is question now of an evil that has crept into the very heart of society. For the scourge of war had been laid on the human race at the very moment that it had become profoundly infected with naturalism—that great worldly plague*

*which, wherever it enters, lessens the desire for heavenly things, extinguishes the flame of Divine Love, and deprives man of the healing and elevating grace of Christ, leaving him without the light of faith, dependent on the weak and corrupt resources of nature and the slave of unbridled human passion. Thus it happened that many devoted themselves solely to the acquisition of worldly goods. Moreover, while the contest between the wealthy and the proletariat had already become acute, class hatred now became still more grave by reason of the length and severity of the War, for while this, on the one hand, brought intolerable privation to the masses, on the other it rapidly made fortunes for the few.*

*Then, too, the sanctity of conjugal fidelity and respect for paternal authority were often grievously transgressed during the War. The remoteness of one spouse served to relax the bond of duty to the other, and the absence of a watchful eye gave rise to freer and more indulgent conduct. More particularly was this notable among the younger women. Sincerely to be regretted, therefore, is the fact that public morals have become far more corrupt and depraved than they had previously been, and for this very reason, too, the so-called "social*

*question" has reached an intensity which causes one to fear the gravest of evils.*

*In the wishful thought and expectations of the seditious members of society there has consequently been maturing the advent of a certain universal commonwealth that is to be founded on absolute equality of men and on community of goods. National distinctions are no longer to exist in this, nor is any recognition to be given to the authority of the father over his sons, of public power over the citizens, or of God over men united in civil commonwealth. All such ravings, should they be carried into effect, must culminate in a tremendous social convulsion, such in fact as is now experienced and felt by not a small part of Europe. Precisely a similar condition of affairs, we are aware, is ambitioned among other peoples. The masses are wrought into excitement by the fury and audacity of a few, while grave disturbances break out in many places.*

*Meanwhile, pre-occupied above all else with this course of events, We have not failed to renew in the sons of the Church a sense of their duty, whenever the occasion presented itself. This purpose, for example, We but recently accomplished through the letters addressed by Us to the Bishop of Bergamo and also to the*

*Venetian Province. And so now, prompted by the same motive—namely, to recall to their duty those of our own fold, however many, who earn their bread by the labor of their hands, and to preserve them immune from the contagion of Socialism, than which nothing is more opposed to Christian wisdom— We have with great solicitude placed before them in a particular manner the example of St. Joseph, that they may follow him as their special guide and may honor him as their heavenly patron.*

*It was he who, in very deed, lived a life similar to theirs; and for this reason Our Lord Jesus Christ, though in truth the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, wished to be called the "son of the carpenter." Yet how many and how great were the virtues with which he adorned his poor and humble condition! And among all these virtues none was wanting to ennoble the man who was to be the husband of Mary Immaculate and the foster father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us persons, then, learn from Joseph to consider present passing affairs in the light of future good which will endure forever; and find consolation amid human vicissitudes in the hope of heavenly things, that so they may aspire to them in a manner*

*conformable to the Divine will—that is, by living soberly, justly, and piously.*

*In reference to the labor problem it is opportune to quote here the words which Our Predecessor, Leo XIII of happy memory, uttered on this question, for they are such that no other words can be considered appropriate:*

"Considerations such as these will serve to encourage and tranquillize the poor and all those who live by the labor of their hands. Yet, although it is permitted them to rise from a condition of want to one of well-being, provided violation of justice is excluded, nevertheless, both justice and reason forbid the destruction of that order which Divine Providence has ordained. On the contrary, it is foolish to have recourse to violence, and to seek to better existing conditions by sedition and revolt, which in most cases produce only greater evils than those which they were meant to cure. If the poor wish to act wisely, let them not believe the promises of seditious men, but let them trust in the example and patronage of St. Joseph and in the maternal care of the Church, which daily becomes more solicitous for their welfare."

*With the increase of devotion to St. Joseph among the faithful there will necessarily result an increase in their devotion toward the Holy Family of Hazareth of which he was the august head, for these devotions spring spontaneously one from the other. By St. Joseph we are led directly to Mary, and by Mary to the fountain of all holiness, Jesus Christ, who sanctified the domestic virtues by His obedience toward St. Joseph and Mary.*

*We desire, then, that these marvelous exemplars of virtue should serve as inspiration and as models for all Christian families. Even as the family constitutes the foundation of the human race, so by strengthening domestic society with the bonds of purity, fidelity, and concord, a new vigor, and, as it were, a new lifeblood shall be diffused through all the members of human society under the vivifying influence of the virtue of Christ; nor shall the result consist merely in the correction of public morals but in the restoration of public and civil discipline itself.*

*Therefore, full of confidence in the patronage of him whose providence and vigilance it pleased God to entrust His only-begotten Son as well as the Virgin most holy, We earnestly exhort all the bishops of the Catholic*

*world that in the Church's present need they should induce the faithful to implore more earnestly the powerful intercession of St. Joseph. And since there are many ways approved by this Apostolic See for venerating the holy Patriarch, especially on all Wednesdays of the year and during the month consecrated to him, We wish that at the instance of each bishop all of these devotions should be practised in each diocese as far as possible.*

*And then, too, since Joseph, whose death took place in the presence of Jesus and Mary, is justly regarded as the most efficacious protector of the dying, it is our purpose here to lay a special injunction on Our Venerable Brethren that they assist in every possible manner those pious associations which have been instituted to obtain the intercession of St. Joseph for the dying—such as the "Association for a Happy Death" and the "Pious Union of St. Joseph's Passing," established for the benefit of those who are in their last agony.*

*To commemorate the above Pontifical Decree We order and enjoin that within a year from the 8th of December next, throughout the whole Catholic world there shall be celebrated in honor of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, a solemn function at whenever time*



*and in whatever manner each Bishop shall consider fitting; and to all who assist We grant a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions.*

*Given at St. Peter's at Rome, July 25, Feast of St. James the Apostle, 1920, in the Sixth Year of Our Pontificate.*









