



OBLATES OF  
ST. JOSEPH

# REFLECTIONS ON ST. JOSEPH



An Initiative of  
***Centro Internazionale Giuseppino-Marellian***  
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*In celebration of*

OBILATES OF ST. JOSEPH

**2019 YEAR**  
**of**  
**SAINT JOSEPH**

**AND HE ROSE UP,  
IN THE NIGHT, AND  
TOOK WITH HIM  
THE CHILD  
AND HIS  
MOTHER.**

**MATTHEW 2:13-14**



*commemorating the  
130 years of **Quamquam Pluries**  
and the  
30 years of **Redemptoris Custos***







## F O R E W O R D

**O**n January 23, 2019, in reference to Resolution 5 of the XVII General Chapter, the Superior General announced the celebration of a *Year of St. Joseph* in our Congregation. It was officially inaugurated on March 19, 2019, on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

There were some circumstances, such as the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* by St. John Paul II, the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Encyclical *Quamquampluries* by Pope Leo XIII and the 150 years since the Decree *Quemadmodum Deus* by which Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, which prompted us to this initiative.

But the main reason behind the announcement was to provide us with an opportunity to go to the roots of our spirituality in the light of the sacred Scripture and of the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. The words of Pope Francis, during the audience given to the Chapter Fathers on August 31, were inspiring and encouraging for deepening our study and reflection on the figure of St. Joseph.

Some of us may feel that we really haven't been able to celebrate it as we wanted to due to the pandemic. May be this is how St. Joseph wants it because, at least when it comes to the Gospel accounts, he accepted with faith all the improvisations by surrendering his own plans to the hands of God. The global situation of covid-19 gave us the possibility of focusing more on our Patron by extending the year up to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the date of 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Decree of *Quemadmodum Deus* with which Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph patron of the universal Church.

During this period of time we have been able to organize in the Congregation a variety of programs of renewal like retreats, formation meetings, symposiums, seminars and monthly reflections on St. Joseph. In this way we intended and managed to be together in order to bring

about a true revival and reinforcement of our life and mission as it was envisioned by our Founder St. Joseph Marello.

To make the Year of St. Joseph memorable even after its conclusion we thought of bringing out an e-book by collecting the reflections on St. Joseph. I am grateful to all our confreres and oblate sisters who contributed their meditations for this purpose. I take this opportunity to thank the Superior General who encouraged us to bring out this e-book. Of course, a big salute and gratitude to Fr. Ian Yacat, OSJ for the beautiful designing and attractive presentation.

May God continue to bless our religious family especially with an increase of genuine vocations through the powerful intercession of Our Lady of Sorrows under the protection of St. Joseph and with the inspiring presence of our Founder Father St. Joseph Marello.



Fr. John Attulli, OSJ

Director

OSJ International Josephite-Marellian Spirituality Center





OBLATI DI SAN GIUSEPPE  
P. JAN PELCZARSKI, OSJ  
SUPERIORE GENERALE

## Letter of Inauguration of the Year of St. Joseph

### To the Oblates of St. Joseph

Dear Confreres,

**T**he XVIIth General Chapter, held in Rome from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, 2018, had as its theme: “He called them that they may remain with Him and to be sent forth to preach.” In a climate of prayer and mutual sharing, the Chapter composed several Resolutions to promote spiritual growth and pastoral zeal. In reference to Resolution 5a which deals with some anniversaries in regard to St. Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, I would like to announce the celebration of a **Year of St. Joseph** in our Congregation. It will officially begin next March 19, 2019, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and solemnly conclude the following year, March 19, 2020.

The circumstances which led to this initiative are to be found in the various dates of commemoration that occur in the 2019-2020 period: the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (8/15/1989) by St. John Paul II, who was intending in his turn, to commemorate the centenary of the promulgation of the Encyclical *Quamquampluries* of Leo XIII on devotion to St. Joseph and the 150 years since the Decree *Quemadmodum Deus* (12/8/1870) with which Bl. Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church.

However, the true profound reason for this initiative rests in the conviction that the remembrance of our holy Protector and Patron of the Universal Church, can be for us a providential occasion to go to the roots of our spirituality in the light of the most recent teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. It will also promote a deeper reflection upon the spiritual patrimony which the Guardian of the Redeemer has left to the entire Christian community. Finally, it will also bring about a true renewal and reinvigoration of the mission we are undertaking.

St. Joseph Marelli was a contemporary of the ecclesial events we just mentioned. It is always useful to re-read his letter to Rev. Giuseppe Riccio in which he speaks of the preparation for the proclamation of the Patronage (Letter 64) and which defines St. Joseph as “that model of a poor and obscure life” upon which he will build his spirituality and that of his religious family. In reference to this, Fr. Cortona recalled in the conferences that the Founder gave to the first Oblates, that he: “reflected often on the interior life of St. Joseph...who did not give himself entirely to exterior activities, but that he united his action to the spirit of prayer.” (Cortona, *BreviMemorie in StudiMarelliani*, 1-2, 2012, p. 63-64).

The idea of a Year dedicated to the Guardian of the Redeemer will perhaps move someone to ask: is it possible that a figure of such doubtless importance, but from a distant time, like St. Joseph, could inspire



and transmit to us still today the desire to “serve the interests of Jesus” in the Church? Or again: is it worth proposing in our day, a Saint of humility and of silence as a model to imitate? What can his life teach people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

I would respond to these questions, simply with the observation that it is he, St. Joseph, who always takes us to the heart of our Christian and Religious vocation; it is he who helps us re-discover the features which make up the identity of a true Oblate; it is he who re-proposes to Christian communities his always relevant and unmistakable style of faithfulness and service. If we were to make use of just one word to sum up the mission and spiritual patrimony of St. Joseph, it would be enough to say “Jesus”, the name which our Saint was called to pronounce and confer in the rite of Circumcision (Mt 2,25). That is the name which St. Paul says is “above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bend, in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2,10)

St. Joseph lives profoundly in union with Jesus, contemplating Him in the Incarnation and the Mysteries of the Hidden Life. Therefore, he reminds us constantly that the vocation to the Consecrated Life and every other Christian Vocation, consists above all in personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In this he invites us to re-center our lives on Jesus, the One thing necessary, from whom comes all the rest, taking from Him meaning and value. In the school of St. Joseph in fact, we learn to welcome the Word as the reason for our life and apostolate. We learn to grow in fraternity. We learn strength of heart, the indispensable condition for dealing with the challenges of daily life and of the apostolate.

I propose that in the course of this Year, these words of the Gospel of Matthew inspire us and accompany us in deepening our personal and community reflection:

**Rise up....**

**And he rose up, in the night, and took with him the child and his mother**

(Mt. 2, 13 & 14)

**Rise up...he rose up...** The verb “to rise up” refers to movement and is linked to an upwards movement. It recurs in the Sacred Scripture, in various contexts, always with a positive meaning: to rise and stand up, to rise after having fallen, to lift up one’s eyes in prayer... It is a call to leave the position of sitting down or laying down so as to get moving, because comfort does not satisfy the deep aspirations of the human heart and is in contrast with the logic of the Gospel. This word spoken by the Angel in a dream, heard and embraced, leads to a radical change in the life of Joseph. The man “of dreams” is open to “surprises” from God and accepts His will even if it upends his life. Three times he dreams and each time he only receives a message and a partial explanation. However, to do the will of God it is not necessary to have a complete picture of the situation, with all consequences and possible developments spelled out. It is enough to have “only that much light as serves for the first step.” (H. Newman)

**...in the night...** This reference to the time of day recalls the symbolic character of the night in Holy Scripture. It serves to highlight and understand the depth of character of Joseph, who does not draw back in the moment of the challenge. As a father, he must take care of the Child; as a spouse, he must protect Mary, not only by day when all is bright and secure, but also at night, when the obstacles seem all the harder to overcome.

**...took with him the child and his mother...** In Joseph we can admire his willingness and readiness, simple and ordinary virtues which adorn him. However, the words of the Gospel reveal that the center of his life and his mission, is Jesus. Joseph obeys the order of the Angel, and this obedience is always

being indicated with the use of the richly meaningful expression: “he took with him.” To take with oneself means to keep, to take care of, to share in the destiny of those persons under one’s care. When members of a family, or of a consecrated community know how to “take with themselves” the lives of their family members or confreres, their daily personal relationships acquire a new depth and create a climate of exponential growth.

The Year of St. Joseph offers us therefore, an invitation and an occasion to re-discover the figure of the Patron of the Universal Church and find in him, the fundamental bases of that vocation which connects us to his name as his Oblates. It will help us to re-establish a personal relationship with him. It invites us to re-read and re-study the publications that speak of his mission. It will become an occasion to compose new songs dedicated to him, in continuity with the rich musical tradition of the Congregation. It will obligate us to celebrate with due solemnity his Feast Days and perhaps organize some pilgrimages to shrines dedicated to him. Finally, it will push us to entrust to his intercession, the earthly affairs of the Church in its rough confrontations with the hostile environment of today’s world. Each Province and Delegation, each community and each apostolic work should seek the ways most appropriate so that this Year may be for each of us an unforgettable spiritual experience.

May the Year of St. Joseph also be a favorable occasion to highlight some aspects and themes of Christian life linked to the spirituality of St. Joseph. For example: the importance of the interior life, of generous service in daily life, the holiness of Marriage and of the family, and many others.

In conclusion, I also exhort the Oblate Sisters of St. Joseph and the Laity spiritually close to us, and all the Faithful who come to our parishes and take part in our pastoral activities, that they too feel themselves to be involved in this initiative and may live with us the Year of St. Joseph so as to grow spiritually and respond with ever greater generosity to the call of the Lord.

I finish with these words of our Founder: “Eamus simul ad Joseph et oremus ad invicem; and may our holy Patriarch obtain for everyone from God every opportune grace.” (Letter 234, *Opera Omnia*, Editrice Impressioni Grafiche, Acqui 2010, p. 586).

***“Let us say to our Great Patriarch:  
See us all for you - may you be all for us;  
You show us the way, you sustain us in every step,  
You lead us where Divine Providence wants to take us.  
Whether the way be long or short, smooth or rough,  
Whether we can or cannot see by human sight the goal,  
Whether moving swiftly or slowly,  
With you we are sure that all will go well.”***

Rome, January 23, 2019 Feast of the Holy Spouses.

Faternally,

*P. Jas Pelczarski, OSJ*





OBLATI DI SAN GIUSEPPE  
P. JAN PELCZARSKI, OSJ  
SUPERIORE GENERALE

## Message for the Opening of the Year of St. Joseph

To the Oblates of St. Joseph  
and to the Josephite Marellian Family

Dear Confreres and Cooperators,

On the 19th of March we will celebrate the annual Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary. However, this year, the annual liturgical celebration will take on a very special meaning for the Family of the Oblates, because it marks the opening of a Year dedicated to that Guardian of the Redeemer, whose name we are proud to bear.

Our holy Founder chose St. Joseph as our Patron and exhorted us to keep him before our eyes along the way of holiness and dedicated service to the Church. In the draft for a “Company of St. Joseph”, he left us this precious directive: “Let each one take his inspiration from his Model, St. Joseph, who was the first upon the earth to care for the interests of Jesus, he who cared for Him as an infant and protected Him as a child and who had the place of a father for the first thirty years of His earthly life.” (Letter 83).

The celebration of the 19th of March and especially of the Year of St. Joseph, as explained in the Letter of Inauguration, offer us an occasion to re-discover the figure of our Patron in the Universal Church, and to recognize in him the principle elements of that vocation which associates us, as his Oblates, with his name. The Guardian of the Redeemer, model of the interior life, is a reminder to us of the essentials and of the relevancy to us of some of those values which, lately, may have been overlooked or forgotten.

One of the major challenges of our time is the integration of the interior life (prayer and contemplation) and mission (apostolate and ministry). We always run the risk of remaining enclosed in a spirituality isolated from reality, or of abandoning ourselves to frantic activity and to the superficiality of material things. The Guardian of the Redeemer teaches us that an

intense and profound interior life and loving, spiritual closeness to Jesus and Mary are sources of motivation, dedication and zealous service.

St. Joseph presents himself as a man capable of harmonizing the daily life of a laborer with the awareness of living in the presence of the Son of God. His daily work is in harmony with the contemplation of the mystery “hidden from the ages” which “has come to dwell” in his home. (cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 25).

We truly believe that the intercession of St. Joseph on behalf of the Universal Church is also a help and support for each of us, in the journey of holiness specific to our state of life. We also invoke this help and support for all the Laity who faithfully collaborate with us in our spiritual ministering and our human and social works, so that they may also experience in their daily lives filled with sufferings and testings, the joy of living in the presence of God and serving their brothers like St. Joseph our Patron.

May God, in this Year of St. Joseph, by re-discovering the life of prayer and of silence and through various initiatives (liturgical, pastoral, cultural and of service) bring new enthusiasm to our Christian lives and infuse renewed zeal in the pastoral ministry of our parish communities.

Happy Feast Day and Happy Year of St. Joseph!

March 19, 2019 Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary.

Fraternally,

*P. Jas Pelczarski, OSJ*



OBLATI DI SAN GIUSEPPE  
P. JAN PELCZARSKI, OSJ  
SUPERIORE GENERALE

## Letter for the Solemnity of St. Joseph Mareello

May 30, 2019

### St. Joseph - A Contemplative not just in Action

To the Oblates of St. Joseph

Dear Confreres,

**T**wo years ago I participated, in Bolivia, in a debate on the present and future condition of consecrated life. The diagnosis of the present was interesting, highlighting positive and negative symptoms, mostly already well known or experienced or spoken of in writings and publications dedicated to such themes. Basically, in a globalized world, the challenges faced by religious are not much different from one continent to another. On the negative side there was the lack of enthusiasm and an existential weariness among some religious, the lack of vocations and the challenges linked to life in international communities.

Just as interesting, however, were the attempts to find and point out possible ways of reinvigorating the mission of consecrated persons, of infusing communities with an intense spirituality, stirring up missionary energy and promoting the flourishing of new vocations. While searching for useful strategies, it was hoped that there would be a structural and organizational reform, an emphasis on a more evangelical style of life closer to the poor, and a greater urgency in undertaking missions on the frontier.

Without a doubt all those proposals are valid and possess a certain relevance, however, to tell the truth, what attracted my attention was a comment which, echoing the language of Pope Francis, named “contemplative anemia” in consecrated persons as one of the factors of the current crisis. According to the author of the comment, “contemplative anemia” is the result of the scarce practice of recollection, of silence, of prayer and of meditation on the Word of God. This deficiency translates into lack of passion for Jesus Christ and for humanity, as well as a fragile conviction about the value and beauty of consecrated life. As a consequence, it leads to various frustrations which a number of religious today are experiencing. At this moment in

time, we run the risk of reducing ourselves solely to one dimension, being swept away by activism, which does not necessarily mean “time dedicated to the mission of evangelization”. Without moments reserved exclusively to being with the Lord, consecrated persons, little by little, become like branches detached from the vine, and gradually the salt of our vocation loses its flavor.

### **St. Joseph - a busy and contemplative carpenter**

Taking my inspiration from the above comments, and making use of this Year of St. Joseph, which among other things, invites us to re-read the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* 30 years after its original publication, I would draw attention to one aspect of Joseph as depicted in the pages of this document. The purpose of this my letter would be to stimulate reflection and further study of the need for a greater harmony between our being *certosini* and *apostoli*, or in other words, between contemplative love and love expressed in service, which we must unite in our lives and in our mission.

For many centuries it was the common opinion that contemplation was an activity reserved to monks and religious, presuming it to be incompatible with secular activity, which was viewed as an insurmountable obstacle. To become a contemplative therefore, you needed to distance yourself to isolated places.

However, the Guardian of the Redeemer offers us an interesting lesson on the theme upon which we are reflecting, because at first glance, he does not seem to meet the requirement just mentioned. Living in the world, St. Joseph was obligated to occupy himself with daily life and constantly maintain his network of social and professional contacts. Beyond the time he spent on the roads of Palestine, his activities don't seem to favor the maintaining of that tranquility, which would be thought of as a condition of contemplation: as a husband he knew the taste of marital crisis and passed through a time of discernment (Mt. 1,18-24); as an anxious father he searched 3 days for his Son, not being able to understand the actions of the 12 year old adolescent who, without explanation, wanders away (Lk 2,50); as a laborer he surely experienced the precariousness of his work. For the rest, as a refugee, he was constrained to leave his homeland, and with his family flee the wrath of a tyrant obsessed with power (Mk 2,14-15).

Nevertheless, the history of spirituality associates our carpenter Saint, involved in his daily responsibilities, with being a contemplative. The Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* affirms that he only apparently gave priority to his activities, and while the Gospels speak exclusively of what Joseph “did”, still, they allow us to discover in his “actions” covered in silence, an atmosphere of profound contemplation. Joseph was in daily contact with the Mystery “hidden from the ages” which “came to dwell” under the roof of his house. (RC 25) “To his work as a carpenter in the house of Nazareth, is extended that same climate of silence.” (Ibid).

Joseph, the just man, awaited the coming of the Messiah, listening to and meditating on the messianic promises of the prophets. His first meeting with Jesus occurred when He was still hidden in the womb of Mary. Later, he advances along the way of contemplation, assisting with the adoration of the shepherds come to the place of His birth (Lk 2,15-16). His heart is filled with admiration while participating in the homage of the Magi come from the East (Mt 2,11). Still later, at the Circumcision, fulfilling the requirements of the Mosaic Law, he had the

privilege of pronouncing and imposing the name of Jesus upon the child, which had been revealed to him at the moment of his “annunciation”: “and you will call Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” (Mt. 1,21)

Joseph contemplates the Son in the ordinary places of daily life: at home, at the workplace, in the courtyards, on the streets, and he takes on that attitude of admiration and wonder, typical of persons who find in Jesus their reason for life.

**“...that happy synthesis left to you by Marello...”**

The title of this section comes from Pope Francis’ discourse to the participants in our last General Chapter, in which he traced out the ideal of the Oblate of St. Joseph: “I encourage all of you, therefore, to continue to live and work in the Church and in the world with the simple and essential virtues of the Spouse of the Virgin Mary: humility, which attracts the benevolence of the Father, intimacy with the Lord which sanctifies all Christian undertakings, silence and hiddenness, united to zeal and the spirit of work according to the will of God, in the spirit of that happy synthesis left to you as a motto and program by Marello: ‘Be Carthusians indoors and Apostles outdoors.’ This teaching, always being alive in your spirits, obliges all of you, dear brethren, to maintain in your religious houses a climate of recollection and of prayer, and the favoring of silence and opportune community activities. The spirit of family should cement the unity of the community and of the entire Congregation.” (Agli Oblati di S. Giuseppe, 8/31/19)

Without entering into the discussion about the various forms of contemplation, I would limit myself to say that this term comes from the Latin *contemplum*, or platform, which existed in front of the pagan temples, from which the priests could scrutinize and study the heavens - the stars and the heavenly bodies - so as to understand the designs of the pagan gods and formulate their predictions.

Instead, theologically, contemplate means to have one’s “gaze turned to the Lord” (CCL 2709) so as to acquire an “interior knowledge of the Lord” and be able to love Him more. (CCL 2515) Contemplation helps to center life in Christ and leads to familiarity with Him and promotes the intimate knowledge of His Person.

On the other hand, you can speak of the contemplative dimension of existence which consists in an attitude of reflection and of meditative pause so as to integrate one’s experiences and not allow oneself to be overcome by the vortex of their activities.

The task of synchronizing and harmonizing our being *certosini* (interior life, contemplation, study, prayer, recollection, time for reflection) with external activity (apostolate, regulating the flow of information, the networks of real and virtual social contacts) constitutes one of our challenges. In the end, we must seek to find a balance between prayer and apostolate, between the announcing of the Word of God and the time dedicated to meditation.

Unfortunately it is often the case that this contemplative dimension is the first victim of our many daily tasks. Our culture today does not help to create a contemplative climate, immersed as it is in many stimulations, risking to live in a continuous search for the gratification of our immediate needs and in the anxiety of activism.

However, at the same time, the contemplative dimension is one of the secrets of the renewal of our personal and consecrated lives, because it leads to an experiential knowledge of Christ. Only



he who has heard, seen with his own eyes, contemplated and touched with his own hands, can offer Him true witness (cf. 1Jn1,1). We can also add that this interior attitude does not isolate one from their place in the Church's life, but helps him to see reality in a new light and allows him to draw strength and sustenance for his apostolate.

Our Founder admired particularly, this profound dimension of the Guardian of the Redeemer: "but the point in the life of St. Joseph upon which he focused most with his beloved children was the hidden life of this great Patriarch with his most beloved Jesus. - 'His life was hidden with Jesus in God.' Behold, these were all his greatnesses and all his merits, this his true life. He is in that which God proposes to him as a model for the entire Church, but more and often our father used to say that since in the Church there were religious congregations who had as their particular purpose to meditate on the sorrows of Mary most holy, such as the Servants of Mary, and others to meditate on the Passion of Jesus, like the Passionists, so therefore the Oblates of St. Joseph were to make a study of imitating more closely that hidden life of St. Joseph: *'et vita vestra abscondita cum Christo in Deo.'* - Fortunate those, he said, who understood the project of the hidden life: they will certainly give great glory to God.

May our holy Patriarch obtain for everyone from God every opportune grace and happy Feast Day of our Founder.

Fraternally,

P. Jas Pelczarski, OSJ



OBLATI DI SAN GIUSEPPE  
P. JAN PELCZARSKI, OSJ  
SUPERIORE GENERALE

## Circular letter for the beginning of the novena to Saint Joseph

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid ..." (Mt 1:18)

To the Josephite Marellian Family

Dear Confreres and Friends,

**T**his year, the beginning of the novena to Saint Joseph, is marked by the alarm of the coronavirus that is spreading all over the world and, in these days, has particularly affected Italy. To stop the epidemic, some provinces where the Oblate communities and parishes are located have been isolated, and until April 4, the celebrations, with the influx of people, have been suspended in churches throughout the territory.

Living in this period in which we realize that we are not masters of history and of our lives, the words that the angel addressed to our Protector come to mind: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid ...". Even to the apostles, taken by fear in some circumstances, the Lord repeats: "Stand up and do not be afraid", "Trust, I have overcome the world". Even amidst the tribulations we are facing, we must have faith in God, and against the temptation of discouragement and withdrawal, let us remember what hope we have been called for here on earth and in eternity.

In this time of darkness waiting for the dawn with firm hope, we confidently turn to our great protector and invoke his patronage:

*Defend, O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family,  
the chosen offspring of Jesus Christ.  
Keep from us, O most loving father, all blight of error and corruption.  
Aid us from on high, O most valiant defender, in this conflict with the powers of darkness.  
And even as of old, you did rescue the Child Jesus from the peril of his life,  
so now defend God's holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity.  
Shield us ever under your patronage that, imitating your example,  
and strengthened by your help, we may live a holy life,  
die a happy death and attain the everlasting bliss in heaven. Amen.*

I express my closeness to all and call for solidarity and prayer for the sick and their families and for all who are working to cope with this health emergency.

Pontianak (Indonesia), March 9, 2020.

With fraternal greetings,

*P. Jan Pelczarski, OSJ*



OBLATI DI SAN GIUSEPPE  
P. JAN PELCZARSKI, OSJ  
SUPERIORE GENERALE

## Letter for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, the Husband of the Virgin Mary

### ITE AD JOSEPH

**The Year of St. Joseph continues until December 8, 2020**

**To the Josephite Marellian Family**

Dear Confreres and Friends,

**I**n consideration of the current times marked by anxieties caused by the spread of the coronavirus and the threats to which families are exposed, and responding to the concern of the confreres, I decided to extend the celebration of the Year of St. Joseph until 8 December 2020. This date also marks the 150th anniversary of the *Quemadmodum Deus* decree (8.12.1870) with which Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church.

It is our hope that, through our commitment and the intercession of the Patron of the universal Church, the spirit of faith will be renewed and the world will find peace.

For the program of these months, it is sufficient to refer to the indications of the letter on the Year of St. Joseph.

#### **The Year continues**

St. Joseph “silent teacher fascinates, attracts and teaches not with words but with the shining testimony of his virtues and his firm simplicity” (Document of Aparecida, 274). His vocation is hidden in the light of the mystery of the incarnate Word, and which the Gospel between a few lines, trace his figure by passing. As the spouse of Mary and a father of Jesus, he participates closely in the work of the

Redemption and through him, Jesus entered into the Davidic lineage and becomes the heir of the messianic promises.

In the continuation of the Year of St. Joseph, the “Josephite lexicon”, that appears in the Gospels and which traces the vivid portrait of our Saint, should inspire us. The existential rereading of this essential vocabulary favors spiritual growth and spurs our apostolate:

- “Waking up from sleep” (Mt 1.24; 2.14) of the habit and opening our eyes to the essence of our vocation and mission.
- “Getting up” (Mt 2:13; 20) from mediocrity or falling, means rising to take a path that it is impossible to do in sitting or lying down.
- “Do not be afraid” (Mt 1,20) but trust in God even when he invites us to take steps that seem too big for us.
- “To grow in age, wisdom and grace” (Lk 2.40), abandoning the comfort zone and living the vocation with gratitude and consistency.
- “Doing” more than speaking, following the example of the one who without wandering and without twisting his nose “did” (Mt 1,24; 2,24) as the angel ordered him.
- “Say yes” to God always also “in the night” (Mt 2:14) and not only sometimes and, mainly, “during the day”, that is, when it is comfortable.
- “To become righteous” (Mt 1:19) by mending the day after day existence on the light of the Word of God.
- “Guarding” (Mt 2, 14) one's neighbor and creation without forgetting to guard one's heart, inner life and contemplative silence.
- “To seek Jesus” (Lk 2:44) in the Scripture, in the poor, in history and to have a fixed appointment to find him every day in the temple (cf. Lk 2:47).
- “Calling Jesus” (Mt 1:21) means invoking his holy name and praying “*ad invicem*,” that is, for each other.
- “Going” (Mt 2,20; 2,23) to proclaim the gospel with our lifestyle and with the word.
- “Take with you” (Mt 1,24; 2,13.14) the life of others by sharing their destiny and helping them to grow “in wisdom and grace” (Lk 2,40).

### **Ite ad Joseph**

In this moment of challenges that the church and the world faces, it is better to re-propose a famous and well-known biblical phrase ***Ite ad Joseph*** (go to Joseph). In the first place, these words recall the story of the patriarch Joseph of the Old Testament, who in the time of anguish saved the people from hunger and death: “So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for food, he told all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you.” (Gen 41.55; Ps 105, 16-20).

Instead, in the fullness of time, another Joseph, the husband of the Virgin Mary, nourishes, guards and protects the Son of God; and these things, he does not only during the day, when everything is clear and safe, but also “at night” (Mt 2:14), when obstacles seem difficult to overcome. The mission that God entrusts to him is to be *custos*, custodian of Mary and Jesus. And this custody then extends to the Church (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 1).

With the whole Church, we implore the protection and intercession of St. Joseph, we recommend our concerns, also for the dangers that threaten the human family.

*To you, O blessed Joseph,  
we have recourse in our afflictions, and after having implored the help of  
your thrice holy spouse, we now with hearts filled with confidence  
earnestly beg you also to take us under your protection.  
By that charity wherewith you were united  
to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and by that fatherly love  
with which you did cherish the Child Jesus, we beseech you and humbly pray  
that you will look down with gracious eyes  
upon that inheritance which Jesus Christ purchased by his blood  
and will succor us in our needs by your power and strength.*

*Defend, O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family,  
the chosen offspring of Jesus Christ. Keep from us, O most loving father,  
all blight of error and corruption. Aid us from on high,  
O most valiant defender, in this conflict with the powers of darkness.  
And even as of old, you did rescue the Child Jesus  
from the peril of his life, so now defend God's holy Church  
from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity.  
Shield us ever under your patronage that, imitating your example  
and strengthened by your help, we may live a holy life,  
die a happy death and attain everlasting bliss in heaven. Amen.*

May St. Joseph obtain for the Church and for the world, as well as for each of us, the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Redemptoris Custos*, 32).

Rome, 14 March, 2020

With paternal greetings,

*P. Jas Pelczarski, OSJ*





OBLATI DI SAN GIUSEPPE  
P. JAN PELCZARSKI, OSJ  
SUPERIORE GENERALE

## To you O Blessed Joseph

### Letter for the Conclusion of the Year of St. Joseph

To the Josephite Marellian Family

Dear Confreres and Friends,

**I**n difficult times for believers, on December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX entrusted the Church to the special protection of St. Joseph, declaring him to be “Patron of the Catholic Church”. The faithful were exhorted to invoke the patronage of him, who in his time, with a fatherly love, knew how to accompany Jesus who “grew in age, wisdom and grace before God and men” (Lk 2,52). He was also able to take care of Him and defend Him “from the many perils which came upon the Holy Family”. In accomplishing his mission, St. Joseph also knew persecution and exile, and his sole recompense was to be able to love Jesus and be loved by Him.

#### “I like St. Joseph”

The young Father Giuseppe Marello was witness to the proclamation of the Patronage, and in a letter sent to a priest friend, mentioned the preparations for the event (Cf. Letter 64). In his preaching to the Sisters of the Milliavacca Institute, he dwelt upon the present day mission of the Guardian of the Redeemer: “who has no need of anything for himself, but asks and receives for us, who are his heartfelt devotees.” (Sunday, April 22, 1888).

At 150 years since the proclamation of the Patronage, the Church, confronted with numerous challenges at the present moment, continues to invoke its Protector with the words of the prayer *To you O Blessed Joseph*, commonly said after reciting the Rosary. Effectively, we ask that he protect us from errors and vices, and that he sustain us in the battle with the powers of darkness and that he help us to overcome adversity.

Two years ago, Pope Francis, at the beginning of his message addressed to our Chapter Delegates, shared this insight: “I like St. Joseph, he has so much ‘power’! For more than 40 years I recite a prayer that I found in an old French missal which says about St. Joseph: ‘*dont la puissance sait rendre possibles les choses impossibles*’ (his power knows how to make impossible things, possible). The power of St. Joseph! He has never said no. We need to take courage from this.” (August 30, 2018).

Further, the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* invites the Church to turn to the Saint of Nazareth: “even, and above all, to sustain its renewed dedication to evangelization in the world, and to re-evangelization in those countries and nations where religion and Christian life were once upon a time flourishing, and now are put to harshly to the test. To bring the first announcing of Christ or to re-take it where it has been neglected or forgotten.” (RC 29)

## **A year to remember**

Coming to the end of the Year of St. Joseph, it is needful to first of all thank the Lord, as St. Paul recommends: “Always be joyful, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1Thes 5, 16-18). It has been an event which has allowed us to rediscover and to re-propose the figure of the Guardian of the Redeemer, our model and inspiration. (Const. 3)

While with this initiative we wanted to remember several anniversaries, yet as stated in the Letter of Indiction, at the origin of the initiative was the conviction that calling attention to our holy Protector could be a providential occasion to go to the roots of our spirituality and carry out a genuine renewal and re-invigoration of the mission we are undertaking.

The appeal *Ite ad Joseph*, made more than a year ago, has been embraced very favorably by the Josephite Marellian Family and by the faithful who come to our parishes and our works.

For all this, to all of you, goes the most heartfelt gratitude!

From the beginning of the Year, various celebrations were planned and events promoted that showed our love and devotion to the Saint of silent activity. In this regard, there did not lack days of study and gatherings to emphasize some of the themes linked to our Josephite spirituality: annual retreats based on the theology of St. Joseph, meetings for prayer and reflection, pilgrimages and appropriate liturgical celebrations. There were also initiatives on behalf of the poor.

If it is difficult to evaluate this past Year, and list all the manifestations that took place in the Provinces, but among the more significant events celebrated we should remember the Centenary of the presence of the Oblates of St. Joseph in Brazil. All of us were joined in the giving of thanks by the Province *Nossa Senhora do Rocio*, remembering the witness of the confreres and the apostolic works there.

The International Symposium on St. Joseph and the 5th International Congress of the Josephite Marellian Laity celebrated in Curitiba, followed by the publication of the Charter of Communion, has reinforced the bonds of our charismatic family.

Further, the taking effect of our Constitutions and General Directory on the Feast of the Holy Spouses clearly put together the close connection between St. Joseph and our vocation, which asks us to reproduce in our lives and apostolates the ideal of service as lived by him (Cf. Const. 3). This requires a profound personal love for Jesus Christ and for His Church, the accompaniment of youth, the capacity to perceive the presence of God in history and a style of service marked by simplicity and fortitude before the challenges of life.

Finally, looking to more recent plans, we were able to have the 3rd International Symposium with the theme: *St. Joseph Marelllo and the Spirituality of Communion* through an online format.

## The mission continues: *Ite cum Joseph*

It is important to consider the Year of St. Joseph not as an episode nor as a self-contained event, but rather as a step towards reawakening our love for our great Patriarch. Let it not be, that once we celebrate the closing Mass, we turn the page, put everything away and declare that we have done enough. Our Founder gave us a precise and constant mission: “to live like St. Joseph “in an intimate relationship with the Divine Word” (Letter 37), learning from him “to care for the interests of Jesus” (Letter 83) in the Church. Further, with him we are called to realize “those things which from day to day Divine Providence points out to us to do” (Rule of 1892), “open to the signs of the times, with special attention to the various forms of poverty, whether of persons or the places of greatest need” (Const. 4).

As a reminder, in this Year we have dedicated to the Patron of the Universal Church, an e-book has been prepared which collects all the reflections of the monthly retreats. By taking up and rereading these texts, we can find inspiration for our journey.

In the post covid-19 world, in carrying out our mission, we welcome with confidence the exhortation of our Father Founder. These in fact, were the last words addressed to his sons: *“Be all of good heart under the paternal mantle of St. Joseph, a place of securest refuge amidst tribulations and distresses”* (Letter 321). May he “support us in every step and lead us where Divine Providence wants us to arrive” because with him “we are sure that all will go well”.

Rome, December 8, 2020  
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

With fraternal greetings,

P. Jas Pelczarski, OSJ



# REFLECTIONS

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## ST. JOSEPH





# A Time to Listen. . . Joseph of Nazareth in the Whisper of God

Fr. Michele Fiore, OSJ



**W**hat is success? Where have we gone? Why all this? God, where is He? Maybe these questions are the questions we will instinctively pose ourselves in these last times. The Pandemic has reawakened in us a sense of limitation, of the unexpected, of the unforeseeable. The danger of falling into the clutches of fear and anxiety will certainly not be small. We will probably have before our eyes the almost surreal scenes of recent events. The health emergency of the pandemic could perhaps well earn the name of apocalypse, in its most authentic biblical sense. A veil has been raised and a revelation about the Church itself has occurred, about its faith, about its liturgy. And when the end of the pandemic arrives, it will need to question itself and undertake a great effort of evangelical discernment, without which it will be useless to make invitations to conversion. In fact, it is not enough to say "Convert!", but like Jesus and the prophets, we will have to point out and unmask the idols that impede the true adoration of the living God and our witness to humanity.



## Foundation of Hope

In this humble reflection, we will try to ask ourselves about the profound value to be given to this time of emergency, which has been bestowed in a very particular way on each believer. We will do so in the company of St. Joseph. Who more than he, an expert in the unforeseeable and the unexpected, could open our vision to hints of hope?

The precise historical moment in which I would invite each reader to enter is Joseph's life in Egypt. When Jesus was born, Joseph, in a dream, receives the command to save the life of the child and His mother going to the land of Egypt. We do not know exactly how long they were there, but one thing is certain: Joseph will have begun to experience there, after all the unexpected and unforeseen, moments of stability, peace and tranquility. However, we also know that things would not continue in this way. "With the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and told him: rise, take with you the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel." (Mt 2, 19-21). The passage continues with a mention so clear as to resolve yet again any possible doubt or unfavorable interpretation of the active engagement of Joseph in this divine project: "Having, however, come to know that Archelaus was king in Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Informed in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee" (Mt 2, 22-23).

Once again, we can say very little about the events of these gospel occurrences. However, we know that which appears to be silence, emptiness and absence in the life of Joseph, hides rather the deepest values of the human heart. Every time that we run into him, there is an invitation to recognize him as being that silent guardian of treasures that must be defended. He safeguards the work of God so that every human element is marked by holiness.

More than ever the imperative to a believer will be clear: listen. Listen to the Word of God so as to be enlightened by it. It is the Word itself, the Letter to the Hebrews (4,12) says, which: "is living and effective, sharper than a two edged sword; it penetrates to the point of body and soul, to the joints and marrow, and scrutinizes the sentiments and thoughts of the heart". It is God who speaks first to man, and for this reason, he asks to be listened to, to be accepted. We might at times forget that Christian prayer is first of all listening. We prefer to say to God: "Listen Lord, for your servant is speaking" rather than: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

## From Fear to Courage

Joseph is the man of listening, or better, the wise man, the one who recognizes in God the certainty of a trusted ally. In what way can Joseph of Nazareth enlighten us in this time of pandemic? The Conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes*, would seem to move our reflection along its way, almost becoming a premise to the Gospel scenes mentioned above. The Introduction of the Constitution (n.1) exhorts us: "The joys and hopes, the sadness and anxieties of man today, especially the poor and all those who suffer, are the joys and hopes, the sadness and anxieties of the disciples of Christ, and nothing is more

genuinely human which echoes in man's heart. Their community is composed of men, who, united together in Christ, are guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of the Father and they have received a message of salvation to propose to everyone. Therefore, this community feels itself to be truly and intimately united with the human race and its story."

During these months of pandemic, everyone has asked themselves about the meaning of their experience, so unforeseeable and tragic. The image to emerge manifests all of man's frailty, the consequences of which, with the greatest probability, will accompany him in the future. Profound suffering, such as the death of persons dear to him, especially the elderly; the absence of that familiar closeness which is essential in moments of fear, disappointment and feeling lost; the sense of helplessness of doctors, nurses and every institutional worker; the doubts and crises of faith; the loss of work; the limitations of social interaction. The pandemic will certainly have re-awakened in him who might have thought himself able to sleep securely, the realities of injustice, of violence, of hunger and poverty, of war and disease: disasters caused in large part by an economic-financial system based on profit, which does not succeed in integrating fraternal social relations and care for the environment. The coronavirus has shaken superficiality and thoughtlessness, denouncing another pandemic, no less serious: that of indifference.

However, we know that a Christian is called to recognize and interpret the signs of the times, invoking his gift of discernment. From this it is possible to try to change perspective, not remaining fixed on causes and effects as much as on the possibilities given us to be caretakers of life.

The coronavirus, not perhaps with the drama which has already overwhelmed us, has however, restored to each of us some possibilities... The most evident to the eyes of Christians will certainly be that of restoring a fundamental reality: the working of God.

The question comes of itself: that which is happening, can it be considered a working of God? A legitimate question, which opens our eyes to visions of hope, rather than perhaps the instinctive prayer to free us from this pandemic - something which would close us into disappointment and blind fear, awaiting a sign from heaven.

Ask God the gift of wisdom so as to be able to enter, despite the tragedy of what has happened, into that which is His conducting and accompanying our story; thus we embrace a moment of salvation.

## Workers of Hope

The entire biblical experience, whether in the Old Testament or the New, demonstrates a constant dynamic capable of being applied to every event: enter into the plan of God, adhere to the will of God; enter so as to understand with God, the meaning of that event. Jesus Christ will be the most singular announcer of this as Son in continuous seeking of the will of the Father so as to conform Himself to it.



It is perhaps precisely here where the profound truth of a proper relationship with God matures. Recognize that there is a plan, a will - that of God - who speaks and challenges. You can now understand better the exhortation in the 1st Letter of St. Peter (3,15): "Adore the Lord, Christ, in your hearts, always ready to respond to whomever asks a reason for the hope that is in you." How have we as Christians become implementers of this essential witness to the story of salvation? The pandemic has seriously challenged every Christian to see himself as an implementer of this hope. As we hear in the parable (Mt. 13,33) of the yeast, which hiddenly and silently is capable of leavening all the dough; or in the invitation to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5,13).

We need to recognize that we have witnessed the re-launching of theological interpretations whose origins are born from the pandemic, presented as the punishment or chastisement of God for the sins of men. There are moralistic interpretations, which perhaps having a certain reasonableness, but also have the danger of making the mercy of God a transaction, a do ut des, which has been much seen in history. Even the "temptation of a miracle" has appeared as the only praying to offer to the heart of God, as if he were a magician who with the swish of His wand will make the virus disappear. All of these are fantastical stories; its very different with from the attitude that the fear of God invites us to have: the mature capacity to turn to God as a Father, recognizing Him as the All-powerful in love.

### **Joseph: Artisan of Perspectives**

Joseph of Nazareth, even in these times, shows himself to be a master at life, reminding us that there is a plan of God to be entered into and not a reality to be avoided. The biblical reference of Mt 2, 19-23 presents the last two dreams of Joseph. Once again the request is clear. Joseph is to take Mary and the Child and return to the land of Israel. That which seemed to be a respite for Joseph after the flight into Egypt (Mt 2, 13-18) is revealed to be



a moment of waiting, because history proceeds according to the heart and wisdom of God.

Joseph's call to care for and make safe of life of both Jesus and Mary, signifies his entering into a will, into very precise plan - that of God. The stability and serenity certainly realized on the part of this father and husband, will once again be put to the test. Punctually the Angel returns to re-organize the plans, most likely the projects too, of Joseph for the future. Deep down, what man is not looking for serenity, for the stability of his home, security at work, happiness in his family? Once again for Joseph, his way will present two paths: enter or not the plan of God. What will Joseph do?

Very little of what we plan in life leads to a clear, certain or full realization. There is always something that interferes with the accomplishment of personal plans; thus we find ourselves often at a crossroads of whether or not to enter into that which appears unexpectedly and different. To enter or not those things desired by God, not as we would want them. This indeed is a challenge! In the ups and downs of our going, we should not be surprised that crises occur. That which tempers our maturity and forges the stature of a man wise in life is his capacity to understand and deal with these crises.

All the events of Joseph show the unexpected and different than supposed, the contrary to what was imagined and even the paradox of what one would never have dreamed. It was very real that moment when Joseph was called to take with him Mary, pregnant with Jesus. That he did not want to denounce her declares all the active will of this man. Joseph receives a role: that of father and husband. He is thus called to decide whether to give or withhold his "yes". He will understand more and more that it is the powerful hand of God which molds his yes and that nothing happens by chance.

The crisis moment for Joseph, constant in all four dreams, was to be continuously placed before a decision to be made; he was called regularly to recognize whether the events before him were simply human facts, or situations in which God could be acting. The mystery of the unforeseeable and the unexpected generates either rebellion, refusal and ego, or it becomes the whispered hearing of a voice which calls to trust, perceiving a will which accompanies and saves.

To believe in this possibility to be part of our story today, our own stories as filled with the presence of Jesus Christ, despite all the catastrophic events which we have before our eyes. This is man's true challenge in his relationship with God.

Joseph yet again accepts the command of the Angel to leave everything, the comfortable and secure land of Egypt, his patterns of life, the whole world he had built, to depart and start over. This is something humanly not simple. It is a continuous crucible of recognizing in the whispers of the Angel, whether this is the work of God or not, and thus to embrace it or not. Joseph is the man of interior life. He is the man of intimacy. Dreams, thoughts, whispers, actions are all moments of profound interiority. Joseph will not be left on his own in this story. He will always, punctually receive the whisper of a Word



which will make everything clear. In the awareness that his story cannot be a mistake, he takes this woman... bestows the name...flees to Egypt...returns from Egypt...goes to Galilee... Joseph each time will be called to enter into his mission - that which God has given to him.

It is here that each of us finds his possible evolution, growth and maturity. Either life is the boundary between the visible and the invisible, despite being right in the middle of a pandemic, between fear and disappointment but still with the awareness that God is behind things; or, history is a simple coming together of cause and effect that become inevitable.

Joseph will not be a spouse and father based on himself, but according to God. According to the pedagogy of God. Entering time after time into the plan of God.

We are in the world, but not of the world, because we are of God. Our experience invites us to see the Christian life not as something commercial, of just good duties and good feelings, which in a certain sense secure a presumed status quo, distancing the tragic from reality. To recognize, to re-discover the deeper sense of life means, most of the time, to specifically pass through the tragic so as to uncover the seed of salvation. Christians will not receive a call to normality. St. Joseph will become a father and spouse in a way that is so far from normal. Nothing is the same if you live it as children of God.

History is to be read by means of the invisible, otherwise it will remain purely horizontal. We will always be between remaining mediocre or entering into greatness. Thus it is important to remain on the boundary between the human and the divine.

The instability, caused by the pandemic, in every level of society, and the even more felt experience of disintegration, has brought to each of us the realization of our helplessness. This is certainly something sad, tragic, but still not to be unappreciated or dismissed. The experience of not being masters of our times and of our story has decisively placed everyone before the possibility of discerning how better to live this present moment, this moment given to us a gift. It is the possibility of embracing, dealing with, living reality, our own sufferings, our problems: either to weep over ourselves or enter into this experience and live it as a chance to meet God.

If you do not open your heart, you will not see these things. "May it happen to me according to your Word." (Lk 1,38). "Rising from sleep, he did as the Angel had told him" (Mt 1,24). In some way, the work of God passes through us. The possibilities are always two: remain closed, inert, firmly entrapped in our own horizon, in our own anxiety, or allow God to enter, who through events realizes His working. To each is given the chance to say yes or no.

The danger into which a Christian may fall today is to hold that prayer, faith, personal relationship with God is some form of "insurance" against misfortune. The experience of Joseph of Nazareth helps us to re-formulate our prayer: not deliver us from the

pandemic, because it is within Your power, a power of love, because you can...but instead pour into us Your Spirit of Wisdom so as to enter into the mystery of this story... a story inextricably linked to the “mysterium iniquitatis” which cannot be understood without reference to the mystery of the Redemption, the “mysterium paschale” of Jesus Christ. To enter the plan of God means we must recover our story in its entirety, in that richness of its goodness, unfortunately menaced and wounded by evil, restoring everything as a possibility of life, at times troubled and demanding. “The entire history of man is pervaded by a tremendous battle against the powers of darkness, a battle begun at the beginning of the world and will last, as the Lord says, until the last day. In the midst of this battle, man must fight without respite so as to remain united to the good, neither can he achieve interior unity except at the price of great efforts, with the help of the grace of God.” (Gaudium et Spes, 37)

### **At the heart of everything: recognize that you are saved**

The journey which Joseph makes each time towards Mary and Jesus takes us to the heart of the experience of the saved: to recognize that the objective will never be to just save oneself. Personal salvation is not sufficient, not enough. The deepest truth resides in seeing oneself as the instrument of salvation, of hope. Each of us then will either be a means of grace or an obstacle to grace. Joseph will be a channel of grace. Necessarily he must believe in the greatness of his story, overcoming his own individualism, his own plans, the idea of stability and comfort he had in Egypt, so as to enter into the will of God.

Either we will believe in the greatness of our mission, our story, or we will be mediocrities, betraying our Baptism. Either we believe in the importance of certain sufferings, catastrophic historical events with all the weight of pain and suffering they bear, as in fact possibilities, places where God may be met in an outstanding way, or everything will seem inevitable, making us feel like slaves and oppressed by the deceit of evil. “Human progress, which is a great good for man, carries with it a great temptation: with the order of values shaken, evil and good mixing, individuals and groups may look after their own things, not those of others. Thus the world ceases to be a place of genuine fraternity, and instead the increase in human power may threaten to destroy the human race itself.” (Gaudium et Spes 37). Joseph of Nazareth is the wise man capable of embracing the situation, the problem, the continuous challenges which propose themselves to be works of God in him. It is the art of understanding positively and allowing oneself to be transformed by problems while continuously searching for hope. It is the profound skill of someone who learns to love in a genuine and disinterested way, reaching levels of awareness, deep and beautiful in one’s heart. To be in the school of Joseph is to believe in the greatness of the work of God, of the work of the Holy Spirit, giving God permission to operate. Thus the experience of Joseph is unique, in his embracing of Mary and Jesus. The body of Jesus is made in the body of Mary, but is nourished by the bread of Joseph. This is the great dignity of our works: through them comes forth the action of God. This is where faith is. Faith is connected to this embracing: this is the first true fact to see as our own, to embrace, to affirm the work of God, to follow Him and make ourselves second to Him. To affirm God means to allow His work to occur

in us, thus surprising us with graces we would never have thought of. We are called to live, conscious that there is always a working of God to affirm, and to take it up, care for it, and nourish that work. Our tribulations are the occasions when we show ourselves His children.

To say yes to God is a grace to ask for unceasingly. It is very hard, but possible. It is precisely when we stop opposing, stop refusing the persons, things, and situations, that we live eternity, live heaven. Saying yes to God allows eternity to open itself within us.

What, in the end, do Jesus, Joseph and Mary have in common? This offers us the principle of the greatness of the Kingdom of God. Mary, in her acceptance of the announcement of the Angel; Joseph in all his activity as spouse and father; Jesus, at Gethsemane as the Son abandoning Himself to the will of the Father. “May it be for me according to Your Word” (Lk 1,38). “He did as the Angel ordered him” (Mt 1,24), “Not my will but Yours be done” (Lk 22,46). These are all expressions that say the same thing: trust in God. From all this comes the adventure that leads to redemption. On Gethsemane is manifested the greatness of our battle, showing to our humanity the capacity of trusting in God.

To return to living in the awareness of being children of God, called to entrust themselves to Him, is the greatest challenge given to the heart of man. Very certainly, this pandemic has given us the possibility of doing so. In the end, as people of faith, Christians, aware of our divine childhood as a result of our Baptism, we must see that there is always a Will to enter into.

Above and beyond, every reasonable dialog, reflection, consideration, sociological, economic and cultural literature, the Christian is he, who called to bring ferment to history, sees that he is in a story of salvation made of unexpected opportunities. These are never weighed on the balance of whether I like them or not, whether I will suffer more or less. It is a journey, a path made of the unforeseeable and the unexpected, which calls us to trust always, and for this reason, invites us to a profound discernment of the heart in the light of reason.

Rather than take the measure of our reality, the believer is called to walk in the story of salvation, which for us takes place here and now, in the middle of a pandemic, which despite causing upheaval in all our comfortable realities, calls us to consider the deep and intimate truth of these events: that every story of salvation is a way of redemption. The God of love, of tenderness does nothing other than this.

To us is always given the responsibility of choice, of perspective: the capacity of knowing how to act and live wisely among the things of life.

We need to learn step by step the art of penetrating into the meanderings of the Mystery, which despite its unpredictability and inaccessibility, becomes a constant possibility of recognizing that we are loved and therefore are able to love. Joseph of Nazareth has done nothing less than this.



# The Foundation of the Family Spirit **FAITH**

Fr. Gregory Finn, OSJ



**I**f everything falls within the will of God, everything can only be fully known and lived by us through the exercise of faith.

Consider: it is God's will which establishes all of Creation. It is His will that ordains salvation through the Incarnation and Passion and Resurrection of His Son. It is His will that sanctification be the work of the Spirit in His children. It is His will that we are born, that we are welcomed into the relationship of grace at Baptism, that we journey through an earthly life which is a gradual transformation and realization of that sanctification, and that we arrive eventually into the heavenly life. All of this we know only by faith.



Further, consider: as part of all this, it is His will that religious families be founded as part of that work of sanctification. God's is the inspiration that launches it. He chooses the Founder to whom the work is entrusted. He is the one who cultivates the family and invites others to join. He constitutes its charism and makes it a pathway of holiness and service to the Kingdom. He makes it fruitful to each of those invited to the family, so that can arrive at and lead others to, that life of Heaven.

God's invitation to each of us is individual and personal, and each of us has perceived it in a unique way. It is an invitation to become part of a specific religious family. That invitation from God is accompanied by the particular graces and gifts that will be needed. That invitation envisions the contributions to the individuals themselves and that they themselves will make as they embrace the calling. That invitation is also a family invitation, for it calls the family to embrace the individual. Their calling is empowered and sustained alongside others likewise called – that is God's design. The fulfillment of this plan for individuals, for the family for the Kingdom is only and always together and it will lead to a communion to be enjoyed eternally. All of this can only be known and embraced and lived by faith.

Our own personal faith is what allows us to perceive the fullness of the reality in which we live and which goes beyond our senses. It allows us to reach the God who is Lord of all things and know Him personally. Our faith shows us our place in all that God plans and disposes.

Our own personal faith leads to understanding: finding meanings of love, goodness and providential accomplishment in all this; comprehending the workings of the Lord in the experiences of sin, grace, mercy, redemption that we are immersed in; and knowing our place in it all, why we are here, what we are to do, how we are to do it and where we are going.

Our personal faith leads us to respond to what is perceived and understood. We hear and listen to what God is showing us and telling us. We embrace His call and become a member of a family – the Oblates of St. Joseph. We commit ourselves to the efforts to be a servant of the Lord and an active member of the family. We persevere with dedication in realizing what the Lord has invited us to. We ultimately achieve our God-given earthly tasks and our eternal destiny personally and as a member of the family.

Is this not what lies at the core of that “hidden life” of St. Joseph? A man whose personal faith, lying unseen but real and powerful, within the depths of his soul, sees and understands and then commits to what the great and invisible God he worships asks of him? Only by faith can we begin to enter in the mystery of the man whom God, through the inspiration of our Holy Founder, proposes to us as the model of our lives. It is by his own profound faith, tested, deepened, enduring, that Joseph is the ready hearer of a divine call and a dedicated accomplisher of the task - to bring Jesus to us all.



Our sense of family as Oblates of St. Joseph depends on God who creates, who orchestrates and sustains all this reality. It depends on our heeding the call and becoming a willing and effective family member. It depends on a perspective that makes sense of all we are part of and feel drawn to do – a perspective granted only by faith.

### Points to Ponder

1. Can I say that I live by faith? How do I know that I do? In what does it show in my life?
2. Can I clearly see the hand of the Lord in my calling and all that derives from it?
3. Can I clearly see the hand of the Lord in creating and guiding the Oblates of St. Joseph?  
Can I see my place in, the calling of others to be there too, the direction the Lord wants us to go in?
4. Am I confident God will sustain me as part of it?
5. Have I meditated on the faith of St. Joseph or invoked him to help me grow in it?
6. How can I grow in faith to be a better part of this family?

### Community Reflection

1. Are we Oblates seen as a community, a family, inspired and brought together by God?
2. Are we individually seen as men of faith as members of our family?
3. Does our community inspire others to seek and live out of faith?





# GIUSEPPE

## ONE of US

Fr. Alberto Barbaro, OSJ

**W**hile I was thinking about what to write and what contribution to make to our reflection on Saint Joseph, I realized that I had gotten myself into a big mess.

The reason is that we do not have much material available on this saint. What do we know about Joseph of Nazareth? Other than the name and some events related to the childhood of Jesus, we have no other significant information. He doesn't say a word. In the episode of the bewilderment and the discovery of Jesus in the temple among the doctors (see Lk. 2,41-59), it is the Mother who recalls the son, not the Father: "Son, why did you do this to us? Here, your father and I were looking for you in anguish". He speaks little, indeed he says nothing and his language is silence. However, he is a good listener. He is alert to the voice of the angel who speaks to him in his sleep. He also reveals himself to be an excellent executor of orders whenever the eternal Father asks him something. Finally, he carries out manual work expressed in the most modest and most tiring forms, those which earned Jesus the title of "son of the carpenter" (see Mt. 13, 55). The problem is that the life of this man, that of a simple craftsman, lacks any important note. In some way, it seems to me to relive the wonder of the inhabitants of Nazareth when listening to Jesus, they wonder about the wisdom of this extraordinary character, knowing that he is the carpenter's son. As if to say that from a normal life it is almost impossible to get something useful and good. And yet this figure so close to Jesus and to Mary, inserted in the Messianic genealogy, if carefully observed, reveals itself to be so rich in elements and meanings that only the simple and the humble know how to recognize, appreciate and make their own. They are above all simple, and Joseph is among them, telling us that there are two ways of understanding and living the life that has been given to us as a gift. One is to think that nothing is a miracle; the other is to convince oneself that everything is a miracle. To belong to those who are convinced that everything is a miracle, we must grasp the difference between living and existing. Joseph belongs to those who believe that everything is a miracle because he lived a good life. Oscar Wilde was of the opinion that living is the rarest thing on the face of the earth. Most people today only exist.



We, despite not having chosen to live, must learn to live. If existing is a fact, living is instead an art. Those who live and believe that everything is a miracle are not visionaries or dreamers with "closed eyes", they belong to the ranks of those who do not want to miss the appointment with normality. In fact today, the real problem is this: we risk to break away permanently and irreparably from everyday life, and for this reason dreams are not realized. The existence of Joseph other than in "working", is a constant and continuous reminder of normalcy. If we want to be happy for a day, just organize a party. If we want this happiness to last about two weeks, just go on a cruise. And if we want it to last a year, we must inherit a fortune. If our desire is that it lasts a lifetime, then it is urgent to give our life a purpose worthy of it. Joseph gave a purpose to his life, trusting completely in the Lord. In obedience to the divine will, our carpenter from Nazareth teaches us first of all to live wisely and with depth. His example puts us in a position to understand that a full life consists, for example, in mitigating the suffering that is in the people we meet and in arousing trust in those we approach. For a father and a mother, as were Joseph and Mary, it means not merely looking at their children, but contemplating them because they are the expression of innocence and purity that asks us to re-emerge even in us who have lost it. Joseph teaches that having a place to stay, that is, a home, is important; having someone to love is indispensable, because this means family. Finally having both, a home and a family, this is a blessing.

Saint Joseph is not a different and distant man from us. Even if the Gospels seem to suggest the contrary to us because of its special closeness to the Son of God, the Spouse of Mary is close and very similar to us. What little the Sacred Scripture says about him certainly makes him an extraordinary character, but not entirely removed from us. Let's try to understand how it is possible that a man so deeply loved by God could be quietly considered one of us. I am convinced that this closeness is not just for a life that oscillated, as we have seen, between the family, the workshop and the synagogue. As it happened for Joseph, the putative father of Jesus, even for us nothing of life, of our history concerns only us. Often we are under the illusion that everything is enclosed and established in what we can think of, say and do. In reality it is not so. The earthly story of this gentle and just man speaks of a link between earth and heaven. It probably never happened to us to perceive the presence of an angel in a dream. But how many times have we felt



a thought, a word, a feeling coming not from us. Some experiences or persons who reminded us that not everything is played out on the horizontal plane of human affairs and that in life, for those who know how to grasp and look deeply, there are many points of encounter with heaven. We do not proceed only horizontally. Think of the "geographical grid" made up of parallels and meridians: how many meeting points. Our life like that of Joseph is not just ours. The bond with others, a meeting and a meaningful experience of life, the desire to be better, the perception of our limits, our own frailties, are some of the meeting points between heaven and earth; they are, in a sense, our "parallels" that intersect with the "meridians" of heaven. Joseph's life suggests that the experience of every man and woman is a continuous encounter with heaven. The venerable Anne Marie Medeleine Delbr  l, a mystic and French poet wrote that "every little action is an immense event in which we are given paradise, in which we can give heaven. What does it matter what we have to do. All we do is nothing but the rind of the splendid reality, the meeting of the soul with God, renewed every minute, every minute increased in grace, always more beautiful for his God". For this woman of our time the commitments and the inconveniences are also occasions in which God and men meet: "Do they play? Soon we are going to open: it is God who comes to love us. An information? Here it is: it is God who comes to love us. Is it time to get to the table? Let's go: it is God who comes to love us. Let him do it. " It is a characteristic that brings him closer to many tireless seekers of "full life".

Another reason that makes this "giant of faith" not far from every human being is suggested to us by Jesus' childhood stories. The Son of God was born in a difficult and complicated context, just like the existence of so many men, comparable to a pendulum that oscillates between happy and sad moments. The pains and joys of St. Joseph recall this alternation of joys and sufferings. I wonder how Joseph's thoughts must have been in the days when God decided to become a man among men. Certainly not very distant from ours when we do everything not to lose faith before ever greater situations, capable of dismantling certainties and convictions without mercy, such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the emergence of a serious illness. Joseph constantly meets God because he had chosen to let life speak. Whenever the narrative events from the Gospels seem to be denied that the angel in a dream had communicated to our carpenter from Nazareth, especially the "do not fear", God intervenes. As for the life of Joseph, even for ours we can perhaps speak of a hidden God, perhaps silent, but certainly, not absent: we must be able to intercept him. Not an easy task, but not impossible, as long as you look deeper and deeper without stopping at the surface of events.

He is a hidden God, but not absent, perhaps because the Almighty loves to observe, not to impose himself. This is also an aspect that brings this gentleman closer to those who struggle, despite the adversities of life, to preserve the faith and continue to believe and hope.

Joseph allowed himself be led by the Lord. The carpenter of Nazareth directs us towards an anonymous and not ostentatious sanctity, not made up of heroic deeds but which is expressed in the small, in the daily, in the usual: "if sin is the banality of evil, holiness is the normality of good". The closer we get to Nazareth, the more God grows in the world. Faith has to do with the daily experience of every person and family. To those of us who see how everyday life is exhausting and who often struggle to connect faith and daily life, Joseph teaches that every human reality can become a sign of God's presence. Every action, every moment can transpire into a bigger reality. For this reason, Joseph continues to be one of us.



# JOSEPH

## SERVUM SERVORUM DEI

### A Model for Priestly & Consecrated Life of Service

Fr. Michael Odubela, OSJ



**T**he title *Servus Servorum Dei* was introduced by Pope Gregory I, popularly known as Pope Gregory the Great, (590-604) as a way of depicting a path of humility for the Pope, other than reckon with the exalted title of the “Ecumenical Patriarch” granted to the then Archbishop of Constantinople by the Byzantine Emperor and the title has since been reserved to the Roman Pontiff. Without prejudice, however, to the reserve usage of the title, I warmly invite us reflect on it in a broader manner, especially as it applies to us in the Priestly/Consecrated life, as Oblates of St. Joseph who are called to serve in love and, moreover, as it invites us to cast our reflection on the imitation of St. Joseph, who no doubt lived the title out as an office his entire life (cf. *Redemptoris Custos* 8).

The title *Servus servorum Dei* is rooted in the Gospel, as it can easily be implied from the passage where Jesus indicated that whoever wants to be great among his disciples must be ready to be the servant (cf. Mt 20:25-27). ‘Servant leadership’ was the style of Christ the Lord who says of Himself, “I am among you as one who serves” (Lk 22:27). Jesus by this saying contrasts the position of the servant leader to that of a “boss leader” who sits at table and waits to be served. It is very clear that what the Lord refers to here is the disposition of the leader other than the position occupied. A leader with the right disposition humbles himself to be a model of service for those under



“  
**Servus Servorum Dei**  
- Pope St. Gregory the Great



his care. He does not lord it over them or flaunt authority over them (cf. Mat 20:25). Leaders who feel themselves high above/before others are easily noticed from their attitude and approach to things and to life's situation generally. They feel unique and special, desiring that everyone bows at their feet and hail them at every given time (cf. Lk 20:46). They feel peerless even among equals, attributing their position to their intelligence and ability. They see themselves as successful, called to be served and not to serve.

Long before Jesus would make the path of servant leadership a model for His followers, St. Joseph, His legal father, had lived it out and showed Him the example of a servant leader. Although the Scriptures did not really tell us about the acts of Joseph in this regard, one can, however, infer from his style of life that Joseph was not a 'boss leader' over the family of Nazareth. His silence is the first indication to testify that he was not bossy and he was not one who tries to gain popularity for himself, being the man under whose care the long awaited Messiah finally manifested Himself. Joseph's silence, made even louder by his humility, was not out of ignorance of who the child Jesus was. He knew beforehand that the child to be born is the Emmanuel, the Son of God that generations had long awaited. His encounter with the Angel Gabriel already revealed that to him (cf. Mt. 1:20); the nativity of the Child testified to it (cf. Lk 2:7-20); the visit of the Magi acclaimed it (cf. Mt. 2:1-12) and the presentation of the Baby in the Temple sealed it (cf. Lk 2: 22-40).

It was not for lack of knowledge or information that Joseph did not publicise his personality or make ridiculous claims about his person in connection with the Divine Son, but it was out of consistent witnessing to a life of virtue that he walked the path of simplicity. In fact, it had been noted right from the moment of his encounter with the Angel that he was a just man (cf. Mt. 1:19). The sense of justice connotes righteousness which does not allow one to arrogate to oneself



that which by right does not belong to him or to make any false claim for oneself of that which does not emanate from one's ability or power. Joseph, having always loved and revered God, knew his life was for the fulfilment of God's will and wanted nothing more but to love and serve God.

On another hand, the humility Joseph exhibited at the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, after he had gone missing for three days, speaks of the fact that he was a servant leader who gave free hand also to his spouse, Mary, in the management of the affairs of the family. Contrary to the Jewish tradition of his time that relegates women to the background and prefer to have them seen rather than heard, Joseph maintained a balanced relationship with Mary, giving her a warm treatment, other than what other

women of her time perhaps enjoyed. Luke tells us that it was Mary who spoke at the finding of the Child, with both of them present, and not Joseph the father (cf. Lk 2:41-52). With the event of the finding in the Temple, Joseph's name and activities were not mentioned anymore in a direct active sense but only in reference to the person of Jesus (cf. Mt. 13:55). His mission of granting legal status to Jesus as a Son of Man and descendant of David had been fulfilled and like an obedient servant who had done what he had to do, went quietly away from the scene.

Joseph's gentle and humble disposition is not to be mistaken in any way for a *laissez-faire* attitude or the attitude of one who shy away from responsibility, as some might want to interpret the episode of the finding in the temple where he left the words to Mary (cf. Lk 2:41-52). Joseph was thoroughly immersed in his duties and was responsible for the upkeep of the family under his care that he was distinguished as the well-known carpenter of Nazareth (cf. Mt. 13:55) and reckoned as a just man (cf. Mt 1:19). He was a father and head of the holy family in every competent sense and he discharged his duties not only in relation to social demands but above all in relation to the Divine will (cf. Mt 2:13).

To be a ruler, or better still a leader, is to have something entrusted to one's care which could be in form of treasure or an empire with the people who share the same idea/vision as persons from among whom the leader is chosen, and who acts as his subjects. In every case where there is a leader there must also be someone to be lead. So much more than governing over things, leadership is, first and foremost, about governing others of the same specie as the one who leads. Joseph was a leader in the home of Nazareth and conscious of the extra ordinary nature of his vocation, he became humbler still. Where greater power reigns, the steward becomes humbler, especially if he realises the trust placed on his shoulders. Joseph knew his place as the first member of the holy family – being the head, yet he was conscious of his unworthiness in the affairs of the Lord. He was humble and did not consider himself equal to any of the major protagonists of human salvation, namely Jesus and Mary, with whom he lived. As a fervent Jew, he knew the distance between God and man and wishes to respect that; he has heard of warnings against approaching the presence of the Lord (cf. Ex. 19:12; Ex 40:1-38) and he has read that those who see the Lord face-to-face shall not live (Gen 32:30; Deut





5:24; Judges 6:22-23, 13:22), yet trusting in the mercy of the same Lord for those He called, he believed he has passed over from death to life.

Bringing the example of St. Joseph to our various communities, we can also x-ray our roles as leaders in our own capacities as Superiors/Rectors, Administrators, Parish Priests/Parish Vicars etc. The Christian community of persons, bound by a common way of life, is also to be stirred by a leader (and leaders in various offices) who precedes others in authority and responsibility. An Oblate placed in position of leadership is to be a leader after the example given by the Lord Jesus when He says the leader must be the servant of all (cf. Mt. 20:26; Mk 9:35; Mk 10:44) and when He puts this into practice by stooping low to wash the feet of his disciples (cf. Jn. 13:12-17). Jesus came to give us life (cf. Jn. 10:10) and to show us the path of enlivening one another. This road, however, must pass through the humble service we render to one another in sincerity of heart. He says, after washing the disciples feet, “you will be blessed if you know these things and do them” (Jn. 13:17). The Lord teaches that the service of love is the foundation to being blessed, for indeed no one can be truly blessed who has not reached out in love or charity (even if only through prayers, as experienced in the life of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, who turned her cell into a stable mission station by reaching out in prayer to missionaries) to others. The humble service of St. Joseph to Jesus and Mary says it all.

The temptation to want to be associated with big responsibilities or high offices sometimes makes us disdain the little ways that could easily bring about our sanctification. It is not the size of the office, the bigness of the parish, the loftiness of the responsibility we discharge that matters, but the spirit with which the work is carried out. Many in Nazareth do not know that heaven was on earth in the small home of St. Joseph, since Jesus was not born in the palace; but in that little home of Nazareth the service of Joseph amounted to a greater reward than the responsibility of Kings who reign in palaces. Nothing is to be despised or belittled when it comes to serving the Lord. Wherever souls are found to be served, there is always Jesus to be served and His interest to be attended to. Assuming the spirit of St. Joseph in disposing ourselves solely to the work of Our Father and not conditionally to our measurement or qualitative value of the apostolate is the secret of a life of fulfilment in the Lord’s service.

We must always remember the words of our Founder that, “if, in the likeness of the great Patriarch St. Joseph, you were to serve Jesus in humble tasks inferior in dignity to those of St. Peter, you must remember that the humble guardian of Jesus holds a higher place in Heaven than the great Apostle” (Lt. 248). Merit is not in size but in quality and quality is not measured by size either but by faithfulness. Let us, therefore, rethink the maxim “Be extraordinary in ordinary things” which reminds us of the great care and fidelity our services require and in our humble application of it in our daily life, preach Jesus, love Jesus and make His teaching known to all and sundry. St. Joseph was hailed in the preface of his liturgical Mass as “a wise and faithful steward in charge of the Lord’s household”. His life is the encouragement we have from the very beginning from our founder, St. Joseph Marengo. Let us be servants of the servants of God entrusted to our care after the example of our Patron and Guide, knowing that it is always the interest of Jesus we serve, each time we bend in humility to live out our apostolate and to love Jesus in all that we care for. St. Joseph remains our sure guide, if we follow faithfully in his steps, we will arrive at the city of love above where the servants of the servants of God are celebrated in eternity.

May St. Joseph pray for us. Amen!

# SAINT JOSEPH

## Son of David

Br. David Pohorsky, OSJ



**F**rom a modern standpoint a majority of people would not point to King David as a model king, yet for Israel he was just that. The Jewish law did not look kindly upon him. After all, he was an adulterer and murderer who brought death and destruction on his nation. He could not keep his family in line; his sons committed treason against him; and his kingdom fell apart during his grandson's rule. Nevertheless, his legacy persists as the greatest king of Israel.

God works in very mysterious ways. King David's life was radically changed by God, as also was the life of St. Joseph. Although David did not always live a life of heroic virtue by Christian standards, he served as a model of social consciousness for Israel. While he did wrong, he never turned his back on God. Despite the unraveling of his life after the death of Uriah, the Hittite, he always turned back to God and never lost his trust in him.

King David was the image of a good king, while Joseph is the image of the just man. By royal standards, David was a good king, especially during his early reign, but also throughout his entire time in authority. He failed by not living up to God's standards. Joseph, the just man, on the other hand, consistently lived up to and surpassed the memory of David, who "was a man after God's own heart."

Both David and Joseph appear from the fringes of society, and are quintessential models of the last becoming first. Nobody saw anything of interest in Joseph, either as a man or as the son of David; yet, just like King David and the Joseph of the Old Testament, "God put him in charge of his house."

It was God, breaking from the expected, who raised King David and St. Joseph from their lowly states in life to their places high in the social consciousness of their respective religions. The family of David was from the south, far from the center of power. When Samuel visited the house of Jesse, David was not Samuel's first choice, because Samuel was choosing by appearance only. Similarly, Joseph was probably not the man to be chosen based on appearance or social status. Yet God chose both of these men to do extraordinary things. Why? God looks at purity of heart, which both Joseph and David possessed. Both trusted in the Lord, despite struggles and trials.

On a human level, David never stood a chance when Samuel visited his family. In fact, in this encounter he is never mentioned by name. It is the mystery of God, who raised him from nothingness, the lowest of the sons of Jesse, living in an obscure village, to become not only the king of Israel, but also the model of all kings that followed him.

In the same way, God chose a man, Joseph, from the obscure town of Nazareth, and raised him, not only to holiness, but to the heights of heaven, so that nobody is greater than he except for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Interestingly enough, an apocryphal account of Joseph names him one of the many suitors for Mary. While not necessarily credible, it serves to highlight the analogy between David and Joseph. Just as David surely would have been rejected by Samuel, so Joseph would have been, if he had not been chosen by God through the sign of a flowering staff. There is nothing that can be pointed to as evidence that Joseph was anything special in appearance; yet he was different from any other son of David, and from the people around him, because of his profound interior life.

As soon as they accepted God's will, both David and Joseph's resolve was tested by a man with whom their life will be defined. For David, this man was Goliath. It was David who brought God into this situation. Throughout David's youth, and for the rest of his life, God would be there to protect him. In spite of trouble, he put his trust in God. With God on his side, he proceeded forth with purity of heart to vanquish evil. It was not as an armored soldier that he conquered Goliath, but rather through trust in God.

In the same way, Joseph conquered Herod. He knew that like David, he was facing his own Goliath, and without trust in God, he did not stand a chance. With great trust, he allowed God to defend him and his family. From Bethlehem to Egypt to the hidden years in Nazareth, Joseph relied on God for the protection of his family.

In a very interesting way, the life of David parallels the history of Israel, whom God raised from nothingness and chose as his special instrument. Israel, like David, sometimes missed the mark and put other things ahead of God. While King David is the ideal man in the social consciousness of Israel and is considered their best king, he is not referred to as the just man. This honor is reserved to his descendent, Joseph of Nazareth, the son of King David who played the final essential role in the preparation for the Messiah.





## DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH in California

### SANTA CRUZ:

location of the diocesan Shrine of St. Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer; permanent St. Joseph Art Exhibit; Guardian of the Redeemer Book and Gift Shop with a focus on books and art that promote devotion to St. Joseph and Josephite-Marellian spirituality; office for Guardian of the Redeemer Publications; headquarters for the publication of the quarterly (national) Guardian of the Redeemer Magazine; Pro-Life teaching, healing, prayer and reconciliation ministry featuring the garden sanctuary and bronze statue of “St. Joseph, Patron of the Unborn,” the “Wall of Remembrance” and the “Book of the Innocents;” a garden meditation pathway featuring fourteen bronze tableaus on the Seven Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph; an active “Family of St. Joseph” (SLIM) who participate in the weekly Wednesday devotion to St. Joseph and in the celebration of the annual St. Joseph and St. Marelo feast days; annual solemn novena to St. Joseph and day of recollection for FSJ (SLIM); annual Fall pilgrimage for the Santa Cruz, Loomis, Madera and Bakersfield FSJs (SLIMs); monthly SLIM ongoing formation gatherings using the ten Marellian Pathways by Fr. Mario Guinzoni, OSJ; occasional retreats and pilgrimages that promote devotion to St. Joseph; a Holy Spouses spiritual support group is promoted and celebrated each January 23.

### LOOMIS:

a seminary and novitiate community that lives the Oblate spirituality of devotion to St. Joseph in a daily, weekly and annual feast days rhythm; an active FSJ-SLIM chapter that is implementing the nearly monthly ongoing formation program of the ten Marellian Pathways; an annual solemn novena to St. Joseph with a FSJ-SLIM Day of Recollection; a Marelo Youth Retreat Center apostolate that incorporates devotion to St. Joseph in some of its youth retreats; a St. Joseph Marelo Parish apostolate that promotes devotion to St. Joseph through occasional preaching, devotions and publications.

### OXNARD:

the St. Joseph Marelo House of Studies for postulants and major seminarians live the Oblate devotion to St. Joseph as outlined in our Constitutions, General Directory and Province Rules. In the 2010-2011 academic year the monthly retreats are focused on Josephite spirituality.



## **MADERA and BAKERSFIELD:**

the Oblate parish priests try to live the virtues of St. Joseph and to pray together the Litany of St. Joseph at the daily noon visit; they pray the litany and seven sorrows and joys devotion with the people after the Wednesday parish Masses; votive Masses to St. Joseph are celebrated on Wednesdays when possible; the annual novena to St. Joseph is preached to the people in March; Holy Spouses spiritual support societies are promoted in the marriage preparation programs and celebrated on January 23; parish building projects are specially consecrated to the patronage of St. Joseph; the pro-life apostolate of spiritual adoption of babies in the womb is under the patronage of St. Joseph; efforts are being made to implement the Constitutions and By-laws for SLIM but it is at a very small and initial phase.

## **Devotion to St. Joseph in Pennsylvania**

### **PARISHES:**

The members of our Province who minister in our four parishes: St. Anthony, in Exeter, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Rocco in Pittston, and Annunciation Parish, in Hazelton strive to live the Oblate spirituality of devotion to St. Joseph in a daily manner by reciting Litany of St. Joseph during the noonday visit together; in a weekly manner with the recitation of the Seven Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph after the votive Mass to St. Joseph in each Church with the parishioners, culminating with a blessing with the relic of St. Joseph Marelllo. We also have devotions for the Annual Novena to St. Joseph (March 10-18) and celebrate the feast solemnly on March 19th. The feasts of the Holy Spouses Jan. 23rd, and St. Joseph the Worker May 1st, are not celebrated as solemnly because we gather together to celebrate these feasts at the Seminary. (see below) All the parishes have people who belong to our Josephite-Marellian Laity (SLIM), who attend a monthly meeting at the Seminary preceded by the weekly devotions. In Hazelton about 20 of these members attend a monthly class on the Theology of St. Joseph.

### **ST. JOSEPH'S OBLATE SEMINARY:**

- headquarters for the quarterly publication of the Joseph (Newsletter of the Province)
- Daily recitation of the Litany of St. Joseph during the daily noon visit
- Weekly Wednesday devotions to St. Joseph consisting of the Votive Mass of St. Joseph, followed by the recitation of the seven sorrows and joys of St. Joseph; culminating with the blessing with the relic of St. Joseph Marelllo. It is well attended by the Josephite-Marellian Laity (SLIM).
- A monthly meeting with the Josephite-Marellian Laity (SLIM) is preceded by Wednesday devotion to St. Joseph
- Annually solemn celebrations of the feasts of the Holy Spouses in January, St. Joseph in March, and St. Joseph the Worker on Labor Day in September.





# SAINT JOSEPH

## From the Earliest Tradition

Province of Nigeria



### Introduction

**I**t is an indubitable fact that St. Joseph was never recorded to have said a word in the Sacred Scriptures, nevertheless his life examples spoke volumes that echoes till present time and makes the humble saint to be ranked above the most eloquent and best writers among the saints.

From the Church's earliest Tradition, Joseph has been celebrated as guardian of the Holy Family and he came to be revered as guardian of God's family on earth as well over time. St. Joseph, son of Jacob, mirrors perfectly the life of the first Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel), who was sold into slavery in Egypt and who saved the Pharaoh's family and the Egyptian nation, as well as all the other people who sought food in Egypt and, hence, was referred to as "Saviour of the world."

God spoke to St. Joseph in dreams, just as He did with Joseph of old. While the first Joseph was **sold** into Egypt, St. Joseph was **sent** into Egypt by an angel. While the first Joseph saved his people from physical death - from famine by storing up grain for bread, St. Joseph saved us from the spiritual death of sin by preserving for us He Who would become the very Bread of Eternal Life. "Go to Joseph" was the admonishment of Pharaoh to the cry of those hungry for food in Egypt.



St. Teresa of Avila,  
*ardent devotee of St. Joseph*

## St. Joseph as Patron and Protector

St. Joseph from ages past has been known as a saint who cares for the well being of people generally and specifically also in relation to the salvation of their souls, hence, St. Teresa of Avila spoke often of her great devotion to St. Joseph; she claimed that he (St. Joseph) never failed her and always gave her far more than what she had asked for. St Joseph Mareello re echoed this belief when he said that “if St. Joseph do not grant graces, he will not be St. Joseph”. Thus, it could be said that the name Joseph is synonymous to granting graces/favours. The experience of the Oblates of St. Joseph Congregation in Nigeria no doubt witness to this same fact, reflecting on the numerous ways St. Joseph has acted not only as a patron, but more so as a protector. His statue beautifully mounted on the seminary Chapel’s dome, as it overlooks the seminary compound speaks on its own the watchful role St. Joseph has over the entire seminary environment and especially over the members of the community who fly constantly to his protection.

Although, the first to hold Jesus Christ so dear to his heart, after the Blessed Virgin, the role and place of St. Joseph in the Church and in the Church’s liturgy was not easy to come by. It was, nevertheless, with gratitude to God’s grace in the life of St. Joseph that on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX, who had defined in 1854 the great dogma of Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception promulgated his encyclical *Quemadmodum Deus* proclaiming St. Joseph the “Patron and Protector of the Universal Church,” saying: “In the same way that he once kept unceasing holy watch over the family of Nazareth, so now does he protect and defend with his heavenly patronage the Church of Christ.”



In less than 20 years later, Pope Leo XIII wrote his splendid encyclical letter, *Quamquam Pluries*, “On Devotion to St. Joseph”. He ended the encyclical with this prayer: “Most beloved father, dispel the evil of falsehood and sin. Our most mighty protector, graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness, and just as once you saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend God’s holy Church from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity, shield each one of us by your constant protection so that supported by your example and your help, we may be able to live a pious life and to die a holy death.”

Driven by the singular quest to promote devotion to this great patriarch, Pope Leo XIII goes on to address his Venerable Brethren to support devotion to Joseph: “That God may be more favourable to our prayers, and that He may come with bounty and promptitude to the aid of His Church, We judge it of deep utility for



the Christian people, continually to invoke with great piety and trust, together with the Virgin-Mother of God, her chaste Spouse, the Blessed Joseph; and We regard it as most certain that this will be most pleasing to the Virgin mother herself... We have seen the devotion to St. Joseph, which in past times the Roman Pontiffs have developed and gradually increased, grow into greater proportions in Our time, particularly after Pius IX, of happy memory, Our predecessor, proclaimed, yielding to the request of a large number of bishops, this holy patriarch the patron of the Catholic Church. And as, moreover, it is of high importance that the devotion to St. Joseph should engraft itself upon the daily pious practices of Catholics, We desire that the Christian people should be urged to it above all by Our words and authority."

Joseph's great dignity and privilege stems from his role as the Spouse of Mary whose dignity is so lofty that nothing created can rank above it, and from his role as the legal father of Jesus. He is not a foster father, (as many people erroneously hold and teach. The term foster, not even in the English dictionary meaning nor in the Hebrew understanding of the word, does it capture or fully represent the role that Joseph played in the life of our Redeemer) but as a legal father, Joseph has full rights to claim Jesus as his son, even though not the biological father of Jesus. Pope Leo goes on to say in the same encyclical that: "Joseph shines among all mankind by the most august dignity, since by divine will, he was the guardian of the Son of God and reputed as His father among men. Hence it came about that the Word of God was humbly subject to Joseph, that He obeyed him, and that He rendered to him all those offices that children are bound to render to their parents. From this two-fold dignity flowed the obligation which nature lays upon the head of families, so that Joseph became the guardian, the administrator, and the legal defender of the divine house whose chief he was. And during the whole course of his life he fulfilled those charges and those duties. He set himself to protect with a mighty love and a daily solicitude his spouse and the Divine Infant; regularly by his work he earned what was necessary for the one and the other for nourishment and clothing; he guarded from death the Child threatened by a monarch's jealousy, and found for Him a refuge; in the miseries of the journey and in the bitterness of exile he was ever the companion, the assistance, and the upholder of the Virgin and of Jesus. Now, the divine house which Joseph ruled with the authority of a father, contained within its limits the scarce-born Church. From the same fact that the most holy Virgin is the mother of Jesus Christ springs the reality that she is the mother of all Christians whom she bore on Mount Calvary amid the supreme throes of the Redemption; Jesus Christ is, in a manner, the firstborn of Christians, who by the adoption and Redemption are his brothers. And for such reasons the Blessed Patriarch looks upon the multitude of Christians who make up the Church as confided specially to his trust -- this limitless family spread over the earth, over which, because he is the spouse of Mary and the Father of Jesus Christ he holds, as it were, a paternal authority. It is, then, natural and worthy that as the Blessed Joseph ministered to all the needs of the family at Nazareth and girt about with his protection, he should now cover with the cloak of his heavenly patronage and defend the Church of Jesus Christ (n. 3).

In a discourse on March 19, 1969, Pope Paul VI invited Catholics to turn to Joseph's patronage as the Church has been wont to do in these recent times, for herself in the first place, with a spontaneous theological reflection on the marriage of divine and human action in the great economy of the Redemption, in which economy the first—the divine one—is wholly sufficient unto itself, while the second—the human action which is ours—though capable of nothing (cf. Jn. 15:5), is never dispensed from a humble but conditional and ennobling collaboration. The Church also calls upon Joseph as her protector because of a profound and ever present desire to reinvigorate her ancient life with true evangelical virtues, such as shine forth in St. Joseph. The

same invitation is extended to us today, not only to invoke the aid of St. Joseph but to also allow ourselves to be schooled and shaped after the example of St. Joseph who dedicated his life entirely for the interest of Jesus. We need to become “the Josephs” of modern time where the will of God will find prompt obedience and His WORD will find an abode in peace.

In his 1989 apostolic exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church), Pope John Paul II discussed the importance of Saint Joseph’s patronage in our day: This patronage must be invoked as ever necessary for the Church, not only as a defence against all dangers, but also, and indeed primarily, as an impetus for her renewed commitment to evangelization in the world and to re-evangelization in those lands and nations where—as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*—religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and...are now put to a hard test.” In order to bring the first proclamation of Christ, or to bring it anew wherever it has been neglected or forgotten, the Church has need of special “power from on high” (cf. Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8): a gift of the Spirit of the Lord, a gift which is not unrelated to the intercession and example of his saints.

## Conclusion

There are many good reasons why St. Joseph should be the special heavenly patron of dedicated souls - in the religious life, in the priesthood, and among the laity like us and ours. But as the Church teaches, he is especially to be venerated and his patronage invoked because he was the guardian of the Virgin Mary and the caring father of Jesus. We may confidently say that the Holy Family which Joseph ruled with the authority of a father contained within itself the first beginnings of the Church. So that, even as Mary is the Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of Christ, so Joseph is the Protector of Holy Church because he was the guardian of Jesus and Mary.

Joseph willingly submitted himself to the divine will of God and strove all through his life to live the same. He became an example of an authentic Christian living, in his total dedication to the Word of God and challenges us to do same. The protection of St. Joseph is sure for all who invoke him and come under his patronage. He is ready to care for all as he did for the interest of Jesus the Savior, all we need to do is hear once again the voice of Pharaoh “go to Joseph” and we will be sure that our Lord Jesus Christ who refuses nothing of Joseph and to Joseph while on earth will surely not refuse his plea of intercession for us who fly to his patronage in heaven. Hence, we could pray: Saint Joseph, father of Jesus and protector of the Virgin Mary, teach us the hardest lesson we have to learn in life; to love as you loved, by putting our affections to use, and by acting on the sentiments we so often express in our prayers. Teach us to understand what Mary meant when she said, “Be it done to me according to your will.” And what Jesus meant when He said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” May we be able to love and care for the interest of Jesus as you did, and may we remain continually kept under your watchful care and protection. Amen.

As Joseph carefully watched over the Holy Family as a body and over Jesus and Mary as individuals, he could do same for us as a religious family and as sons and daughters under his loving care and protection. Let us allow Joseph to be the veritable meter for measuring our disposition to God’s will, so that he can gently lead us to carry out God’s will and be better committed above all else to the interest of Jesus in our daily lives. Saint Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, pray for us who have recourse to you and lead us where divine providence wants us to be! Amen.

# SAINT JOSEPH

## The Hardworking Man

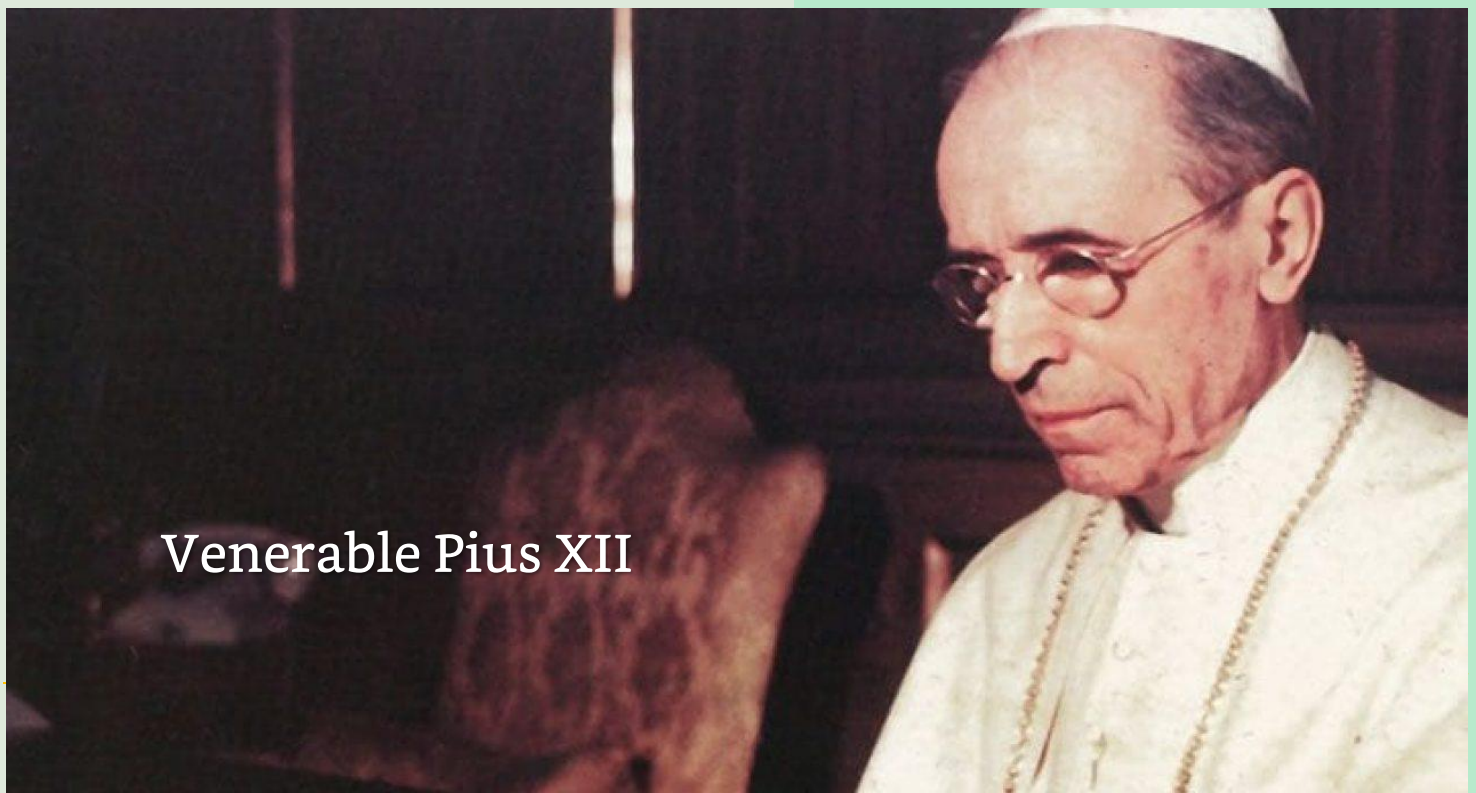
Fr. John Attuli, OSJ



### Introduction

**T**he notion of work is often associated with that of fatigue. But work is more than just fatigue, otherwise people wouldn't feel so confused when they lose it. "To kill a man, you don't need to take his life away, just take his job away" (Pino Aprile). We experience it during this period of coronavirus, covid-19.

In modern societies, having a job is important for maintaining self-esteem. Even when working conditions are relatively harsh, hard and boring, work tends to be a factor of fundamental importance for an individual's psychological well-being. In fact, the job offers intrinsic satisfactions which probably assume a greater value than the money earned. Many people say



Venerable Pius XII



that their main concern is not the amount of money they can earn, but rather being able to demonstrate that they know, how to carry out well the activity they are called to do.

In recent centuries, a separation has been created between the psychology of work and that of faith, a separation that has had great social repercussions. And even today this keeps many men and women away from the Christian faith. This is one of the major misunderstandings of modern society.

Pope Pius XII instituted the feast of 'Saint Joseph the Worker' on May 1, 1955 with the intention of helping workers to rediscover the Christian sense of work, so fully embodied in the humble carpenter of Nazareth.

### **In the book of Genesis**

Regarding work, the Bible provides general principles and not a systematic and thorough study. The work is accepted and presented as an integral part of human life and placed in the perspective of the relationship between God and man.

The book of Genesis presents God the Creator (Genesis 1) as a God who works and rests: in six days He creates the universe. The seventh day is the completion of the work of the previous six in which God contemplates the perfection of His work and rests. The day of rest is a day of blessing. It is the day of blessing of a God who is not idle, but He encompasses work, that is, gift of Himself, fruitfulness. *"God created man in the image of Himself; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"* (Gen 1:27). *"Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it"* (Gen 2,15). Man is the image of God and placed by God in the garden, he is entrusted with the task of guarding and cultivating it. *"Man is therefore, like his God, a being who works and rests. Both 'work' and 'rest' fall into the image of God"* (A. Bonora, Lavoro, in NDTB, p. 778). Being the image of God, divine blessing inserts man's entire life, including work, in the context of relationship with the Creator Himself.

In the narration of chapter three of Genesis, we read that man wants to establish the criteria of his being and of his activity outside the context of his relationship with God and His work of love. He follows the snake's message in the direction of a stingy and selfish will to dominate. Therefore, we read in Gen 3,17-19, God turned to the man and said: *"Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, Accursed be the soil because of you! Painfully will you get your food from it as long as you live. It will yield you brambles and thistles, as you eat the produce of the land. By the sweat of your face will you earn your food until you return to the ground, as you were taken from it. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return."* From then on, man procured food with fatigue, while work was contemplated in the garden of Eden, but it was not associated with fatigue and pain.

Therefore, the first impact with work in the story of the book of Genesis is contradictory: the work marks the fundamental nature of man, but soon it becomes punishment and curse.



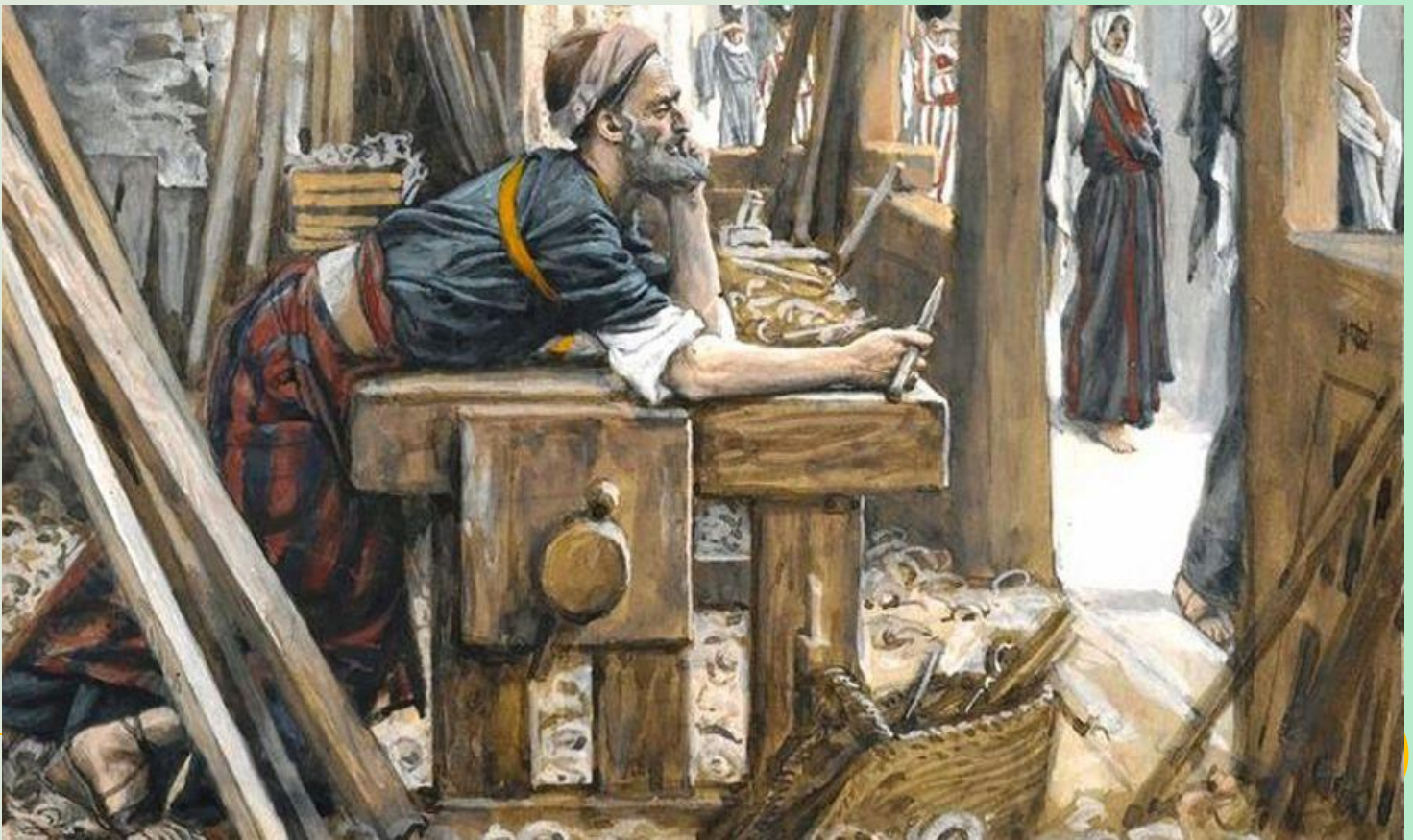
## In the Jewish tradition

In the Jewish tradition, this negative connotation of work has been transformed into a positive value. A correct dimension of man's toil is restored in the subsequent biblical reflection. The work is appreciated and considered to be a fundamental dimension of man planned by God in a right relationship with Him and with creation. Work must not become an idol or an absolute value, but always should remain related to prayer and subordinate to the day of rest, a day dedicated exclusively to the worship of God.

In the Jewish tradition, work is closely related to the study of Torah. A thought of the wise Gamaliel is very significant in this regard: *"It is good that the study of the Torah is accompanied by some profitable work, because the involvement in both keeps one away from sin: while when the study of the Torah is not combined with another work, it ends up falling short and causes sin"* (Cit. in Elena Bartolini, *Il lavoro opera delle nostre mani*, 101).

It can be said that the transmission of practical knowledge that enables one for work is placed at the level of the obligation to teach the Torah to one's descendants. In fact, *"if a man learns two paragraphs of the Torah in the morning and two in the evening, and all day takes care of his work, he is considered to have performed the whole Torah"* (ibidem, 102). It is understood, then, that every father has an obligation to teach a trade to his son. Failing in this task is tantamount to predisposing him to become a thief. *"Man is obliged to teach his son a trade; anyone who does not teach his son a trade, teaches him to become a thief"* (Talmud).

Despite the sin of the first parents, the plan of the Creator, the sense of His creatures and, among these, of man, called to cultivate and care for creation, remains unchanged. *"Your own labors will yield you a living, happy and prosperous will you be"*, says Psalm 128.



## Saint Joseph, the Carpenter

In the Gospel St. Joseph is called a carpenter. When the Nazarenes heard Jesus teach in their synagogue, they said of him: *"This is the carpenter's son, surely?"* (Mt 13.55). It is good for Jesus to be recognized as the son of a carpenter, of a simple man who works hard on the things of the earth, but who also knows how to listen to God and put into practice His Will.

The Greek term *téktôn* (ὁ τέκτων), which ordinarily translates as "carpenter", corresponds to the Latin *faber* and indicates a craftsman who works on wood or stone. Basically, one can think of the work of a manufacturer of plows and tools for agriculture, and also of one who generically works on wood, the classic carpenter, or even the carpenter who provides for wooden structures needed for construction.

Therefore, there is no doubt that St. Joseph was a real worker, a worker, a man of toil. It is believed that he was a carpenter who worked every day for a lifetime. And with the work of his hands he ensured sustenance for the Child Jesus and the Virgin Mary, thus playing an extraordinary role in the project of salvation.

## Joseph, Trainer of the Master

*"Man is obliged to teach his son a trade"* (Talmud). Joseph taught the trade to Jesus who grew in wisdom and grace, until the beginning of his public activity (Lk 2,51-52). In reality, alongside Joseph, Jesus has not only learned his father's trade, but also shared and assimilated that human and concrete dimension that characterizes the world of work, *"This is the carpenter, surely?"* (Mk 6,3), that is *"the civil status, the social category, the economic condition, the professional experience, the family environment, human education"* (Paul VI, Allocution of 19 March 1964). Hence, Jesus' participation in Joseph's work was far beyond any activity occasionally practiced alongside another. It is a submission, the meaning of which qualifies and defines the whole life of Jesus.

St. John Paul II writes in the *Redemptoris Custos*: *"Human work, and especially manual labor, receive special prominence in the Gospel. Along with the humanity of the Son of God, work too has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation, and has also been redeemed in a special way. At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption"* (n. 22). Feeding and raising the Divine Child who was preparing to be the victim and oblation for the redemption of the world: this was the reason that made the work and all efforts of Saint Joseph holy and extremely meritorious. For this his service and participation in the mystery of the Redemption, the Church venerates him and proposes him as an example for the workers.

## Some Characteristics of the Work of St. Joseph

**Intimacy with God:** *"Life has two precious gifts: beauty and truth. I found the first in the heart of those who love and the second in the hand of those who work"* (Khalil Gibran). St. Joseph possessed these two gifts by having a heart that loved and the hands that worked. The strength of Joseph's silent work stemmed from his love for God and for Jesus and



Mary. Joseph is the one who discovered God's love for humanity and thus welcomed God's plan of Incarnation, to be the "Emmanuel". It is from this intimate experience of faith that proceeded his strength to lead a hard life and to face all the challenges to take care of Mary and Jesus.

**Availability and obedience to the Will of God:** The worker realizes his full vocation, when he aims primarily to earn heavenly goods (Mt 6, 25-34), the only and true ultimate goal. St. Joseph understood this fact after listening to the voice of God through the angel. Therefore, he handed over his life to a Project that transcended him, with the acceptance of the command to take Mary with him. Joseph *"In this way showed a readiness of will, like Mary's with regard to what God asked of him through the angel"* (RC, 3).

**Trust in Divine Providence:** He never had too much worry and anxiety of those who have no faith in that Providence that feeds the sparrows. Therefore, as a righteous man, he observed faithfully the weekly Sabbath rest prescribed by law to the Jews. He left the workshop when the duties of religious celebrations imposed it on him, or when special wishes of God inspired him to undertake pilgrimages. Thus, he respected and maintained the primacy of God in his life with filial trust in Him.

**Justice and honesty:** Being a righteous man, he knew that work is law for everyone. He did not rebel, did not complain about his job, or fatigue. In fact, he worked diligently, patiently and honestly carrying out his obligations and contracts. There have been many occasions when St. Joseph felt pain and suffering from the injustices of others. But, Joseph remained righteous; and his righteousness was not something that simply derived from scrupulous observance of the commandments, but it came from an integral search for the Divine Will.

**Humility:** St. Joseph loved and respected his work. "The man who is ashamed of his work cannot have respect for himself" (Bertrand Russell). St. Joseph in his humility paid no attention to all those reasons that might have seemed good and that could have induced him not to deal with material things and manual work: being descended from the great King David, being married to the Mother of God, being the putative Father of the Incarnate Word, etc ... Humility taught him to reconcile his dignity with the exercise of a very ordinary, humble and tiring profession.

**Spirit of poverty and detachment:** St. Joseph did not look for a work to satisfy the greed for gain or wealth. He did not want to be rich and did not envy the rich. Work has never been an idol for him. He has always known how to be happy with his life and profession. As a man of faith he transformed daily fatigue into a great means of exercising virtues.

**Hard work:** *"This is the carpenter's son, surely?"* (Mt 13.55). In the Gospel, St. Joseph is called a carpenter. This translation expresses very partially the meaning of the Greek term *téktôn*. It was said that at the time of Joseph, the carpenter was one who worked on wood, on iron and on stone, so he was at the same time a carpenter, blacksmith and bricklayer. So, he did hard and tiring work. *"Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as done for the Lord and not for human beings"* (Col 3:23). Saint Joseph, a hardworking and just man, bears witness to this way of operating.

## Conclusion

St. Joseph Marello tells us that it is in St. Joseph that we find inspiration for our life and activity: *"The life of St. Joseph was consumed in work and in the exercises of piety, in prayer, fortifying the will to want to consume everything in the work to keep the boy Jesus and Mary: such should be the life of the Oblates of St. Joseph, an intertwining of the exercises of piety, study and work"* (Rules 1892.6).

Vatican II asks: What is the meaning and value of human activity? How should its fruits and resources be used? To what end do the efforts of both individuals and communities tend? (cf. GS 34). St. Joseph's life is the answer to all these questions. He worked for Jesus and Mary. Therefore, *exemplar opificum*, model of workers, is invoked and has something to say also to us Oblates of St. Joseph, who must work, "silently hardworking" (L 83).

Our Founder did not hesitate to recall the example of St. Joseph to say that the Brothers themselves must work, wisely distributing the time for study and work: *"Intellectual and manual labors should be combined together, as two means that lead to a single end: the service of God in the imitation of Saint Joseph"* (Letter 236). Whoever becomes a member of the Oblates of St. Joseph chooses St. Joseph as the model and teacher of his life.

It is good to remember a saying of St. Pope Paul VI, very similar to the thought of our Founder: *"Saint Joseph is the model of the humble whom Christianity lifts up to great destinies. Saint Joseph is the proof that to be good and authentic followers of Christ "great things" are not required, but only common, human, simple, but true and authentic virtues"*.

Let us pray to our model and patron saint to teach us to always appreciate the beauty of a simple and laborious life.

### Some questions for personal and community reflection:

- Do I appreciate and value work?
- Do I work honestly, diligently, patiently, with good will?
- Do I love and appreciate manual work?
- Do I keep a balance between "intellectual and manual labor" in my daily life?
- Do I take part in the fatigue of work as a disciple of Christ, in the style of Saint Joseph?
  - How much do I love doing 'ordinary things in an extraordinary way'?





# SAINT JOSEPH

## Husband of Mary

Fr. Matthew Spencer, OSJ



*This month's reflection is guided by the principle title given by the Church to St. Joseph, that is, St. Joseph, Husband of Mary. I have chosen here to focus on three simple aspects of this most important role of St. Joseph, and I pray that these modest contributions might inspire you to deeper reflection on the importance of St. Joseph in the life of each of us as Oblates of St. Joseph.*

### **Do not be afraid.**

**D**uring my theology studies, one of our professors shared with us the story of the first wedding he presided over as a priest. He had personally prepared the bride and groom, and he knew them to be ready for this lifelong commitment. After the homily though, as the priest approached the couple, he noticed that the groom was sweating profusely and that he looked distraught. As the rite progressed, the groom became more and more agitated. He began whimpering and groaning as if in agony of some sort, and the priest anxiously tried to move more quickly through the rite.

When the moment arrived for the couple to exchange consent and to profess their vows to one another, the groom nearly collapsed. He cried out and looked at the priest in complete panic and insisted that he couldn't go on. The young man was so frightened, so overwhelmed by the nature of a lifelong commitment, that he had become paralyzed by fear. My professor, a young priest at the time, took the groom to the sacristy for a moment, gave him a glass of water, and encouraged him to relax. They returned to the altar and again tried to continue, but to no avail. Several more times they returned to the sacristy, each time the presider hoping the groom would find the strength to move forward, but each time the groom panicked and couldn't utter his vows.

Finally, my former professor, nearly as overwhelmed as the young man that his first wedding was going the way it was, decided that either he could postpone the wedding, or he could forcefully guide the young man through the vows and pray that God's grace would

provide. He chose the latter, and one word at a time, firmly led the groom through the vows.

Twenty-five years later, that same couple invited my former professor to celebrate an anniversary Mass to commemorate their wedding day. I'm sure he had plenty to say in his homily at that anniversary Mass.

Gratefully, most weddings are less dramatic and less stressful than that one. Yet who can blame the groom for such a profound reaction to the grandeur of his vocation? Indeed, the vocation to matrimony is a profound commitment, a sharing in the cross of Christ, and a true imaging of the relationship between Christ and his Church. Marriage as a vocation should make the bride and groom tremble at the dignity and august nature of their call.



Even our patron, St. Joseph experienced fear at the prospect of his vocation, as alluded to by the angel's words to him in Matthew 1:20. When St. Joseph was faced with the sublime call to fulfill the singular mission entrusted to him, to be not only the husband of Mary but also the guardian of the Redeemer, he naturally experienced trepidation. And why not? Not only did he discover that his bride had been chosen to be the mother of the Savior, but he was confronted with the possibility of being the earthly father of the long-awaited Messiah. St. Joseph recognized the wonder of that moment in salvation history and he was keenly and humbly aware of his own limitations and weaknesses. Truly in the face of such an awesome vocation, one couldn't help but tremble, even one as holy as St. Joseph.

Although our own vocation as Oblates of St. Joseph is different from that of marriage, we will no doubt experience uncertainty and trepidation in our lives too. When we cannot see the entirety of God's plan, we may become fearful of what our role in that plan might be. When we are given a new assignment by our superiors, a new ministry in the Province or Delegation, or when we are asked to serve in ways far outside of our comfort zone, we might tremble and imagine that surely such a task is not meant for us. Like St. Joseph, we might even question the nature of our vocation and mission before us. But instead of becoming paralyzed by fear, we are called, like St. Joseph, to place our trust in the Lord and to find peace in knowing that God's grace will accompany us along the way.

Indeed, as we imitate St. Joseph in his closeness to our blessed Mother, we might experience the same reaction as he did, a fear that perhaps we are not worthy, a fear that perhaps we are not capable, a fear that perhaps there is one better than us that should take our place. In peace and tranquility though, we imitate St. Joseph in listening to the voice of the Lord revealed to us, in choosing not to fear, in drawing close to Jesus and Mary, and in allowing God to work through our littleness.

### **Authentic intimacy.**

Some years back, our Province in the United States admitted a young man as an aspirant. He had many virtues and qualities that seemed to point to a religious vocation, and for some years he advanced through aspirancy, postulancy, the novitiate, and into temporary vows. I worked with him personally at various stages in his formation, and I can attest to his great openness and eagerness in seeking God's will. But, he also came to the Congregation from a family situation that is unfortunately more and more common in today's world: his parents had divorced, and both had remarried; both of his stepparents had various children from other marriages, and he joked to me once that not even Our Lady, Untier of Knots, could untangle his family tree. Behind the humor though, was a truth that was impossible to ignore: his family life had affected him deeply, and not always for the better. Ultimately, this young man left formation, in part because his family background made it difficult for him to fully understand the family spirit and commitment of our Congregation.

There is without a doubt a crisis of relationship and family in modern times, a crisis that is as insidious as it is heartbreaking. The breakdown of the family has led young people to struggle to trust those uniquely charged with their care. This lack of trust bleeds into other relationships in their lives, including their relationship with God, and our young people in turn have an even harder time creating healthy relationships and understanding commitment. Consequently, they seek out intimacy and relationship in destructive and unsatisfying ways, either through sexual deviance and sin, alienation and isolation, or even through meager technological substitutes.

Yet, it is not only young people that face such threats and temptations. Within our own religious life and consecration, even confreres with many years of faithful consecration can find themselves seeking out intimacy in misguided and even harmful ways. The brokenness of the world has not spared religious life and its members.

For the Oblates of St. Joseph though, we have the perfect example and antidote to overcome the afflictions of the heart that might assault us. The Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, found in their chaste love for one another, the most rewarding and authentic intimacy that creatures on earth can experience. As Pope St. John Paul II wrote of St. Joseph, the love between Mary and Joseph "proved to be greater than this 'just man' could ever have expected within the limits of his human heart" (*Redemptoris Custos* 19). Indeed, in his vocation as husband, St. Joseph reminds us that true intimacy and authentic love is found precisely in conformity to God's will through chastity.



As Oblates of St. Joseph, we seek out this genuine love in chastity that was at the heart of the Holy Family, first for our own wholeness and holiness, and then for the holiness and happiness of the world. We must remain vigilant to the temptation to substitute authentic intimacy and friendship with cheap imitations that modern society tries to present. Like Mary and Joseph, our commitment to chastity is an invitation to authentic human connection and relationship, one that finds its grounding in our family spirit and our healthy community life.

### **Faith-filled obedience.**

The current worldwide pandemic has created great consternation in the hearts of many of those that we serve. Anxiety at the uncertainty of the future, frustration at how the world and the Church may be reacting, and fear that people will suffer greatly. There is much concern throughout the world in present days, and we as Oblates are not immune to such feelings and reactions either.

But I do believe that we have a model for confronting such troubling times that should make us even more capable of peacefully persevering through such challenging times and allowing us to be examples of tranquility in such moments of trial. Our patron St. Joseph was not shielded from crisis and turmoil. From Bethlehem to Nazareth, from Egypt to Jerusalem, St. Joseph was faced with challenge after challenge, and difficulty after difficulty. Yet as we know from scripture, his response in the face of such difficulty was prompt and faithful obedience to the indications of Divine Providence. As husband of Mary and earthly father of Jesus, St. Joseph sought to overcome each trial by listening to the voice of the Lord and by immediately obeying.

Such an attitude can be difficult to embrace when we think we know better. And it becomes even harder when our hearts are anxious at all that is transpiring around us. But we cannot go wrong with humble obedience and with a tranquil disposition, even if things are not improving as quickly as we would prefer. Mary and Joseph show us by their lives that responding to crises peacefully and meekly is a sure path to growth in the spiritual life.

We give thanks to God for the example of St. Joseph in our lives and in our religious vocation. Let us pray that we may dispel all fear in our lives, that we may find solace and consolation in our chaste commitment to the Lord, and that we may remain obedient and at peace, even in times of great trial.

### **Some questions for personal and communal reflection:**

- What fears am I facing, and how can I respond to them better?
- How can I deepen my trust and reliance on God's care for me in difficult times?
- How does my commitment to chastity bear fruit in my relationships with others?
- In what ways can I better model the love of the Holy Spouses in my religious life?
- How am I handling the trying times of the world and the Church today?
- How does obedience help me keep my peace when the world's problems remain?

# SAINT JOSEPH

## Protector of the Universal Church

*150 years since the decree of "Quemadmodum Deus"*

Fr. Sebastian Jacobi, OSJ



On December 8th, 2020, the Church will remember the 150th anniversary of the Decree "Quemadmodum Deus" of Pius IX, with which St. Joseph was proclaimed Patron of the Universal Church. During Vatican Council I, on March 9, 1870, a petition was presented to Pope Pius IX by 38 Cardinals, 153 Bishops and 43 Superiors General asking that St. Joseph be proclaimed Patron of the Universal Church. This proclamation, which could not take place during the Council due to its being interrupted by a well-known political upheaval, was later made by Pius IX on December 8, 1870.

For us, Oblates of St. Joseph, this decree has a particular significance. Our Founder, St. Joseph Marelli, was in Rome during Vatican Council I, as the secretary to Bishop Carlo Savio. On March



17, 1870, a week after the presentation of the petition to the Vatican Council, St. Joseph Marelllo wrote from Rome to his friend, Fr. Giuseppe Riccio: "On the pre-vigil of our Patron Saint, and in a moment when devotion to the Head of the Holy Family is about to reach its highest development, due to the petitions made by Christendom to the Father of the Vatican Council, I cannot hold back from writing a couple of words... Let us pray, the both of us together on the day of our great Patriarch, so that as we start to exalt him in our hearts, we will be worthy of soon seeing him exalted by all Christendom with the title being prepared of Patron of the Universal Church." (cf. Letter 64). For St. Joseph Marelllo, this was important news, which will guide him towards a spirituality of Joseph which is of a particularly ecclesial nature. His Draft for a Company of St. Joseph, promoting the interests of Jesus, the first step in his founding our Congregation, drew strong inspiration from this spirituality of Joseph.

### **St. Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church**

The Patronage of St. Joseph was proclaimed on December 8, 1870 by Pius IX by means of a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites **Quemadmodum Deus**, which was promulgated during a solemn Mass in the Basilicas of St. John Lateran, St. Peter in the Vatican, and St. Mary Major. This was a decree, according to St. John XXIII which "opened a vein of rich and precious inspirations to the successors of Pius IX" (Apostolic Letter, St. Joseph Patron of Vatican Council II, March 19, 1961).

The story of this provision is like an adventure. Pontifical documents at the time, were being controlled by the Italian government. Pius IX legally evaded this government control by making use not of a Bull or Papal Letter, but of a decree of the Congregation for Sacred Rites.

It is a document which marks a genuine turning point. While preceding documents of the Holy See on St. Joseph at most arrived at calling him the "most distinguished spouse of the Mother of God", and the title of Spouse only preceded by the title of "Adoptive Father of the Only Begotten Son of Almighty God. This document represents a small official treatise on St. Joseph, with references to his titles, his greatness, his dignity, his holiness and his mission to all the world.

The figure of St. Joseph is described through the role which the Patriarch Joseph had in the story of salvation. That which Joseph, son of the ancient Jacob, was in relation to the earthly life of Israel, St. Joseph was with regard to the supernatural life of men. Pius IX writes: "In the same way that God placed that Joseph, son of the Patriarch Jacob, over all the land of Egypt, so that he might provide grain for his people, so also, with the arrival of the fullness of times, when He was about to send His Only Begotten Son to earth as Savior of the world, did He choose another Joseph, of which the first was a type and figure, who having been made head and master of the house and of his possessions, he chose him as guardian of his greatest treasures."

The decree, first of all, shows the singular dignity of St. Joseph "constituted by God as lord and prince of his house and possessions and chosen as guardian of divine treasures". "In fact, he had as his spouse the Immaculate Virgin Mary, from whom was born by the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ, and before men deigned to be known as the reputed son of Joseph, and was subject to him. He whom so many kings and prophets longed to see, was not only seen by Joseph, but

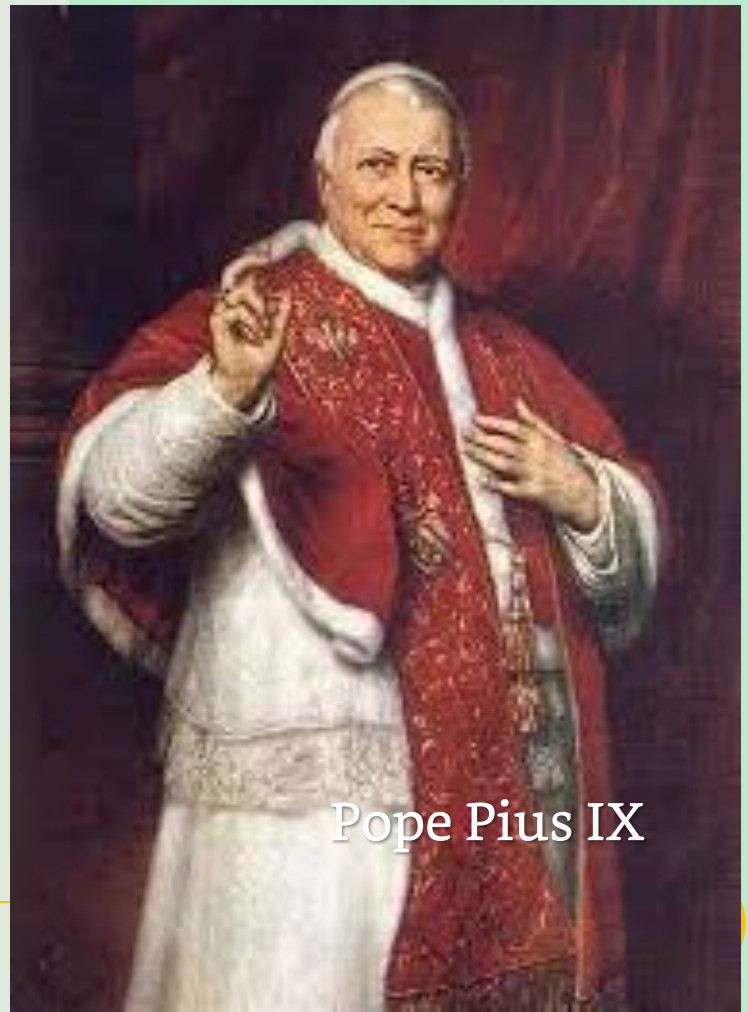


lived with him and who with paternal affection embraced and kissed Him; he even most abundantly nourished Him whom the faithful would eat as bread come down from Heaven so that they may have eternal life. Because of this sublime dignity, which God conferred on His most faithful Servant, the Church has always given high honor and praise to most blessed Joseph, after the Virgin Mother of God, his spouse, and invoked his intervention in difficult times.”

The document calls “most sad” the present time: “Now, in these most sad times, the very same Church, on every side attacked by its enemies, and oppressed by the gravest evils, such that impious men thought that the gates of hell had finally prevailed against her, by means of the most Excellent and Venerable Bishops of the entire Catholic world, sent to the Supreme Pontiff their supplications, and those which the faithful committed to their care, asking that he deign to constitute St. Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church.” “With the Sacred Ecumenical Council of the Vatican renewing again their requests and their desires, our most holy lord, Pope Pius IX, in consternation for the most recent and lamentable condition of things, and to entrust himself and all the faithful to the most powerful patronage of the Holy Patriarch Joseph, wanted to satisfy the desires of the most Excellent Bishops and so solemnly declared him Patron of the Catholic Church, enjoining that his feast, falling upon March 19....” (cf. Pius IX *Quemadmodum Deus*, December 8, 1870).

### **A Document for the saddest of times**

Pope Pius IX entrusted the entire Church to the protection of St. Joseph in a very sad time. The long period of Pius IX’s pontificate (1846-1878) was particularly torturous, both from the political and the religious point of view. Pius IX’s refusal to enter into conflict against Austria (April 29, 1848) was held to be the cause of the failure of the war, and drew upon him such unpopularity, that after Carlo Alberto’s victory at Goito in May of 1848 and the armistice imposed by Radetsky at Cusozza in July, he was forced to flee from Rome (November 24). After his return from Gaeta (April 12, 1850) with the help of the French, Pius IX was continually the target of anti-clerical liberalism. The Siccardi Statutes (1850) laid down in the Kingdom of Sardegnia, were later extended to other regions in Italy, leading to the deportation of Bishops, suppressions of collegiate churches and of religious orders, sequestration of religious property and the incarceration of priests. At the same time, there were religious persecutions in Spain as well as in Germany, Poland and Russia.



Pope Pius IX

From 1859, tension continued to grow with the House of Savoy, due to its having annexed Tuscany, the Dukedoms and the Legations. In 1860 Cavour occupied Romagna, the Marche and Umbria. After the defeat of Castelfidardo (September 18) the Pope was left only with Rome and the surrounding Patrimony of St. Peter.

Freemasonry and anticlericalism blocked any attempts to reconcile the government of Italy with the Holy See, especially with regards to the appointment of Bishops to numerous vacant Dioceses. In the fall of 1867 the Garibaldini uprisings threatened Rome. In the end, on the 20th of September, 1870, by way of the breach at the Porta Pia, Rome was occupied by troops of the Italian government.

Philosophical, religious, moral and social errors were occurring at the same time as the political upheavals. They were condemned, after nearly ten years of reflection, by the Encyclical "*Quanta cura*" and its celebrated list of eighty erroneous propositions, called the "Syllabus" (December 8, 1864). It would be easy to imagine the reaction to Pius IX by his adversaries and the accusations made against him of being against civilization and progress. (cf. Tarcisio Stramare, OSJ, "*San Giuseppe nella Sacra Scrittura, nella Teologia e nel Culto*", Ed. Piemme, Roma, 1983, p. 271)

### A Powerful Protector



The Church, officially exalting the dignity and holiness of St. Joseph, at the same time recognizes that the mission given to him by God, regarding the physical body of Jesus, also extends to his mystical body, and thus invokes his patronage. The secondary title "Guardian of the Redeemer - the figure and the mission of St. Joseph in the life of Christ and the world" is an explicit declaration of the "perennial timeliness" of St. Joseph, whose mission was not just historical - that is limited to a particular time and place as is the case with any other personage - but 'meta-historical', involved in the mystery of the Incarnation. (Cf *Redemptoris Custos*, 1) and extends to all the fullness of time which belongs to the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word." (cf. *Redemptoris Custos* 32). "The entire Church was already there with him, as in a seed, already ripening in humanity and in the blood of Christ Jesus. The entire Church was there in the virginal maternity of Mary most holy, mother of all the faithful, who at the foot of the Cross she would inherit in the blood of her first son Jesus. So small to the eye, but so great



to the gaze of the spirit, the Church was already there with St. Joseph when he was the guardian of the Holy Family, its fatherly care caregiver. (cf. Pius XI, Allocution April 21, 1926; Stramare, “*La Via di San Giuseppe*” Ed. OCD Roma, 2001, pp. 92-93).

“The Church wants him as its Protector” affirmed Paul VI, “with the unshakeable confidence that he, to whom Christ desired to entrust the protection of His frail human infancy, will desire to continue from Heaven his caregiving mission to guide and defend the Mystical Body of the same Christ, always weak, always threatened, always dramatically in danger.” (cf. Paul VI, Homily of March 19, 1969)

As Protector of the Church, St. John Paul II says you are referring to an invocation deeply rooted in the revelation of the New Covenant. The Church is the Body of Christ. Would it not then be logical and necessary that he to whom the Eternal Father entrusted His Son, might extend his protection also to that Body of Christ, which is the Church? Today the community of believers, spread throughout the world, entrusts itself to St. Joseph and places under his powerful patronage, its needs in this current difficult stage of history. “I invoke your help, O marvelous Guardian of the Redeemer: You who defended Jesus Christ, you who are Protector of the Holy Church.” (cf. St. John Paul II, *Monterotundo*, Homily of March 19, 1993).

### **A Protector for Today**

The Church always needs the intercession of St. Joseph. “His protection is an efficacious defense against the dangers which arise, and even more, he is a great support in taking up the work of the New Evangelization. Today this work of evangelization has a particular relevance. I exhort everyone to entrust, with perseverance, this work to the intercession of St. Joseph.” (cf. St. John Paul II, Rome, Discourse to the Faithful of the Diocese of Kalisz, November 6, 1997). Paul VI invited us to invoke his patronage “as the Church, in these later times, is used to doing for itself, first with a spontaneous theological reflection on the joining of divine activity with human activity in the great economy of the Redemption, in which the first, the divine, is all sufficient to itself, but the second, the human, ours, while capable of nothing (cf. Jn15,5) is yet not dispensed from a humble, but conditional and ennobling collaboration. Further, the Church invokes him as Protector for a profound and very real desire to re-vivify its earthly existence with true evangelical virtues, which shine in St. Joseph. (“*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*” Vol VII, 1969, 1268; Cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 30)

Thus “still today we have enduring reasons to recommend every human being to St. Joseph” (cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 31), says St. John Paul II. “This Patronage must be invoked and it is necessary right now for the Church, not only as a defense against rising perils, but also, and above all, as support for a renewed dedication to the evangelization of the world, and the re-evangelization of those ‘countries and nations where - as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* - the Christian religion and life were once upon a time flourishing’ and ‘now are hard put to the test.’ To bring the first announcing of Christ or to re-bring it where it has been neglected or forgotten, the Church needs a special ‘strength from on high’ (Lk24,49; Acts1,8) the sure gift of the Spirit of the Lord which is not separated from the intercession and example of His Saints. (cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 29).



## Appendix - St. Joseph in the Magisterium of the Popes (1870-2020)

**Leo XIII** - was the first Pope in history to dedicate an entire Encyclical to the adoptive father of Jesus: *Quamquam Pluries* (August 15, 1889) which contained the prayer “To you O blessed Joseph” and various indulgences.

**Pius X** - approved the Litany of St. Joseph by the Decree *Sanctissimus Dominus*, March 18, 1909, and invited the faithful to honor him on Wednesdays, the day dedicated to him.

**Benedict XV** - on the 50th anniversary of the Proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, he dedicated to St. Joseph, Patron of the Catholic Church, the Motu Proprio *Bonum Sane*, July 25, 1920.

**Pius XI** - several times mentioned that the mission of St. Joseph was above all other missions, including that of St. John the Baptist and St. Peter. (cf. Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris*, March 19, 1937).

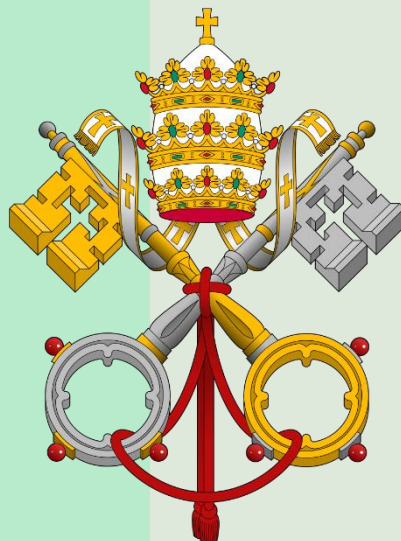
**Pius XII** - instituted the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker (May 1, 1955).

**John XXIII** - nominated him Patron of Vatican Council II with the Apostolic Letter *Le voci che* (March 19, 1961) which is an extraordinary summary of devotion to St. Joseph in the world.

**John Paul II** - dedicated to St. Joseph the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, commemorating the 100th anniversary of *Quamquam Pluries* August 15, 1989.

**Benedict XVI** - several times emphasized the excellence of the virtues of St. Joseph.

**Francis** - began his Petrine ministry on the Feast of St. Joseph and dedicated the Homily to him (March 19, 2013) and he inserted the name of St. Joseph in Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV in the Roman Missal (May 1, 2013)



# SAINT JOSEPH

## Minister of Salvation

Fr. José Antonio Bertolin, OSJ



**T**he Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* by John Paul II places the ministry of St. Joseph with the mystery of salvation, affirming that He “*was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood. It is precisely in this way that, as the Church's Liturgy teaches, he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation*” (RC 8). From this comes the importance and quality of his cooperation in God's plan of salvation from the fact that he accepted his vocation and his specific role.

St. Joseph, therefore, is not a person of secondary importance and even less a decorative figure in the plan for our salvation. God chose him and destined him for a specific task which must be known if we do not want to run the risk of not having clear the reason for the mystery of human redemption with its foundation in the humanity of the Son of God of whom Joseph was to be father on earth. So, the presence of St. Joseph in the History of Salvation is tied to the plan of the Incarnation by which it was established that the Word would be part of the human race by being quietly placed within the institute of the family.

Joseph was, therefore, in virtue of the mission entrusted to him, the object of a sublime choice by God to be among all men the one chosen to be God's direct collaborator, the



*“reputed father” of his Only-Begotten Son, “the true spouse of the Queen of the World and Lady of the Angels” (SCR, Inclytus Patriarcha Joseph, 09/10/1847).*

These two titles, father of the Son of God and Spouse of the Virgin Mother of God, make Joseph an unattainable figure in the order of holiness because *“of the singular graces and heavenly gifts with which God abundantly enriched him in view of the task entrusted to him”*. In fact, *He fulfilled perfectly the task entrusted to him and the mission he received, placing himself unconditionally at the disposition of the divine will.*

His mission is unique and great: to watch over the holiness and virginity of Mary and to cooperate in the incarnation of the Word and the salvation of humanity. *“The holiness of Joseph consists precisely in his faithful and perfect fulfillment of this great and at the same time humble, noble and hidden mission, resplendent and at the same time mysterious”* (Pius XI, Homily from 03/19/1928).

From the moment that the Angel revealed Joseph’s vocation to him (Mt 1:21), his life had not other goal or reason except to serve the Redeemer. Paul VI states this in a incisive way when he says: *“St. Joseph immediately places at the service of God’s plans all of his liberty, his legitimate human vocation, his own conjugal happiness, accepting the condition, responsibility and weight of a family, denying himself, however, for an incomparable virginal love, the conjugal love which nourishes and sustains the family, in order to offer by this total sacrifice his entire existence to the imponderable needs of the coming of the Messiah”* (Homily from 03/19/1969).

Meditating on the mission of St. Joseph as God’s collaborator in the mystery of our redemption, we recognize that what is characteristic of him *is in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a total gift of self, of his life and work; in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house”* (Paul VI, Homily from 03/19/1966).

If among Gospel figures, those of St. John the Baptist and St. Peter, because of their special mission, are particularly relevant, the former for having been the forerunner to Jesus and the latter for having received from him the care of his Church, *“the person and mission of Joseph, reserved and silent, practically ignored and unknown because of his humility, to use the words of Pius XI, reveal to us a type of ministry which is much more important even though hidden, much more necessary even though less visible.* In fact, St. Joseph carried out the mission entrusted to him in the most perfect oblation of self and in a perfectly hidden way: two characteristics, these, proper to his personality.

St. Joseph’s work was, in a certain way, indispensable for the realization of the mystery of human redemption. This is the case because God’s plan for the coming of the Redeeming Word to earth in order to save man required the presence of a spouse alongside the Virgin other of the Savior and of an earthly father for Her Son. The lesson which is born from his entire life is of great importance for the whole Church. Paul VI knew how to sum up this aspect, when he stated: *“St. Joseph is the type of the Gospel which Jesus...will proclaim as the plan for the redemption of humanity; he 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"* (Homily from 03/19/1969).

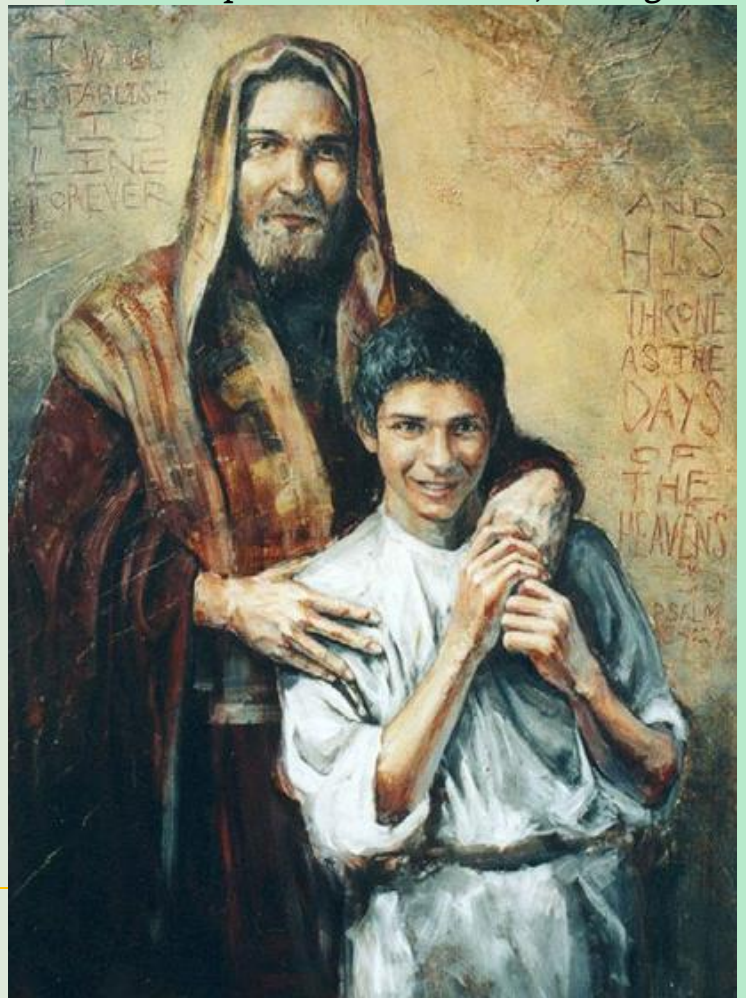
In the examples which St. Joseph left for us *"it is clear that God expects from each one of us that which he has a right to expect, that is the faithful and generous response to his call, his will, and his desires. The faithful and diligent use of all his natural and supernatural gifts which He himself has given to each one, according to the different happenings in life and the duties of ones proper state"* (Pius XI).

*"St. Joseph is a man of few words but of an intense life, who does not shrink back before the responsibilities which he received from God. He is an example of great availability to the Divine call, of peacefulness in all things, of complete trust found in a life of supernatural faith and charity and of that very effective instrument which is prayer"* (Giovanni XXIII).

There is no doubt that within the History of Salvation the vocation of St. Joseph must be considered and his role as the son of David, spouse of Mary Most Holy and father of Jesus recognized. His is not a second place role and he was in no way left on the margins of the Redemption, from the moment that he received from God that highest responsibility, equalled only by the infinite trust which was his response, having been entrusted with the most precious treasures of Jesus and Mary.

St. Joseph received from God the grace to take a direct role in the mystery of the Incarnation of his Son and to be his minister. "Descendant of David", he passed on to Jesus the Davidic descent, indispensable for being recognized as the Messiah. He was the one to have Jesus listed among the citizens of the known world as that time, enrolling him as his son, in Bethlehem, during the census of Augustus. He was the one to introduce him into the People of the Covenant, having him circumcised. He was the one who gave him his name, presented him to the Father in the Temple and fulfilled for him the right of offering of the first-born. He was the one who protected him, along with his Mother, in the flight into Egypt and then reintroduced him into the land of Israel. Choosing as his home Nazareth, he made it so that his fellow countrymen would call him a "Nazarene". He was the one to support him and educate him, giving him a place in society and in an honorable profession, while forming him in prayer and in the knowledge of life and of the world.

Called by God to serve directly the person and mission of Jesus in the exercise of his fatherhood, in fulfilment of the divine will, Joseph was truly indispensable in the realization of God's plan, cooperating in the great mystery of the Redemption and becoming



to all effects its “minister”. As John Paul II stated so well, he participated in the redemptive mystery as no other human person, with the exception of Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate World; and this places him the closest possible to Jesus (RC 21).

### **SPREADING OF DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH IN THE “NOSSA SENHORA DO ROCIO” PROVINCE (BRAZIL)**

The most widespread devotions to St. Joseph in the Province and already traditional among our faithful are:

- Remembrance of St. Joseph each Wednesday, each 19th day of the month and in the month of March, with proper songs, litany of St. Joseph and Joys and Sorrows.
- The feast of St. Joseph are preceded by a triduum or novena, as an opportunity to make the Josephite theology known and deepened, besides nourishing the popular devotion.
- Solemn celebration of the feasts of St. Joseph in March and May. Also growing is the devotion to the Holy Family (December) and the Holy Spouses (January).
- The first of May, St. Joseph the Worker: gathering of all of the Josephite Laity of the Province in Apucarana, in the Shrine of St. Joseph (about 500 people each year, coming from the various cities where we minister).
- CEJM – Center of Josephite-Marellian Spirituality, headquartered in Apucarana: this is the organ for giving life to and spreading devotion to St. Joseph in the Province. Monthly publication of the pamphlet “Sementes Josefinas” (each time with a small article on St. Joseph, distributed through e-mail along with holy cards and texts for the celebration of the triduum and novenas in preparation for the feasts of St. Joseph). It maintains the province website [www.osj.org.br](http://www.osj.org.br), created a Josephite website [www.josedenazare.blogspot.com](http://www.josedenazare.blogspot.com) and holds every 3 years the Theological Pastoral Week on St. Joseph.
- Many of our works (schools and parishes) have newsletters, bulletins and other small publications on St. Joseph, besides their own website. In general, they make use of and share the materials provided by the CEJM.
- Josephite Fraternity: in almost all of our works there is a group of laity devoted to St. Joseph, who get together periodically to pray to and know better their Holy Patron.
- In the Formation Houses and Seminaries the traditional devotions are maintained: daily prayers, visit to the Blessed Sacrament with the Litany of St. Joseph; Wednesday Joy and Sorrows; the Oblate feasts are always solemnized. Spiritual Reading and Retreats. In the Novitiate the Theology of St. Joseph is studied.





# SAINT JOSEPH

## The Educator

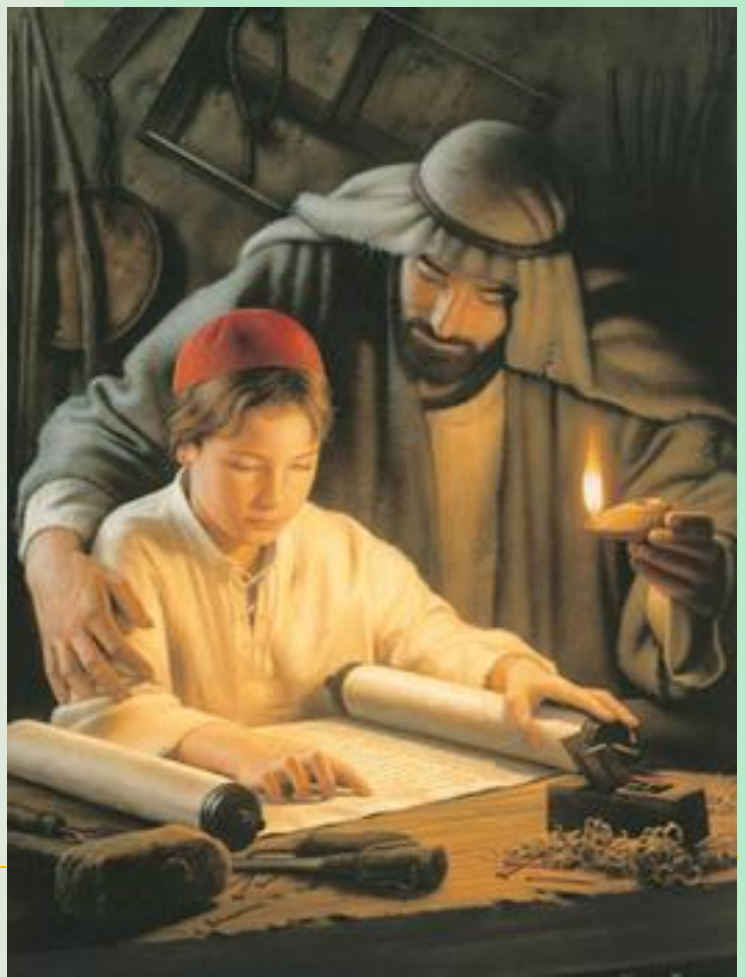
Fr. Maximo Sevilla, Jr., OSJ



### Introduction

**I**n a television interview with P. Tarcisio Stramare, OSJ by Tv2000it regarding the figure of St. Joseph, our most eminent Oblate Josephologist explained that there are four most important titles of St. Joseph which he alone has. They are namely, father of Jesus, spouse of Mary, son of David, and a just man. At the end of the interview, he remarked, "With these titles, what else do you like?"

Indeed, if there is a title that is attributed to St. Joseph, like being called the patron of the Universal Church or the model of all workers, it must find its basis on those four attributes of St. Joseph found in the scriptures. As P. Stramare made emphasis, St. Joseph is important not because he was the patron and model of workers, but because, first of all, he was chosen by God to be a father to Jesus. In his most important magisterial teaching on St. Joseph, the *Redemptoris Custos*, St. John Paul II made it clear that St. Joseph's "fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an 'apparent' or merely 'substitute' fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family (RC n. 21)"<sup>1</sup>.





In this article, I will reflect on the role of St. Joseph as teacher and educator, a duty that is inherent to his mission of being a father to Jesus. St. John Paul II highlighted this important service of his fatherhood in *Redemptoris Custos* in these words: "The growth of Jesus 'in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man' (Lk 2:52) took place within the Holy Family under the eyes of Joseph, who had the important task of 'raising' Jesus, that is, feeding, clothing and educating him in the law and in a trade, in keeping with the duties of a father (RC n. 16)."

## Duties of Jewish Fatherhood

To fully appreciate and understand the role of St. Joseph in the education of Jesus, a deeper insight into the concept of Jewish fatherhood, according to the ancient Jewish tradition, will undoubtedly help us. The following passage from the Babylonian Talmud, the most the important source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology, summed-up the mission of a Jewish father to his son:

The father is required to circumcise his son; to redeem him [referring to the firstborn son, as per the Biblical passages in Numbers 18:15-16]; to teach him Torah; to assure that he marries, and to teach him a trade. Some say he must also teach him to swim. Rabbi Judah says, whoever does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery<sup>2</sup>.

Notably, the six duties enumerated by the Talmud are "gender-specific". They are specific and unique responsibilities of a father to his son, while the mother is not bound by these obligations<sup>3</sup>. They also reflect a division in the roles between genders in Jewish culture and society. Thus, the study, trade, and public affairs belong to the men's domain, while the women's domain is the home<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, women are exempted from tasks which they themselves are not obligated to fulfill. In Jewish law, there is a notion that a ritual may only be performed by a person who is obligated to do so. He may not be substituted by someone who is not obligated. Hence, the ritual of circumcision of a child is an obligation solely given to the father and may not be performed by the mother<sup>5</sup>.



Likewise, the responsibility of performing the ceremonial ritual of redemption of the firstborn son who is destined for the service of the temple is a unique responsibility of the father. Since no woman can do priestly service in the temple, the mother cannot perform this ritual<sup>6</sup>. And what about the education of children? Though it is the duty of all parents to raise their children according to the Jewish law, beliefs, morals, and tradition, only the sons are required to be trained in the

theoretical study of the Torah. Since only the males are trained in the Torah study, the father has the sole obligation to educate his son in the knowledge and practice of the Jewish Law<sup>7</sup>.

One will observe that the first three duties of a father to his sons, namely, circumcision, the redemption of the firstborn son, and Torah study, are geared towards their spiritual development. The other three, namely, arranging a marriage, providing swimming lessons, and teaching a trade are geared towards their physical well-being<sup>8</sup>.

It is also interesting to note that the father, who has the sole duty to find a suitable wife for his sons, should fulfill this task with a noble purpose of ensuring they will live a life of holiness in the sacred bond of marriage. Thus, the word "*Kiddushin*" or the act of betrothal has its root from the word "*Kadosh*" which means holy<sup>9</sup>.

It is also interesting to know why the father needed to provide swimming lessons to his sons. Since traveling by boat and bathing in the river expose children to the dangers of drowning, the father has an obligation to give his son tools for survival in such situations. In knowing how to swim, the child must also learn to save life, which is said to be the command of the Torah that "supersedes even the strongest commandment"<sup>10</sup>.

Lastly, the Rabbis insisted that to teach his son a trade is a grave task which the father must never be negligent. A father failing to do this task is like driving his son to become a thief. He is as guilty as his son, who has turned to robbery because he did not teach him any trade to support himself<sup>11</sup>.

### **Jesus' growth and development under Joseph's watchful eyes**

In saying that "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man" (Luke 2:52), the gospel touches on the fundamental Christian belief that Jesus is not only divine but also human like us. The Fourth Eucharistic prayer contains this truth in proclaiming that Jesus "was a man like us in all things but sin." Luke's gospel did not say that Jesus advanced in stature but was already full of wisdom from birth. No, he also experienced growth in all his human dimensions: body, mind, and spirit. It is, therefore, right to believe that like other children in Nazareth, he learned to walk, to talk, to read, to work, and even to grow in his values and character with the influence of his environment and with the help of the people around Him.

Reflecting on how Jesus learned to become a full-grown man, the bible scholar, Lucien Deiss, in his scholarly work entitled, "Joseph, Mary, Jesus", asserted that like any human being, his intelligence and his heart remained subjected to the human law of growth. He adds, "The development of his personality took place under the sun of heavenly grace, of course, in his most intimate conversation with his Father, but also in the warmth of the home of his father Joseph and his mother Mary<sup>12</sup>." Thus, we also have a reason to believe that Jesus owed much of his natural human development from the parental care of Joseph and Mary.

Pope Francis, in his catechesis during his papal audience in St. Peter's Square on the solemnity of St. Joseph (19 March 2014)<sup>13</sup>, asserted that St. Joseph played a pivotal role in the three areas

of Jesus' growth, which he referred to as the three dimensions of education, namely, "wisdom, age, and grace." The Pope explained that age refers to the physical and psychological aspect of Jesus, whose healthy development was assured through the material and moral support of St. Joseph. Wisdom, on the other hand, corresponds to his growth, particularly in the knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. Pope Francis imagined that Joseph must have accompanied Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath to hear the Word of God. Lastly, grace refers to his growth in the spirit, which, according to the Pope is the area where St. Joseph's role is more limited than that of age and wisdom. In all these three dimensions of education, St. Joseph watched over and accompanied Jesus towards growth and maturity. As the Pope highlighted, the educational mission of Joseph is "certainly unique and unrepeatable, because Jesus is absolutely unique." This fact should earn him the right to be called "a model for every educator, especially every father."

However, these magisterial statements only establish the primordial truth that Joseph is the primary teacher of Jesus, a role that is solely given to him as a right as well as a duty for having been chosen as a father to Jesus. Nonetheless, it still leaves us thinking of what are the things Jesus learned from him and how he made an impact on the formation of the personality of Jesus. If Jesus also grew in knowledge through experience, can we reasonably identify specific skills, ideas, values, traits, or character which He could have learned from Joseph?

At times, we hear some preachers in the pulpit who are very imaginative in making assertions or hypotheses regarding what Joseph must have taught Jesus. Shall we say that those assertions do not deserve our attention because they belong only in the realm of hypotheses? Is the hidden life of Jesus a forbidden territory for our imagination to unravel? Or with the information that we have about the place, the time, and the society where the holy family lived, should it allow us to scratch a bit some images of the growing years of Jesus in their humble abode in Nazareth without falling to the doctrinal errors found in the apocryphal literature?

I believe that we would appreciate and understand more the claim that St. Joseph is truly the model of all educators if we could see and imagine the child Jesus in his early human development through the eyes St. Joseph; if we could imagine the home, family atmosphere, the support and love that Joseph and Mary lavished on him; and if we could hypothesize with reasonability what St. Joseph could have possibly taught through the eyes of Jesus himself.

### **What Jesus could have learned from Joseph**

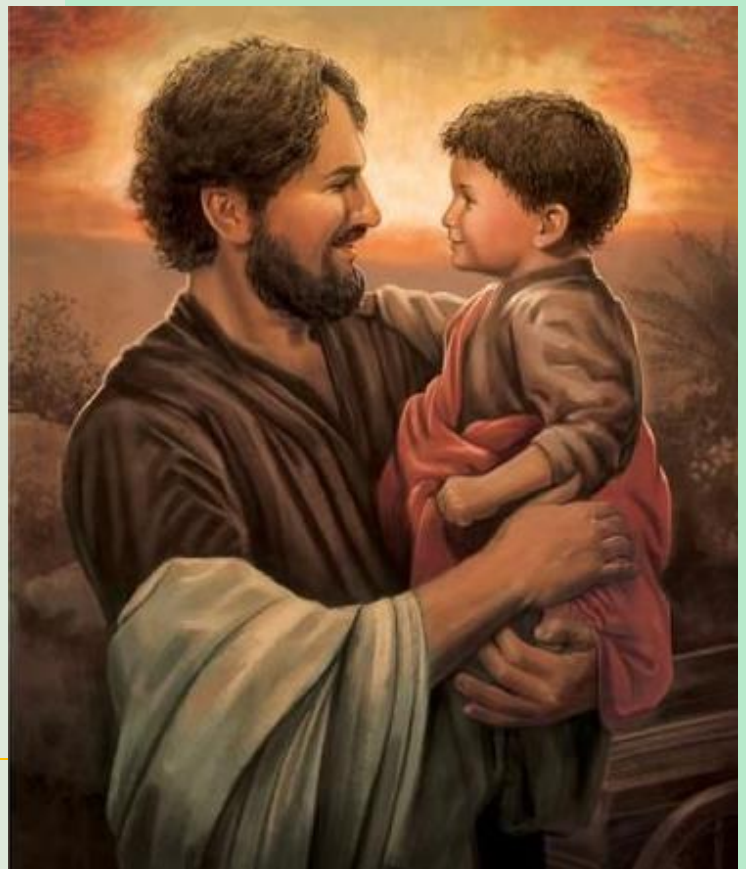
Notwithstanding the lack of resources other than the gospels to unravel how Jesus advanced in "wisdom, age, and grace," Deiss asserted that we could reasonably believe that, like all human beings, Jesus carried within himself the indelible traces of his childhood in the fullness of his adulthood<sup>14</sup>. We may recognize Jesus' childhood memories and learnings in his words and actions, which are recorded in the gospels. Where else could he have possibly learned them, other than, in their home at Nazareth with Joseph and Mary as his teachers or mentors? We know that a part of what a student has learned or has become reveals the kind of teachers or mentors he had in life. If this is true, we can also reasonably hypothesize some qualities of St. Joseph through the words and actions of Jesus apart from what the gospels have said about him. Let us mention a few important things Jesus must have learned from his earthly father.



We can imagine how Jesus learned from his parents his first Aramaic words: *imma* (“mama”) and *abba* (“daddy”). He must have recognized in the faces of Joseph and Mary the meaning of these words<sup>15</sup>. More importantly, it was from Joseph that he learned the meaning of “*Abba*.” Through Joseph, a positive image of fatherhood must have been etched on the memories of Jesus. Perhaps, he would not have taught to call God, “*Abba*”, if he did not experience the kindness and tenderness of His *Abba* Joseph. For Jesus, the icon of his *Abba* in heaven is no other than His *Abba* Joseph on earth. In highlighting the kindness of God, the Father in heaven, which is much more than that of a kind father who would not give his son a snake if he asks for a fish, Jesus must have remembered his earthly father, Joseph<sup>16</sup>. The kindness and tenderness which Joseph has lavished on Jesus must have led Him to discover the infinite goodness and tenderness of God the Father in heaven. Moreover, Jesus himself shows tenderness and love towards little children. Could this be a reflection of the tenderness that His *Abba* Joseph showered on Him during His childhood<sup>17</sup>?

The gospels also tell us that people are astonished at his wisdom and deep knowledge of the scriptures. Adding to their amazement is the fact that they knew that he never went to any school<sup>18</sup>. In the synagogue at Nazareth, his townspeople could not believe what they have seen and heard because they took it against Him for being a carpenter's son<sup>19</sup>. We can look at the people's comments as a compliment on Joseph rather than an insult. It does not only confirm that Jesus learned from him the carpenter's trade but also the first rubrics of the Torah, which he had become a master. Being mainly responsible for the religious formation of his son, Joseph must have taught Jesus his first lessons in Hebrew the language as well as the books of the Torah and the prophets. He must have taught Jesus the “*Shema*”<sup>20</sup>, the first prayer that any Jew should learn. We can imagine that it was Joseph who drilled the words and meaning of the “*Shema*” in his memory when He was still a young boy.

Hence, we can also reasonably say that the answer Jesus gave to the scribe who asked him about the greatest commandment was the memory of the “*Shema*” which he learned from Joseph. Indeed, it is paradoxical to imagine Joseph teaching the meaning of the “*Shema*,” the love of God to Jesus, who is himself the face of God's love<sup>21</sup>. How did he teach Jesus the primacy of God's love in one's life? Indeed, not only through words but in the most eloquent way through his actions. In their yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Passover<sup>22</sup> or in their weekly visit to the synagogue, Jesus must have seen how important those moments are for Joseph. He must have seen Joseph and Mary listening attentively to God's word and, together, singing the psalms and praising God. He must have seen them how they treated their neighbors well and even strangers. He must have seen in his parents the perfect example of what it means to love God and neighbor.



As a dutiful father, Joseph has taught Jesus his trade. The gospel of Mark tells us that the people of Nazareth knew well that Jesus was a carpenter<sup>23</sup>. Even in his preaching, Jesus used the images of plows, yokes, chests, lampstands, etc. which most probably are the things He and Joseph used to construct in their workshop<sup>24</sup>. But Jesus did not only learn from Joseph the skills of using the hammer, chisel, ruler, and T-square. He must also have learned for him the value of a job well done and to see his “work as an expression of love” (RC 22). He also probably learned from Joseph that one should not work only for the food that perishes but also for the food that endures for eternal life<sup>25</sup>. In John’s gospel, Jesus identified this food in saying, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work<sup>26</sup>,” Can we also say that Jesus saw in Joseph, a just man whose life is nourished and energized by his deepest desire to recognize and accomplish God’s will? It is also reasonable to imagine that Mary must have recounted on Jesus the events around his mysterious birth as well how Joseph placed his entire self at the service of God’s holy will and design.

Finally, we wonder how Joseph and Mary accepted Jesus' celibacy, which was something counter-cultural in traditional Jewish society. During his time, everybody takes as a rule what the scriptures say, “it is not good for a man to be alone<sup>27</sup>.” However, the incident of finding Jesus in the temple must have left a deep impression on Joseph which has prepared him to accept that Jesus is destined for a different path set by the will of the heavenly Father and not by human conventions<sup>28</sup>. Joseph must have realized that all human traditions are subordinated to the will of God. His duty as a father to Jesus is realized above all in respecting his freedom and decisions and in supporting Him to fulfil his vocation and mission. However, Joseph did not have the privilege to see that the greatest learner in the world who grew up in “wisdom, age, and grace” under his roof will become the greatest teacher of all. But it does not forbid us to imagine that before his demise, Joseph still had the pleasure of listening to the wisdom of the Son of God, whom God the Father has entrusted to his fatherly care.

## CONCLUSION

The figure of St. Joseph as a father and educator should appeal to parents, teachers, formators, mentors, and all involved in the training and formation of the young. To parents, St. Joseph’s example challenges them not to abnegate their educative duty to the schools because more than anybody else, they have the greatest impact on the formation of the minds and hearts of their children. In the earliest times, the home is at the same time a school which trains children not only to learn a specific trade but to educate for life. St. Joseph shows that the duty of the parents, above all, is to accompany and help their children to discover their vocation and mission in life. To all teachers, formators, and mentors in schools, formation houses, and oratories, St. Joseph’s example is a reminder that teaching is a noble vocation that draws its inspiration from the mission of parenthood. Thus, they must always see themselves as the second parents of their students. In this view, the ideal type of education lies in the seamless collaboration between the school and home. St. Joseph reminds all educators that the success of their mission lies not only in empowering the youth to attain a comfortable life but also to help them discover and accomplish their God-given purpose and mission. Lastly, St. Joseph invites all parents and teachers to see in every child, in every student the face of Jesus whom the heavenly Father has entrusted to them.



## NOTES

1“Redemptoris Custos” (August 15, 1989) | John Paul II,” accessed January 2, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_15081989\\_redemptoris-custos.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_15081989_redemptoris-custos.html).

2Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin, p. 29a, quoted in Chaim Isaac Waxman, *The Jewish Father: Past and Present* (William Petschek National Jewish Family Center, American Jewish Committee ..., 1983), p. 60.

3Cf. Ephraim Levitz, “The Concept of Fatherhood in Traditional Jewish Sources and Its Impact on Current Views of Fatherhood” (2014), p. 50. Accessed June 1, 2020, <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/12889>.

4Cf. Waxman, *The Jewish Father*, p. 60.

5Levitz, “The Concept of Fatherhood in Traditional Jewish Sources and Its Impact on Current Views of Fatherhood.” pp. 51-52.

6Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

7Cf. *IBID.*, p. 54. Training in the study of the Torah “includes the study of practical knowledge (application of Jewish law in all facets of life), as well as theoretical study, referred to as study for the sake of study.”

8Cf. *IBID.*, p. 56.

9Cf. *IBID.*, p. 55.

10Cf. *IBID.*, p. 55.

11Cf. Waxman, *The Jewish Father*, p. 60.

12Lucien Deiss, Joseph, Mary, Jesus (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1996). The author is a former

professor of theology and Scripture at the Grand Scholasticat de Chevilly-Larue. Being one of the pioneers of the biblical and liturgical renewal, he worked for the reform brought about by Vatican II and participated in the ecumenical translation of the Bible.

13“General Audience of 19 March 2014 | Francis,” accessed May 28, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140319\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140319_udienza-generale.html).

14Deiss, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, 80.

15*Ibid.*, p. 8.

16Cf. Luke 11:11-13

17Cf. Deiss, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, pp. 21-22.

18Cf. John 7:15

19Cf. Matthew 13:55

20Cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today.”

21Cf. Deiss, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, p. 17-19.

22Cf. Luke 2:41

23Cf. Mark 6:3

24Deiss, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, p. 15.

25Cf. John 6:27

26John 4:34

27Genesis 2:18

28Deiss, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, p. 138.





# SAINT JOSEPH as GUARDIAN



Fr. Aldrich Gamboa, OSJ

In the hymn *Salve, Pater Salvatoris* that could be found in the Gallican Breviary during the reform of Pope Pius V (1569) and remained in use until the late 18th century, we can find the title describing St. Joseph as “*custos Redemptoris*”:



*Salve, pater Salvatoris,  
Salve, custos Redemptoris,  
Ioseph ter amabilis.  
Salve, Sponse Matris Dei,  
Salve, hospes Iesu mei,  
Ioseph ter amabilis.*

We can find the special role of St. Joseph as “Guardian” and “Depositary” of the mystery of God in the grander perspective of the mystery of redemption and the “missionary movements”. This faith is explicitly expressed in the ecclesiological and theological vision of St. John Paul II: the encyclical *Redemptoris Custos* together with the other “*Redemptoris*” encyclicals form the missionary movement of the Church and the idea of the Church as communion emanating from the Trinity. The vertical movement from the Trinity is represented by these encyclicals: *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980) re the Father, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May

1986) re the Holy Spirit, *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979) re Jesus Christ. From this first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* flows the horizontal movement highlighting the image of the Holy Family: *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987) re Mary, *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989) re St. Joseph and then culminating on the *Redemptoris Missio* (17 December 1990) about the mission of the Church. Here we can see the theological movement of the mission from the Trinity (*Missio Trinitatis*) unfolding in the mystery of Incarnation and Redemption (*Mysterium Salutis*) and there flows the mission of the Church (*Missio Ecclesiae*).

In this theological and missionary movement, John Paul II places St. Joseph at the heart of redemption and in the mystery of incarnation and highlights his role as the legal father of Jesus and husband of Mary and as the guardian and protector of the Holy Family<sup>1</sup>. It is important to note here the title used by the document to describe St. Joseph “*custos*” or guardian. It gives light to the nature of “fatherhood” of Joseph. Though St. Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus, he remains as the father of Jesus by the virtue of his marriage to Mary and together they form a genuine family. «In this family, Joseph is the father: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an “apparent” or merely “substitute” fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family»<sup>2</sup>.

In this light, considering Joseph as the *custos*, he is not only a father to Jesus or a husband to Mary but also a «guardian and cooperator in the providential mystery of God»<sup>3</sup>. As a *custos*, Joseph dedicated himself at the service of the Incarnate Word, his life becomes a total dedication to the service of the Messiah and Holy Family of Nazareth<sup>4</sup>. This humble and faithful service that characterized St. Joseph is also what inspired Pope Francis to consider him as his model as he leads the people of God. In his homily during the Mass for the inauguration of his Petrine ministry which falls on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, husband of Mary and Patron of the Universal Church, he emphasizes the image of St. Joseph as *custos* considering him as an authentic image of service and responding to the Christian vocation.

«Joseph is a “protector” because he is able to hear God’s voice and be guided by his will; and for this reason he is all the more sensitive to the persons entrusted to his safekeeping. He can look at things realistically, he is in touch with his surroundings, he can make truly wise decisions. In him, dear friends, we learn how to respond to God’s call, readily and willingly, but we also see the core of the Christian vocation, which is Christ! Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation!»<sup>5</sup>.

This significantly previews his peculiar way of leadership and the ecclesiological approach of his pontificate. He adapted the Latin American inductive method for theology basing on the concept: See-Judge-Act<sup>6</sup>. This is prominent in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and in his encyclical letter *Laudato si’*. Another notable aspect of his theology and ecclesiology is his great respect and consideration to the *sensus fidei* specially on what the Latin American theology calls the “theology of the people.” This very evident in his homilies and messages and at times, he would even promote special devotions.

In his apostolic journey to the Philippines, he indirectly promoted his personal devotion to St. Joseph particularly the image of the Sleeping St. Joseph. He said that he has this image on top of his table and whenever he would have a difficult problem he would write it on a piece of paper



and put it under the image so that St. Joseph would dream of it<sup>7</sup>. Afterwards, he gave an inspiring reflection about the dream of St. Joseph and his task to be the guardian of the Holy Family. He warned the families against the «colonization of new ideologies» that destroy the family. Then, he encouraged them to imitate St. Joseph, «Like Saint Joseph. The gift of the Holy Family was entrusted to Saint Joseph so that he could care for it. Each of you, each of us – for I too am part of a family – is charged with caring for God’s plan»<sup>8</sup>.

From the teachings of these Popes and in the underlying ecclesiology and theological approach, we can see the significant role that the person of St. Joseph plays in the life of the Church. He is considered as patron, protector, and guardian of the Universal Church. Moreover, we notice the emerging idea of St. Joseph being a model for the faithful specially towards the path of sanctification and dedication of one’s life to service. In fact, in the *Redemptoris Custos*, Pope John Paul II expressed his “heartfelt wish” that «the very person of St. Joseph may have renewed significance for the Church in our day in the light of the Third Millenium». Being both a custos of the Holy Family and a depository of the mystery of God, St. Joseph will not only be helpful in our understanding of the Church but also of the religious life since he is the first on earth together with Mary to contemplate in the mystery of the Word-made-Flesh and the first to take care of the interests of Jesus.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>T. STRAMARE, «San Giuseppe. Il custode del redentore nella vita di Cristo e della Chiesa» in Omelie temi di Predicazione 98 (2006) 57

<sup>2</sup>Redemptoris Custos, n. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., n. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., n. 8.

<sup>5</sup>FRANCIS, Homily during Holy Mass for the beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome (19 March 2013).

<sup>6</sup>G.WHELAN, 11.

<sup>7</sup>FRANCIS, Address in the Meeting with the Families Manila (16 January 2015).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Redemptoris Custos, n. 32





# JOSEPHITE SPIRITUALITY

Fr. John Attuli, OSJ



## Prayer

**W**e come to you in our afflictions, O blessed Joseph...in order that helped by your example and intercession, we may live in a holy way.

*Prayer of Leo XII to St. Joseph*

## Introduction

The month of March is especially dedicated to our beloved Patron St. Joseph. The People all over the world look at the marvellous example of the life of St. Joseph. And we the Oblates of St. Joseph must see it also in the context of this “Year of Spreading Devotion to St. Joseph”. Therefore, it’s good that we reflect with special interest on the Spirituality of St. Joseph.

## Spirituality

We know that Spirituality means *a particular way of life inspired and led by the Spirit*. We know it from the Sacred Scripture that the Holy Spirit gives His gifts to individuals. The Church teaches that there are seven gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us and they are: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel,



fortitude, piety and fear of God. We know that besides these Gifts to the individuals, the Holy Spirit continues to build up the Church through the instrumentality of some Holy Men and Women. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the Church as a Sacrament of Salvation continues to bring people to Christ and so that she can fulfil her mission, the Holy Spirit *“bestowed upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her...”* (Cf. CCC.768).

We all are guided by the Holy Spirit and we all have received different gifts from the Spirit. As religious we have received the gift of the evangelical counsels. They are given to us for the building up of the Church, the body of Christ. Our Constitutions say: *“The Holy Spirit builds up the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, also with the gift that is renewed, of the evangelical counsels, which strengthen in a more perfect way the bonds of baptism”* (OSJ Const. Art.1). St. Paul in his letter to the Romans says: *“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher in teaching; the exhorter in exhortation; the giver in generosity; the leader in diligence; the compassionate in cheerfulness”* (Rom 12:6-8).

### **The life style of St. Joseph**

We know that our beloved founder St. Joseph Marello was enlightened by the Holy Spirit and he received a special grace of attraction towards the life of the Guardian of the Redeemer, St. Joseph. What attracted Marello was the life style of St. Joseph, which we can call the spirituality of St. Joseph. St Joseph Marello closely observed the life style of St. Joseph. So, he could discover certain basic characteristics of life of St. Joseph. Thus, Marello taught *“St. Joseph lived in union with God, in humility, in hidden life, hard work and total commitment to ‘the interests of Jesus’.”* (OSJ Const. Art.3).

### **St. Joseph’s heritage**

We believe that St Joseph inherited the moral and spiritual heritage from his ancestors. He was aware of the promises God made to them. He felt himself to be one with them. He had a duty to be worthy of their virtues and to repair their faults. So he called his ancestors to mind often with the awareness that he owed a debt of gratitude.

He always remembered where he was from. In his veins ran the blood of Abraham whose living faith and total obedience had won for him an everlasting posterity; the blood of Jesse of whom Isaiah had said *“a branch shall spring forth from his root.”* Many legal documents bore witness to his link with the prophet-king. Solomon was another glorious ancestor well known for his incomparable wisdom; Roboam, Josaphat, Achaz to whom Elijah had foretold the virgin’s conception, and many others. In spite of his royal blood of the illustrious tribe of Judah, his status was that of an unassuming workman in a small town. Instead of living on rich lands of his ancestors he resided in Nazareth, an unpretentious village.

When we look at our Patron all the evangelical perfections are found in an admirably balanced manner in him. For our reflection now we will take only some of the outstanding virtues which Marello accepted and imitated in his life, which he asked us, his spiritual children to imitate.

## 1. Obedience

The place of honour among the virtues of St. Joseph is held by obedience. Each time the Evangelist mentions the saint it is to show him practising that virtue. "Rising up, he did as he was commanded"(Mt.1:24; 2:14). "He rose up", an expression that in biblical language means the promptness, the energy with which one gives himself to the task he is about to perform.

Joseph appears before us as that servant of whom God can ask anything, like the centurion in the Gospel who said of his servant, 'go' and he goes; .... 'Come and he comes'; ... 'Do this, 'and he does it'(Mt.8:9; Lk. 7:8)

As the prayer '*Our Father*' had not yet been taught to men; yet during his whole life Joseph was endlessly repeating the central phrase, "Father, may your will be done" (Mt. 6:10). He had perfectly understood that the greatest wisdom a creature can possess is to live in dependence on his creator, like the Son who entering the world offered himself as a complete oblation, "Behold, I come, O Father, to do thy will"(Heb. 10:7; Ps 40:7-8).

At every manifestation of a desire from heaven, Joseph surrendered himself like a docile child, ready to answer every call, every undertaking, and every sacrifice. He listened always and obeyed. He did not know where God would lead him; but for him it was enough that God knew. He did not argue; he did not object; he did not ask for explanations. He was always submissive and prompt.

## 2. Humility

"Obedience is the achievement of the strong and humble". Only God could measure the depths of Joseph's humility. He knew himself to be favoured by God. But, he was neither disappointed nor exultant by his vocation. He did not make use of his title of adopted father of the Son of God to set himself apart or on a pedestal. Where others might have put themselves in the pleasant splendour of pride, St. Joseph remained in the spirit of '*Magnificat*'. He buried himself in the shadows.

If he found any good in himself, he recognized it as a free gift of God. By his modesty and humility he was distinguished from others. He might have said like Elizabeth "From where does this joy come to me that my God and the Mother of my God have deigned to live in my house?"

## 3. Silence

St. Joseph found his joy always in fulfilling God's plan peacefully and so silently that the Evangelist can give us no word of his. In all challenging situations in which God placed him, he remained calm and silent. He perfectly knew that the duty of a servant was not to speak but to listen to his master's voice. Thus, he teaches us that silence is the necessary condition for leading a life of *union with God, of close contact* with him.



We the Oblates of St. Joseph should not regret for not having any words spoken by Joseph recorded in the gospel, because our Patron wants to teach us the lesson of silence. He knew that the Father had confided a great secret in trust to him. He decided to keep silence in order to keep that secret and to meditate and relish the treasure he found. He did not want anyone who saw him to think of him other than a simple workman trying to earn his daily bread, so that no word of his might cause an obstacle to the manifestation of the Divine Word.

He remained breathless in wonder for what God had done to Mary and to himself. He felt himself so overwhelmed by glory that only silence could express the depth of his gratitude. He needed deeper and deeper silence and recollection in order to meditate on the graces, the mysteries entrusted to him.

Some may think that St. Joseph the Silent man is only a poor old-fashioned saint who lived and worked as a carpenter in the remote village of Nazareth, a man who has no message for us today. On the contrary, it is really St. Joseph who teaches the modern people of our century the most urgent and needed lessons of life. No other model could serve the men of this present time, so badly in need of what makes true greatness. Modern man appreciates nothing so much as excitement, noise, showy appearance, and quick results. Faith in recollection, silence, and meditation is lacking. These important virtues seem in the eyes of the world to be outworn and outdated today.

#### 4. Life hidden in God

St. Joseph teaches us that true greatness consists in serving God and our neighbor. He appears before us as the perfect servant, forgetful of self, desiring only his master's glory. He ordered his life along lines to procure that glory. He did not want to make his actions shine in men's eyes. His heart burned with love that was ever attentive to the slightest sign of God's Will. Thus, he reminds us of the primacy of interior and contemplative life. He gives us the great lesson of subordinating all our actions to the interior life. By his life, he proclaims that self-denial is indispensable in order to be really fruitful according to God's Heart. His message is that *the essential is not to appear, but to be; not to bear a title, but to serve.*

To the worldly wise, whatever is opposed to the rights of the individual is anathema. Everything should serve the individual and his supposed rights. The dream of many is that they may make a name for themselves, be distinguished so that the rest of the mankind will bow before them. Unfortunately, this temptation is increasing among us religious too.

It is good to remember that the last General Chapter observed the symptoms of individualism and pride in the reality of our Congregation. Some practical guidelines were given to the formators to help the seminarians to overcome such tendencies.

## Conclusion

In the present social context of the world we must seriously commit ourselves to learn from the beautiful example St. Joseph and live faithfully the values he lived. It's a challenge that we should accept in our life as Oblates of St. Joseph. People, especially the youth want to see us humble, obedient, recollecting in silence and hidden in the mystery of Christ taking care of the 'interests of Jesus'. They want convincing examples rather than verbal teachers in order to guide and inspire them. I think in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the canonization of our Founder, St. Joseph Marelllo, the Church and the world demand this from us.

Let me wind up remembering the great desire of the Church and our beloved founder expressed in our Constitutions: "By the profession of Religious vows one becomes an actual member of the Congregation and assumes the personal responsibility of striving for religious perfection... In this way the Oblates choose *"to follow closely the Divine Master by the practice of the evangelical counsels"* (let. 95). They live *"hidden and silently active in imitation of St. Joseph, that great model of a poor and humble life"* (let. 95) and dedicate themselves to the apostolic ministry proper to them"(Const. Art.7).

*"That to be hidden in Christ Jesus is of all glories the greatest"*

- Bossuet



## St. Joseph Devotional Activities in the “St. Thomas” Province

“The Congregation has St. Joseph as its Patron. Therefore, all its members are called Oblates of St. Joseph and make a special effort to honour and love him as a father by imitating his virtues and promoting his devotion” (First Rules; GD art.1).

Devotion to St. Joseph is part and parcel of the faith tradition of the Catholic families in India. In all the houses of our province, there is the daily recitation of the Litany of St. Joseph and the prayer to St. Joseph after the Rosary, there is also the weekly devotion of the “Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph”.

On Wednesdays, when the Liturgy permits, the votive mass of St. Joseph is celebrated in communities and parishes. To this we add, the ‘novena of St. Joseph’ usually together with the lay people.

In various ways the Month of St. Joseph is celebrated. In families and parishes we have special prayers during the whole month of March. We call it ‘Masa Vanakkom’.

The Feast of St. Joseph on March 19<sup>th</sup> is celebrated and prepared for by a Novena or Triduum. March 19<sup>th</sup> is celebrated solemnly in almost all the parishes. Besides the celebration in our parishes, our confreres go around for preaching and for the Eucharistic celebration. We are also invited in other parishes to preach novena in preparation to the feast.

The Feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1<sup>st</sup> is celebrated solemnly in our houses and parishes. In the province it’s also the day of first profession of novices. On this day in some parishes we have grand celebration organized by the construction workers.

Recently we introduced particular celebrations for the Feast of the Holy Spouses together with the Josephite-Marellian Laity. The Groups of Josephite-Marellian Laity have periodical meetings and formation programmes. There are formation classes on the spirituality and devotion to St. Joseph.

Every year we print and circulate Calendars with the image of St. Joseph, which people appreciate much. Through the quarterly publication “Samrakshakan”(Guardian), we propagate the knowledge and devotion to St. Joseph.

Of course, together with what we do in order to spread the devotion to St. Joseph, as Oblates of St. Joseph we should always examine personally our life to see how we imitate our Patron, “who was the first model of the religious life, having always had his eyes fixed on the Divine Exemplar, whom the Eternal father mercifully willed to send into the world to teach us the way to heaven”(GD art. 2).

Deo Gratias!



# SAINT JOSEPH

## Minister of Salvation

Fr. Ferdinando Pentrella, OSJ



**T**he theme for our reflection, as presented in the title given by our Josephite-Marellian Spirituality Center, is very general and difficult to take on. But, since it is for us Oblates of St. Joseph seen in the context of this “Year of Spreading Devotion to St. Joseph”, certainly it is referring to the part carried out by our Saint in the historical reality of Jesus’ humanity, “mysterium Christi” (Col. 4:3; Eph. 3:4) and the culminating moment of the “*mysterium pietatis*” (1 Tim. 3:16) or “*mysterium salutis*” (cfr. Col. 1:26; Eph. 1:4ff.).

So our reflection will seek to help us meditate on the **role of St. Joseph in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God.**

In this regard, article 3 of our Constitutions states: “Faithful to the charism of their Founder, the Oblates of St. Joseph are called to reproduce in their lives and in the ministry the Christian mystery as it was lived by St. Joseph in union with God, in humility, in a hidden life, in hard work and in total commitment to ‘the interests of Jesus’.”

Concretely, our reflection will follow that which the “gospels of Jesus infancy” tell us and what we pray and reflect upon in the pious practice of the “Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph”.



We begin with a quote from Paul VI's homily given on March 19, 1964. He says that Joseph "gave Jesus his civil status, social category, economic condition, professional experience, family environment and human education". These are the life conditions required for the historical reality of the mystery of the Incarnation and they are assured by Joseph in face of his true marriage with Mary, on which depends legally his fatherhood of Jesus.

John Paul II also affirms in "*Redemptoris Custos*": "Together with human nature, all that is human, and especially the family - as the first dimension of man's existence in the world - is also taken up in Christ. Within this context, Joseph's human fatherhood was also "taken up" in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation" (n. 21).

In light of the facts of the Incarnation of the Word, it is through Joseph as father that the historical reality of the humanity of Jesus is inserted "into the human, social and religious order which includes the census enrolment, the circumcision, the conferral of the name, the offering of the firstborn, and the defense, sustenance and education of Jesus as true man." (T. Stramare, *San Giuseppe nel Mistero di Dio*, Ed. PIEMME 1992, p. 126-127).

We will take some time now to reflect briefly on the "individual" mysteries of the human existence of the Incarnate Son of God in which St. Joseph has his role as protagonist, while making it known that it is not our intention (nor possibility nor ability) to take on the exegetical and theological meanings of the gospel passages which are cited.

## 1. The genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1:1-16; Lk. 3:23-38).

Mt. 1:16 : "Jacob the father of **Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah**".

Lk. 3:23 : "When **Jesus** began his ministry he was about thirty years of age. **He was the son, as was thought, of Joseph**".

For our reflection some of the consequences or conclusions that can be deduced from these gospel passages are of interest.

- a. Joseph assures Jesus of his royal descendancy from David, as foretold by the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam. 7:12-16.
- b. This concerns a legal descendancy (for Jesus) or fatherhood (for Joseph), which substitutes the natural, given that the generation of the Word Incarnate did not come about following the laws of physics.
- c. This legal fatherhood of Joseph's is just as true and real as that which is natural.

## 2. The Annunciation to Joseph (Mt. 1:18-25).

Mt. 1:20-21 : "**Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will**

**bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”.**

Having reached the culminating moment in the history of salvation (*mysterium salutis*), Joseph is chosen by God and prepared by Him (this is why he is “just”, v. 19) :

- a. to be and remain as the “spouse” (v. 19) of Mary;
- b. to save and watch over the virginal conception of his “spouse” (v. 20);
- c. to give the name to this unique “son”, who to all familial and legal effects is completely his son..

### 3. The birth of Jesus (Lk. 2:1-16).

**Lk. 2:4-5 : “And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child”.**

**Lk. 2:16 : “So they (the shepherds) went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger”.**

God willed :

- a. that Jesus, conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18,20; Lk. 1:35), be born of Mary, virgin and betrothed to Joseph;
- b. that Joseph as a true father give Jesus his civil status and social category;
- c. that Joseph be beside Mary as her spouse and the “child” as father, with a fatherhood which is fuller than that which is biological: a legal, affective and psychological fatherhood (consisting of welcoming and educating).

### 4. The circumcision of Jesus (Lk. 2:21).

**“When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb”.**

**Mt.1:21 : (the Angel to Joseph) “you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”.**

For the Hebrew people one of the first duties of the father toward his son is that of “circumcising him”, a precept and a rite which, even if not done literally and physically by the father, signifies the father’s responsibility of enrolling his son in the people of the promise.

Luke underlines the link between the circumcision, the first shedding of blood, and the conferral of the name in order to reveal the salvific meaning of the rite: “the circumcision was the historical moment in which the name of Jesus became “*mysterium salutis*” (T. Stramare, o. c., p. 97).



As said in the ancient liturgical hymn in honor of St. Joseph "*Caelitum Joseph*", God allowed Joseph to be a "minister" (assistance and instrument) of this "mystery of salvation": "*dedit (te) et esse ministrum salutis*".

- a. Joseph, even though he is not named since for the Evangelist Jesus is the protagonist, is the father who provided this rite for Jesus,
- b. Joseph as father ensured that everything was carried out "according to the Law" of the people of the promise.
- c. Joseph, by means of a personal experience unknown to us, lived directly all of the particular aspects of that moment of salvation: the drops of blood, the cries of the baby, his tears, his pleading eyes.

## 5. The presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Lk. 2:22-38).

Lk. 2:22-24 : "**When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they (his parents) took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord', and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord**".

Lk. 2:27 : "**the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law**".

Lk. 2:33 : "**The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him**".

Jesus presented to the Father remains always the absolute protagonist. Mary and Joseph are the executors of the rite established by the Law (Lv. 12:24; Ex. 13:2; 13:11; Lv. 5:7; 12:8).

Mary has an important role. Besides the fact that it is for her purification that the Holy Family came to the Temple, the prophecy of Simeon, though having Jesus as its central point Jesus who is salvation, explicitly involves here, as mother, in what is to happen to Jesus.



In this "mystery" as well, the participation of Joseph, as father, is certain and of the first order.

- a. He is the one responsible for the child and of the religious observances which regard him. For the Hebrew people the principle duties of a father toward the son was to circumcise him, ransom him (for the firstborn), instruct him in the Torah and in a trade and to obtain for him a wife.
- b. Joseph is directly and economically interested in the observance of two precepts

of the Torah: the law of purification for his wife Mary who had become a mother and the law of the firstborn child, his son.

- c. Joseph by mean of the actions of the rite offers the body of the child and ransoms him, even though in reality that Firstborn for his entire existence would remain an “offering” to the Father and the “ransom” would not have substituted his belonging to the Father.

**6. The flight to and residence in Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15) and the return from Egypt (Mt. 2:19-21).**

Mt. 2:14-15a : **“Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod”.**

Mt. 2:21 : **“He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel”.**

Joseph is shown to be carrying out his duties and his rights as head of the Holy Family.

- a. The Angel appears to him; speaks with him; communicates to him their destination; reveals to him the time to return; orders him to return.
- b. Joseph follows immediately and exactly God’s commando not as an executor in service of someone superior to him in his house, but as the indisputable head of his family, which is subject to him.
- c. We add the consoling and always timely application of this “mystery” made by Leo XIII in his Encyclical *“Quamquam pluries”*: St. Joseph over the course of time you always saved your Son, who in the Church continues to be persecuted to the point of wishing him dead.

**7. Jesus stays behind in the Temple (Lk. 2:41-50).**

**“his parents looked for him (v. 44)... After three days they found him in the temple (v. 46)... When his parents saw him, they were astonished (v. 48)... ‘Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.’ (v. 48)... But they did not understand what he said to them (v. 50)”.**

We would like to note the verbs which in this “mystery” Joseph lived, sharing in them with Mary, and what they tell us.

- a. **To search for Jesus** is in reality the permanent state of the Christian, even when we **anguished** due to lack of satisfaction or failure.
- b. It is always possible **to find Jesus and to look upon him with astonishment**.
- c. Another constant position for the Christian is to welcome Jesus and to trust in him, even while **not understanding his words**(*“in verbo autem tuo”*, Lk. 5:5).

**8. The hidden life in Nazareth (Mt 2. 22b-23; Lk. 2:39-40,51-52).**

Mt. 2:23 : **“(Having returned from Egypt Joseph) departed for the region of Galilee. He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth”.**



Lk. 2:39-40 : “(After the presentation in the Temple, Joseph, Mary and the child) **returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him**”.

Lk. 2:51-52 : “(After Jesus stayed behind in the Temple, Jesus) **went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced (in) wisdom and age and favor before God and man**”.

A hidden life which lasted “**about thirty years...He was the son, as was thought, of Joseph**” (Lk. 3:23).

ohn Paul II notes in “*Redemptoris Custos*”: “The growth of Jesus ‘in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man’ (Lk 2:52) took place within the Holy Family under the eyes of Joseph” (n. 16). Therefore, Joseph’s family, the Holy Family, not only is “the prototype and example for all Christian families” (ibid, n. 7), but also “an example and model for human families, in the order of salvation and holiness” (ibid, n. 22).

As for Jesus, also for us who belong to the Family of the Oblates of St. Joseph or to the Josephite-Marellian Family, there is a path of growth (inevitably) in age and just as much a growth (chosen) in wisdom and grace before God and men.

### **DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH in the “Holy Family” Province**

In our “Holy Family” Province, **in all of our Houses**, besides the daily recitation of the Litany of St. Joseph and the prayer to St. Joseph after the Rosary, there is the weekly practice of the “Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph”, which in some parishes is prayed with the people.

Each Wednesday, when the Liturgy permits, the votive mass of St. Joseph is celebrated. To this we add, on the same conditions, the votive mass of St. Joseph Marello each Tuesday, just as each Saturday the votive mass of Our Lady.

In various ways, the Month of St. Joseph is celebrated.





The Feast of St. Joseph on March 19<sup>th</sup> is celebrated and prepared for by a Novena or Triduum. The Feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1<sup>st</sup> is also celebrated.

Particular celebrations are also held for the Feast of the Holy Family, the titular patron of the Province, and the Feast of the Holy Spouses, usually on the Sunday which follows the actual feast day.

The Groups of Josephite-Marellian Laity have at least one meeting a month with a time for Josephite-Marellian formation. During one of the aforementioned feasts the Groups renew their annual membership.

Two houses, **Solofra (Avellino) and Margherita di Savoia (Barletta)**, distinguish themselves in honoring St. Joseph the Worker on May 1st with a Novena or Triduum in preparation, special celebrations and events, and the day of the Feast masses, processions and recreational moments.

In Solofra this is the Patronal Feast of the Church-Rectory. In Margherita di Savoia it is the Patronal Feast of the Chapel located in the new area of the Parish.

It is good to recall that for an Oblate of St. Joseph, or even anyone who belongs to the Josephite-Marellian Family (an Oblate Sister, one of our laity), it is important to see “how” we live and present or spread the devotion to St. Joseph our Patron and Model given to us by our Holy Founder Joseph Marelllo. But first there is the need and the question of “what” is the devotion to St. Joseph for each one of us Oblates.

Our Rules say that **the devotion to St. Joseph belongs to the nature and purpose of the Congregation.**

We quote first article 1 from the General Directory : “The Congregation has St. Joseph as its Patron. Therefore, all its members are called Oblates of St. Joseph and make a special effort to honor and love him as a father by imitating his virtues and promoting his devotion” (First Rules). The explicit reference to the “First Rules” from 1892 (Chapter I – Nature of the Congregation) is due to the fact that the text is identical in both documents.

Article 3 of the Constitutions is more specific. We quote only the parts from in which are of interest to us here. After having stated that the Oblates of St. Joseph “are called to reproduce in their lives and in the ministry the Christian mystery as it was lived by St. Joseph” (a statement which quoted completely at the beginning of the previous reflection), the article speaks of our “forms of ministry” in service of the Church and presents three of them in particular. The third is to “promote devotion to St. Joseph”.

To be thorough we have articles 74-75 of the Constitutions and 41 of the General Directory which give some “Josephite” indications for our ministry.

*“Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit”*, so as to have a greater awareness of what for us Oblates on a personal level is devotion to St. Joseph, independently of that which is done...or is not done.

**Laus Deo!**

# FAITH OBEDIENCE WORK



## Virtues of a Son of Joseph

Fr. Alvaro De Oliveira, OSJ

**W**e live in a vague society that cares less of the fundamental values of man, in a time of great mental confusion. This social phenomenon has a devastating effect on human behavior. Many philosophers affirm that we are not in "an age of change, but in a change of epoch." And we are part of today's nihilistic culture. It is not possible for us to uproot ourselves from this world to go and live elsewhere. The religions, the ecclesiastical world, the consecrated life, and even we Oblates of St. Joseph are in it. What can we do? "Or fight or die", said St. Teresa: do we lie down and slowly vanish into thin air? Or react to regenerate and renew our community, province, Congregation?



Our holy Founder chose St. Joseph as his model and pointed him out to his Oblates, teaching them to imitate him and invoke him: "You o Joseph, show us the way, sustain us at every step, lead us where divine Providence wants us to arrive." Among the many and rich qualities of the life of St. Joseph, today we want to reflect briefly on three virtues: faith, obedience, work.

01 - St. Joseph is presented, in the New Testament, with a few essential features. He does not say a word in the Sacred Texts, but some very profound words are reserved for him. He is called by the Evangelist Matthew, "a just man" (Mt 1:19): "a man of faith, God-fearing, responsible, honest, sincere, worthy,

noble." The biblical concept of justice is determined by relationship with God. In the Old and New Testaments it is believed that those who fulfill the divine will in the fear of God, in love and in respect for others are just men. "The righteous will live by his faith" (Hab 2, 4), says the prophet Habakkuk, after affirming that the wicked will die without escape. The man of faith expects help and salvation from God (Ps. 34, 9-10), because he knows that the Lord is just and merciful (Ps 4: 2,4).

The ideal of the "righteous Israelite" is presented especially in the Psalms, in Job and in the book of Proverbs. The chosen people exercise justice when they do not neglect their duties to God (Is 58: 2) and when every individual leads a perfect life in every respect (Ps. 4, 2-5; Is 56, 1-3). Alongside religious fidelity, civil honesty and loyalty in general, the just Israelite is assiduous in the practice of faith, respects the law in all its precepts, and is held up in the administration of justice. In the New Testament the term indicates the ethical and religious rectitude of man, in the sense of willingness to make God's will his own. In Mt 21.32 and 2Pt 2.21 the way of justice is the life lived according to the precepts of God and therefore he who keeps the commandments is right. The adjective "right" refers, of course, to Jesus, but not to him alone (Mt 13.17; 23.25.25, Lk 1.6; 2.25; 2Pt 2.7). The full meaning of this term becomes clearer when it is combined with other adjectives of an ethical-religious "holy" (Acts 3.14), "God-fearing". And so was Saint Joseph throughout his life. The constant inspiration of his action was the will of God in all circumstances. And the vicissitudes of life presented him with particularly difficult moments (change of vocation, acceptance of paternity, long journey to the census, threat of death of the Child, flight to Egypt, return to Nazareth, loss of his son, possible illness with concern for the future of Mary and Jesus, and death). In all, Joseph saw the will of God. He was a faithful and just man to the end.

*To reflect: Is faith for me a commitment to a set of static truths or rather the following of the person of Jesus and growth in his friendship? (The Apostles said to the Lord: Increase our faith.) Am I God-fearing, honest, sincere, and responsible? Am I faithful to the practices of piety, even when I cannot do them with the community?*

02 - Being a "just" man - because he was willing to do the divine will joyfully and faithfully - Joseph gives his life to a project that transcends him, with the acceptance of the command to take Mary with him. Here is the justice of Joseph: it is not simply a question of the scrupulous observance of the commandments, but of a justice that is an integral search for the divine will, received with full obedience. Because of this obedience, a new life begins for Giuseppe, with previously unimaginable perspectives. He slowly discovers a deeper sense of the vocation of spouse and father. He will thus remain beside Mary as faithful bridegroom, and to the child a paternal and responsible figure. The assumption of this responsibility is expressed first with the decision to take Mary, his wife, with him; then with the imposition of the name to the newborn Son of Mary (Mt. 1.21). The act of naming means giving the child the social identity of the father: it is precisely for this reason that Jesus can be recognized as a "descendant of David", an essential requirement of messianicity. This child is, therefore, handed over to the responsibility and love of Joseph and, through him, God gives to human history the greatest pledge of his fidelity, he who is the "Emmanuel", the "God-with-us", prophesied by Isaiah.



"To the angelic orders Joseph always obeys readily and every time occur an expression most suggestive of his prompt response:" he took with him ". The first time was at the end of the annunciation of which he was the addressed: "he did as the angel of the Lord had ordered him and took his bride with him". Subsequently, "taking with oneself" concerns the angelic order about the child and mother to seek refuge in Egypt; finally the same expression occurs when it comes to returning from Egypt. "(Card. Gianfranco Ravasi).

Certainly all this is wrapped in the mystery of God, which is accessed only by faith and obedience to his will. Well, even in this Joseph excelled, defined, precisely because of his faith, with the sober and great appellation, of "just man". And right also because in all his life he always and only did the will of God.

Obedience is the condition of the social order. Society rests on the foundation of the fourth commandment, therefore without obedience there is no social order. From the Supreme Pontiff to the child, we see a stairway composed of innumerable steps, where each has inferior and superior levels. Everyone must obey. The Pope is also subject to the laws and regulations established by Jesus Christ. If we observe obedience, society, communities, families are good; if obedience is violated, everything walks slowly towards ruin.

Obedience is the condition of perfection and holiness especially for consecrated souls; the flight of obedience is their strength, their strength, the custody of their virtue. Whoever follows obedience, at every moment does the will of God, then walks on the path of holiness; he does

not need to look for where the will of God is: he has it before his eyes at every moment, without danger of deceiving himself.

*To reflect: Is my obedience ready, simple and supernatural? Can superiors always count on my willingness to accept a change of home, parish, or service? Or are they afraid to ask me something, do they have difficulty organizing the province because I refuse to cooperate?*



03 - Saint Joseph presides over the family of Nazareth, supports the home with his work, defends it and protects it, not with a leaders attitude, but leaving this role to God. After having started the day with praise to God together with his family, Joseph dedicated himself to the work of carpenter / blacksmith in his workshop: he welcomes and contracts customer requests, giving them due attention; and at the same time doing the deliveries in the right and honestly agreed ways. However, a reflective man as he was, Joseph knows and

establishes priorities in everything: God comes first and on him, Joseph knows, everything depends. Then comes his family. And there is also the right attention to work and customers, to be served professionally. Love for God, for people and for things, exactly in this order.

Surely Jesus observed, from an early age, the behavior and virtues of Mary and Joseph. He reflected himself in them and tried to imitate them in everything, according to his age, as the evangelist says: "he grew in wisdom, age and grace before God and before men" (Lk 2:52). Being a boy, it was natural that he followed his father to the workshop, taking an interest in the various types of work that Giuseppe carried out, carefully observing and learning the correct way to use the tools and to carry out precisely the jobs requested by the clients. Thus it was that he learned the paternal profession, deserving the same title of carpenter that he had been his father's: "Is not this the son of the carpenter?" (Mt 13:55); and "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, brother of James, of Joses, of Judas, and of Simon?" (Mk 6: 3).

Our "work" is not carpentry, but the apostolate. We should dedicate ourselves to it "professionally", with the "sweat of the forehead", as if the salvation of the world depended on us. However, without arrogance or ill will, laziness and minimalism. But not even with greed for better positions, as our Founder warns us "In the likeness of the great Patriarch Saint Joseph, if you were to serve Jesus in menial and inferior jobs to those of Saint Peter, think that the humble guardian of Jesus has a higher place in heaven than the great Apostle" (L 282). Having the model of Saint Joseph always before our eyes, we will be able to do great good for souls and first of all for ourselves.

*To reflect: Am I dutiful, helpful, available? Or am I lazy, indolent, pessimistic in the work entrusted to me? Do I offer myself lovingly and willingly to help my brothers? Am I creative in the office that has been entrusted to me? Do I work to make my superiors praise and appreciate me, or above all do I seek to do the will of God? Am I cheerful and happy in my office? How do people see me?*







# SAINT JOSEPH'S

## Service of Fatherhood

Fr. Enrique Barragán Pérez, OSJ

*"from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named"*  
*Ephesians 3:15*

**S**t. Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood. It is precisely in this way that, as the Church's Liturgy teaches, he "cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation" and is truly a "minister of salvation".<sup>1</sup> Human love constitutes the greatest expression and manifestation of his reality as a spiritual being. And human love which is more similar to Divine Love, is the love of a mother, of a father, of spouses, of those who know how to give life to the one loved ("Who are my mother and my brothers ...? Those who do the Will of my Father"), those who give their life for their friends. "Even if a mother should forget her sons, I will never forget you", because "I have your name written on my hand". "If you only knew how much my Father loves you".



However, the actual cultural reality of postmodern man, made up of complex manifestations of secularism, materialism, hedonism, and the Babylonian confusion of the multi-form pluralistic culture, guided by different opinions, ways, and liberal laws, which seek to ignore this Creative, Providential, mercifully Prodigious and Loving Father, and who position themselves in this way against human nature itself, manipulating and destroying their true identity, reaching numerous erroneous manifestations and misguided truths. So in many places and circumstances, the figure of the human father, the vocation to fatherhood,



has lost for man and society, the value which the Lord in the Plan of Salvation wished to give it.

Throughout history many people have influenced the present was of looking at life. For example, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, in his theories presented the father as the symbol of authority and power over the earth, which has provoked in human beings, from birth, a social, moral, and religious repression of all of his instincts (most of all the sexual ones). We are not surprised when those who believe in his theories, if they wish to be free someday, are forced to reject the father figure in order to build up their independence.

Another thinker, from the past century, very influential in the lives of many young people in the 1950's and 1960's, was Jean Paul Sartre. He suffered during his childhood an experience of a father which unfortunately was disastrous. In his vision of the world and of himself, which flooded the famous crisis of '68, his very existence frightened him and caused him to vomit (that is way he called his most famous novel *Nausea*). And since he feel a profound resentment for his life, he came to the thought that the only sin a man can commit is that of becoming a father. He asked himself, What right does a man have to give to the world lives without meaning which will be unhappy?

On the other hand, during the same time a great Christian thinker, Gabriel Marcel, saw in the origin of the family the secret for building a truly human existence. In parents who love him and care for him, the human being discovers from childhood, fidelity and hope, when he knows he is loved, he begins forming a conscience that is human life is something of value, a sacred treasure which nobody can take from him.

However, the world needs a Father. Or better, needs to discover God in hi quality as Father. It is in the New Testament where we find this Good News, this Novelty, revealed by the Son, and which is splendid, that Yahweh, the unpronounceable, the Absolute, the Eternal, El Shaddai, is forever ABBA! ("Because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father")(Jn. 15:12-15). A Father who is not only Creator, Liberator of his People, Ally, Law Giver, Judge and Lord. He is not only the Ruler of all things, but he is above all Father. And in serivce of his Fatherhood he as subordinated everything else.

Considering this great vocation and mission of St. Joseph, that of being "minister of salvation" with the exercise of his human fatherhood of faith, justice and love, the wealth of theological reflection becomes incalculable and in spirit of prayer, which becomes unquenching over the course of the centuries, given how close he is to the Mystery of Christ and of his Incarnation. But let us at least reflect a little bit on those essential points which are so significant for our present culture in the exercise of fatherhood.

### **THE SERVICE OF ST. JOSEPH'S FATHERHOOD, REVEALER OF THE LOVER OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER**

The Son of God, the Incarnate Word, during the first thirty years of his life on earth remained hidden: he hid himself in the shadow of St. Joseph. In the house of Nazareth, "Jesus was obedient to them" (Lk 2:51) to both Joseph and Mary, just as a child is obedient to his parents. Only Joseph and Mary know his Mystery, live this Mystery each day. The Son of the Eternal Father is considered,

before men, to be the “*son of the carpenter*” (Mt. 13:55). In this way, “In St. Joseph the Heavenly Father expressed on earth all of the spiritual dignity of fatherhood”<sup>2</sup>. St. Bernardin of Siena affirms in speaking of St. Joseph that when God chose a person for a specific mission, he gives him all the necessary graces to fulfil it. “Since it is inconceivable that such a sublime task would not be matched by the necessary qualities to adequately fulfill it, we must recognize that Joseph showed Jesus “by a special gift from heaven, all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father's heart can know”<sup>3</sup>. God found on earth two perfect collaborators in his masterpiece. Like Mary, Joseph also forms an integral part of the mystery of salvation. We can use an expression which the Father of the Church St. Irenaeus used in speaking of the Trinity: “Just as in heaven God acts with two hands which are the Son and the Holy Spirit, so also on earth he acts with two hands which are Mary and Joseph.” “His fatherhood is expressed concretely “in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a total gift of self, of his life and work; in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house.”<sup>4</sup>. So, Joseph of Nazareth is a particular revelation of the dignity of human fatherhood. In the brilliant figure of St. Joseph, we are able to see shine the profound relationship which exists between Divine fatherhood and human fatherhood.

### **THE SERVICE OF TEACHING OF ST. JOSEPH'S FATHERHOOD**

The reason for this human needs is seen in human nature, which not only provides the being of the offspring but also the perfection of that being. For St. Thomas it is clear that “It is evident that the upbringing of a human child requires not only the mother's care for his nourishment, but much more the care of his father as guide and guardian, and under whom he progresses in goods both internal and external”<sup>5</sup>. In the Gospels, the paternal role of Joseph in respect to Jesus is clearly shown. In fact, salvation, which come through Jesus' humanity, is realized in gestures which form part of daily family life, in respect to that condescension inherent to the economy of the incarnation. Joseph is the one whom God chose to be the “overseer of the Lord's birth,”<sup>6</sup>, the one who has the duty to provide for the ordered insertion of the Son of God into the world, respect the divine dispositions and the human laws. All of the life, both “private” and “hidden” of Jesus was entrusted to his care. One of the most sacred duties of father is was to instruct his son in religion. Chapter 30 of Ecclesiasticus, 1-13, speaks of the education which a father must give to his son “that he may be his joy when he grows up”.

“The growth of Jesus ‘in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man’ (Lk 2:52) took place within the Holy Family under the eyes of Joseph, who had the important task of ‘raising Jesus, that is, feeding, clothing and educating him in the Law and in a trade, in keeping with the duties of a father.

In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Church venerates the memory of Mary the ever Virgin Mother of God and the memory of St. Joseph, because he fed him whom the faithful must eat as the bread of eternal life.’

For his part, Jesus 'was obedient to them' (Lk 2:51), respectfully returning the affection of his 'parents.' In this way he wished to sanctify the obligations of the family and of work, which he performed at the side of Joseph"<sup>7</sup>.

The religious, moral and cultural formation of Jesus was due in great part to Joseph. Some authors discover in Jesus' parables, taken from rural and shepherding life, the teaching of Joseph. Some domestic image of Jesus come from having watched his mother: make bread, use leaven, repair clothing; just so other images come from having learned from Joseph: to lay a good foundation, be a good administrator, foresee costs, etc. St. Joseph was privileged as the father and teacher of Jesus, to accompany him and teach him in his human development..

### **THE SERVICE TO WATCH OVER IN SILENCE, THE WORD WHICH SAVES, THE INCARNATE WORD**

The Son of God, the Incarnate Word, in the first thirty years of his life on earth remained hidden; he was hidden, in the shadow of St. Joseph. At the same time, Mary and Joseph remained hidden in Christ, in his ministry and mission. "Joseph was in daily contact with the mystery "hidden from ages past," and which "dwelt" under his roof"<sup>8</sup>. Joseph related to Christ as a father with his son, while both lived, in all areas of affection, living together, care, authority and obedience, education, life and death. There has never been in the world a father and son who were closer, more closely united in love, mutual respect and common goal. There has never been in the world a father more father than Joseph, nor a son who could feel more truly a son than Jesus. St. Joseph, "Guarded the wealth which has been entrusted to him with a fidelity proportionate the value of this inestimable treasure"<sup>9</sup>.

In Joseph's house, the presence of God was lived, with all of those noble and elevated feelings which St. Paul lists in his letter to the Colossians, and which the Liturgy has us read on the feast of the Holy Family heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, mutual forgiveness, peace. (Col. 3:12)

"Christ as God had his own experience of Divine fatherhood and of sonship in the womb of the Most Holy Trinity. As man he experienced sonship thanks to St. Joseph. He on his part, offered to the child who grew by his side the support of masculine balance, the clarity to be able to take on problems and courage. He exercised his role with the quality of the best of all parents, receiving strength from the highest source from which 'every family in heaven and on earth is named' (Ef 3,15)"<sup>10</sup>.

In the recent Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortations, "Verbum Domini" of his Holiness





Benedict XVI, at No. 124, he tells us: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (11:28). Jesus points out Mary’s true grandeur, making it possible for each of us to attain that blessedness which is born of the word received and put into practice. I remind all Christians that our personal and communal relationship with God depends on our growing familiarity with the word of God”. As our Founder, St. Joseph Marelló, teaches us, St. Joseph is the depository and confidant of the most profound “Intimate relationship with the Divine Word”. “This is the most profound truth about St. Joseph, and which constitutes his true greatness: his intimate relationship with Jesus, the Son of God. A relationship with is communion of life, sharing of ideas, exchange of affection, service of love”. (*San José Marelló en los escritos del P. Geremia*. Oblati di S. Giuseppe 1993). And so also “his true food is to do the Will of God”, the Word of God is truly his home, from which it is completely natural for him to enter and leave. He speaks and thinks the Word of God; the Word of God becomes his word, and his word is born from the Word God. In this way he demonstrates, besides, that his thoughts are in harmony with the thought of God, that his will is a will with God. Having been intimately penetrated by the Word of God, he can be chosen as father of the Incarnate Word.

### ACTIVITIES OF THE JOSEPHITE SPIRITUALITY IN THE PROVINCE OF MEXICO

From the First Evangelization, this Country has been consecrated to the fatherly protection of St. Joseph, we are in the XVI century, when the first Parish on this American Continent was dedicated to “St. Joseph of the naturals” where there was also a school of arts and offices, hosted by the first missionaries. This serves as a reference toward the value of the great tradition of devotion of this people toward our Great Patriarch who on the other hand, paradoxically, is not well known. The great popular devotion which led to naming and dedicating many towns and cities after this great Patriarch and to name many male children “Joseph”.

So for us today in this Province, as Oblates of St. Joseph, and to be celebrating a jubilee year given the sixty years of our presence in these lands, this is a great task and challenge, to make known and practiced the virtues and examples and to promote devotion to the Patriarch of Nazareth. As can be seen, hearing this gentle name so close to Jesus and Mary, always so well received, it would seem that we all feel close, that we know him, venerate him, but when we want to deepen our meditation of his ministry, we realize that there is still much we need to do and to say.

Inspired by their spiritual membership in our Religious Family, the first fathers who arrived as missionaries in these land, took up the task of promoting this devotion as a fundamental part of our Charism. So today, we administer in three sectors, three Parishes dedicated to our Holy Patron. St. Joseph of the Mountain in the city of Monterrey, in the Topo Chico colony, St. Joseph in the Jardines del Alba colony of Cuautitlán, Izcalli and St. Joseph Atlán, belonging to the Diocese of Tula, recently canonically erected, but with a decades long tradition of his Patronage. In these large pastoral areas, the Patronal and civic feast is celebrated with great solemnity, with the great participation of civic and ecclesiastical authorities. This feast is preceded by a novena and by strong moments of the celebration of sacraments of first communions and multiple confirmations. In the minor seminary in Tepalcapa dedicated to St. Joseph, there is also offered a very significant feast presided over by the Bishop and the Educative Community of the “Fray Bartolomé de las Casas”

Cultural Center, accompanied by the People of Tepalcapa and various representative groups of the community, as also the priest concelebrants friends of the community. In the Parish of St. Matthew the Apostle in Huichapan, Hidalgo there is a great celebration in honor of St. Joseph in the three Chapels of the more than thirty communities which form them. One is found in the village of Mamithí, the other in Sabinita and the final one in Comodejhé. Each of the communities profess a fervent devotion to St. Joseph and this great popular devotion is being taking advantage of in order to deepen their theological and doctrinal knowledge of a true devotion. In the other Parishes, in the North Sector of Monterrey of St. Paul Apostle and Holy Spirit in the colony of Anáhuac, and in the South Sector of St. James Apostle in Tepalcapa, Diocese of Cuautitlán, the Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph are prayed every Wednesday. And the Solemnity of the Holy Spouses is intensely promoted in all of our Parishes, to the delight of the People of God and their participation. As for our Minor Seminary in Tepalcapa, Pre-Seminary in Monterrey and the Major Seminary in Villa de Juárez, N.L, the prayer of the Joseph Lily has been adopted as part of our spiritual growth in devotion to St. Joseph, sharing in this with the people themselves. We feel very committed to our Josephite-Marellian Identity and motivated by the International Center of the General Curia y we continue promoting initiatives for the translation of materials, participation and all that can lead us closer to reflecting upon and living our Oblate spirituality. For this reason, it is with great joy that we will celebrate this coming May 30 and 31 and June 1, of this year, in the Auditorium of the Educational Center Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, nuestro THE FIRST PROVINCIAL JOSEPHITE CONGRESS! In celebration of our 60th anniversary in Mexico, with the theme “ST JOSEPH GUARDIAN OF THE FAMILY”. We believe that in this great event, which will have the participation of some Bishops, Fr. Larry Toschi OSJ from California, Josephite Missionaries, besides the other invited confreres with great experience in this area, we will find great spiritual benefit and enrichment, in order to begin a deeper mediation on our spiritual treasure.

Also we like to mention our participation in various moments in which we are invited by the diocesan clergy, where we are working and by the seminaries in which our students are studying, to regularly share our Oblate spirituality and identity. All for the Greater Glory of our Blessed God”.

And we end praying with that meaningful prayer of our Holy Founder:

**“You , O St. Joseph! Instruct us, assist us, make us  
worthy members of the Holy Family”**

## NOTES

1*Redemptorias Custos* N°8 John Paul II

2John Paul II, Audience March 19, 1980

3RC 8

4Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1966): *Insegnamenti*, IV (1966), p. 110

5S. Th.,II-II, q. 154, a. 2 in c.

6Orígenes, Hom. XIII in Lucam, 7: S. Ch. 87, pp. 214 s.

7RC 16

8RC 25

9Garrigou-Lagrange, San José, Buenos Aires 301

10San José en el pensamiento de SS Juan Pablo II, P. Tarcisio Stramare, Centro di Spiritualità Giuseppina, p. 11

# SPIRITUAL FATHERING in the **IMAGE** of **SAINT JOSEPH**



Fr. Winston Carrera, OSJ



**L**ike every other priest in the Catholic Church, we, Oblates, who have received the sacred orders are popularly addressed “father.” But, this is not an exclusive experience of the Oblate priests. The Brothers whom the laity are not able to distinguish completely from the ordained members of our religious institute probably on account of their belonging to one and the same religious community with us, the exercise of almost the same apostolate and the more telling, the same religious habit that we don, are also addressed “father,” albeit mistakenly. More than just an expression, the word “father” actually describes each and everyone of us, Oblate religious, whether ordained or not, as what we are and should be to the people of God entrusted to our pastoral care specially the fathers and the young (OSJ Constitutions, 3, 60, 65) in our faith communities.

As teachers in the faith, we, Oblates, reflect in ourselves the image of God the Father. According to our charismatic identity we present to others the person and characteristic virtues of St. Joseph. (OSJ Constitutions, 74) For the OSJ, and the universal Church for that matter, St. Joseph is the best image of God’s



fatherly love for all His adopted children in Jesus Christ. It is he that we present and represent to the people whose particular search is for an earthly icon of a “father.”

In today's modern world, human families are looking for a figure that would build up the basic institution of humanity and society. The particular group of fathers themselves is so urgently in need of a role model par excellence. In response, the OSJ present St. Joseph as the model of family and social virtues (OSJ Constitutions, 74) in their preaching and in the life that they live.

### **St. Joseph: A Man of Faith and Prayer**

It is commonplace to hear today of crises in spiritual and moral leadership. Easily this is traced at home where it usually begins. Some of its bitter fruits among the young are high rate of juvenile crime, broken homes and unchurched young people.

Turning to St. Joseph then, we can offer a solution with the call to faith and prayer for fathers. We glimpse his faith in action in the Gospel of St. Matthew. First, we find him agonizing over whether to divorce Mary quietly because she was betrothed to him and conceived a child that was not his. Yet after the angel of the Lord had revealed to him in a dream Jesus' true paternity, Joseph awakened and did as the angel of the Lord had directed by receiving Mary into his home as his wife. (Mt. 1:24) So too, after the visit of the magi, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. This time, he informed Joseph that King Herod was searching for Jesus to destroy Him since he viewed “the newborn King of the Jews” as a direct threat to his rule. Joseph was instructed to flee into Egypt with Jesus and Mary. He got up after the dream and took the Child and His mother and left that night for Egypt. (Mt. 2:14) We have to notice here how Joseph didn't hesitate to obey and actualize God's will without fear.

Now in order to respond to God with such faith, Joseph must have been a man of deep prayer as well. After the family had returned from Egypt in all those vicissitudes, we can well imagine Joseph turning to the Lord at home with his family, in his carpenter's shop with Jesus, and at Nazareth in the synagogue on the Sabbath with his fellow villagers.

Joseph's example as well as our life of dynamic, obedient faith and constant prayer are a powerful reminder of the spiritual role fathers have to play in families today. In many Catholic homes, spiritual leadership is considered the particular and even the sole responsibility of the mother. It might mean only the mother reads the Bible stories and leads (or supervises) the recitation of the rosary and night prayers with the children when they are small. It might mean that only the mother and the younger children attend the church. It might mean that only the mother involves herself in the religious events in the children's life. Whatever the situation may be, St. Joseph as father, calls fathers back to God, not simply by being with the family, or complementing the mother, but in a deep significant manner, leading the rest of their families in a life of faith and prayer onto the way to salvation.

### **St. Joseph: A Provider and Protector**

In modern society, fathers place an emphasis on providing a good life materially for their children and protecting them from physical harm. That's all well and good. But do they protect their families from moral and spiritual harm?

Let us consider the example of St. Joseph. As a carpenter he did far more than simply provide materially for his family. Although Scripture is silent on the details of the holy Family's sojourn in Egypt after fleeing from Herod, we do know that Egypt at the time had a pagan culture that accepted the worship of many gods. In such environment, Joseph surely protected his family spiritually, keeping intact the purity of their faith. Maintaining Jewish prayer and customs in the home must have been a priority for him as a husband and father during the exile.

We are actually living today in an environment which is often hostile to our faith. The materialistic tendency is so strong that it erodes trust in divine Providence. It is the human hands instead that are made to work more rather than the hidden, mysterious hand of God; in the same vein, the human mind has practically taken over the shaping of life events in disregard of divine design. What can be said about the protection being provided by the fathers to their family members nowadays? In many cases protection is directed to that which is of less value – material possessions over non-material wealth, physical comfort over spiritual growth, self over others. A worst manifestation of this orientation may be the sacrifice of invaluable human life itself. Obviously, the values have been confused, and the universally acknowledged hierarchy of values is not properly observed. To a certain extent even we, religious, experience this.

Joseph proved himself to be a reliable provider for Jesus and Mary. He didn't have much but he always had the necessary things for the holy Family as he unfailingly trusted in the divine Providence. A most loyal protector was he when his family had to move. Consider that he had to uproot his family twice: first, when he was fleeing from Herod, and again, when he returned to Judah several years later after Herod's death. We can imagine how Joseph was a rock for Jesus and Mary during those times of unpredictable changes as he lived his faith securing his treasures which are the same precious treasures of God. If we adhere to God and are anchored well in the providence of God, then we rest secure together with our communities and families whatever changes happen in our life.



### **St. Joseph – A Humble Servant**

Humility is not a highly prized virtue in our society. And unfortunately the secular media tends to glamorize superstars in the sports and entertainment world, giving the young and children the impression that riches and fame and impressive skills are what really matter. This becomes the conviction of many a parent who dream big for their children.

By comparison, Joseph was a poor carpenter who settled in a little village and humbly provided the needs of his family. We can imagine him working in a modest carpenter's shop with Jesus day in and day out. Scriptures paint us a portrait of an assuming man who does not put himself forward. Not a single one of his words is recorded, but his faith in action and humble service speak volumes. He was there silently serving in the background at the birth of Jesus, the presentation in the temple, and the finding of Jesus at the age of twelve.

Instead of the brash and flashy superstar as a male icon in the centre stage, we sorely need this inspiring model of humble service. Joseph reminds the fathers and the “spiritual fathers” that our actions and attitude of genuine service really do matter. With the young observing us our humble service can make a real difference in how they eventually turn out someday.

### **The “Abba’ Relationship” and the Prayer “Our Father”**

It would have been impossible for St. Joseph to be the role model of human and “spiritual fathers,” without mirroring his foster son Jesus’ “Abba” relationship. The biblical prayer “Our Father” is traditionally called the “Lord’s prayer” because it was taught by Jesus to his disciples (Lk. 11:1ff); however, understanding the role of Jewish fathers to their children, we have a strong reason to believe that the prayer was probably learned earlier by Jesus from his human father (or at least its basic elements) in the context of the “Abba” relationship’ with His divine Father.

Here again is the prayer: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” (NRSV, Catholic Student’s Edition, 1989) When Jesus introduced the “Our Father” he invited the disciples to develop an intimate relationship with God the Father. He mirrored to them the true Father – all-holy, almighty, holds all of creation, provider, merciful, protector. Everyone then should relate to Him with this understanding. In their turn the disciples must reflect in themselves to others the image of the one Father of all.

Thus, this filial prayer entrusted by Christ to His Church is very essential and important is the life of the Oblates of St. Joseph in the particular apostolate of “spiritual fathering.” Jesus does not give us this formula of prayer to repeat mechanically. When it is said with faith and devotion it makes possible the pray-er’s imaging of the Father in oneself, which image we want others to see. In as much as it is the Spirit of God that moves us to cry, “Abba, Father!,” then we truly become children of our Father, and therefore, His reflections. Just like what Jesus did, if he had had his opportunity St. Joseph would have introduced to us the same prayer.

Like Jesus, the OSJ are sons of St. Joseph. Every time we pray (no less than three times every day) the “Our Father” in fervent devotion God the Father’s image is stamped on us. It is never his own image that St. Joseph wants us to see in himself, but instead to have a glimpse of God. It is actually God we project to others. May the children of God around see icons of the Father in us as we do “spiritual fathering” to them particularly to the fathers and the young.





# The Betrothal of the MOTHER OF GOD

Fr. Manuel Manrique, OSJ



One of the more traditional feast of our Congregation is the Feast of the Holy Spouse Mary and Joseph. This celebration is found at the very beginning of our Institute and was celebrated in a special way by the “carissimi” (seminarians) then and now (January 23). The Josephite-Marellian Laity has a particular indulgence available for its members on this date and we Oblates of St. Joseph are also able to take advantage of this.

The theme of our reflection this month proposed to us is “The Betrothal of the Mother of God”. We would like to consider this title with the modesty which is necessary to a devotion which considers the mystery without pretending to have the same erudition which the experts in this matter could share with us.

**From the Gospel according to St. Matthew (1:1-2:23.)**

In the tradition of St. Matthew is found the justification for Jesus being the Messiah. This is a fundamental fact which ties the fulfillment of the messianic promises with the event of the incarnation of the Word. Joseph is no mute

spectator of this crucial moment in Salvation History but a protagonist who links the Davidic descendance with the absolute miracle of Mary's Virginal Maternity.

Joseph is *"the husband of Mary, of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah"*.

The rest of the narration relates to us Joseph's condition as spouse: having already celebrated his "betrothal" with Mary, she was already "promised" to him and, according to the Jewish customs of that time, he was waiting "to take her to his home".

The way in which the marriage was celebrated at that time is described by Jesus in different passage of the Gospels and the same with the neo-testamentary writings: the story of Cana (Jn 2:1-12), the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13) the joy of the bridegroom, the Pauline exhortations, etc.

Matthew's explication: *"This is how the birth of Jesus came about"* has a lot to do with the description of the paternal and spousal role of Joseph, and the way in which he carried out this great responsibility. The Angel's appearance reveals to Joseph his mission and to all believers Jesus' divinity, the legitimate heir of David. Joseph is the first to receive the announcement of the mission of the Son of God and the first to proclaim the Name which saves.

### **From the Gospel according to St. Luke (1:26-2:52).**

Luke puts Joseph in second place given the intent of his narration. However, Mary is the "virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph of the house of David". The second place which Joseph holds is fundamental and he is no less a protagonist in so much as that he is the explanatory background for all of the principal characters: Jesus is the Son of God and heir to the messianic promises as the legal Son of Joseph. The Magnificat is also Joseph's song in so much as he is husband of the one who has been looked upon in her lowliness.

Even if it is not mentioned in his infancy narrative since Mary is the protagonist, in Luke still Joseph is the "father of Jesus": *"your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."* Jesus' response is very deep in meaning, because in it is established the parental relationship of the Holy Family: God is His Father (and the Temple his house), She is his Mother whose spouse has the visible role of being father to the one who is subject to both.

### **Mary and Joseph's marriage is a true marriage.**

The fundamental elements of Scripture direct us in considering the form and consequences of the marriage of the Mother of God. Joseph and Mary had celebrated their wedding and were waiting in conformity with the customs of their day for him *"to take her into his house"*, when the Lord announces to both of him his will. The availability of both of them is found in Mary's virginal maternity and Joseph virginal-legal paternity. Jesus is the Son of God born of Mary by an extraordinary act of God; he is the Son of David, the Messiah, because he is the "son" of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

At the same time, asking ourselves about the marriage of the Mother of God we can see that it was a true marriage in as much as the goals of marriage were completely fulfilled: the union of two souls (*"your father and I ...with great anxiety"*). This marriage was perfected in time in the education of Jesus who *"lived subject to them"*.

Mary and Joseph live their marriage at the same time as their virginal charism contributing to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, Virginal Spouse of the Church.

The Holy Spouse have for our confusing times much to witness to as regards the goods and ends of marriage. The pastoral goals of this feast can offer to our Josephite Laity and faithful new perspectives which give light to their vocation according to their state in life.

It is in this ordinary life in Nazareth where the daily mystery of family life is verified and which remains as the ordinary sign of the virtuous life to which our Holy Founder invites us.

### **St. Joseph Marello speaks to us of the ordinary life.**

The mustard seed is considered the smallest of the seeds which are planted in the orchard and still it grows so much as to become a nice little tree. For this reason it is a good figure for the small virtues, which can produce great holiness. In fact, the great saints reached their holiness not so much in the practice of extraordinary virtues, which are practiced only on rare occasions, but in the repeated and continuous acts of the small virtues. So St. Joseph did not do extraordinary things; but the constant practice of the ordinary and common virtues he reached that level of holiness which raises him above all the other saints. Preaching at the Milliavacca Institute. February 14, 1886.

### **ACTIVITIES IN THE “SANTO TORIBIO ALFONSO DE MOGROVEJO” PROVINCE – PERU**

The activities of this Province seek to follow the way inherited from the Oblates of the “first hour”, such as the ministerial services in the Parishes, Schools and social ministry in all of the houses.

As Parishes, we find ourselves concentrated on the coast (eight all together), in Lima we only have five, with various Chapels in each of which a Mass is celebrated regularly. Our greatest challenge is to maintain our enthusiasm for our service to the Church in the most difficult places, which are not found only in the Mountains (4 parishes), but also those which are in the large cities, in poor and crime ridden areas, with greater physical and moral danger than in the Mountains.

The social ministry activities vary among human assistance and promotion, such as the parish soup kitchens, legal assistance, school support (after school), medical dispensaries, hospital, artistic and technical formation centers, being the most important.

The activity which carries the greatest commitment is in the field of education, since the majority of our houses have an education center to direct. In this way from the first years, the aspect of our charism of the education of youth has been carried out. These education centers are different types for different ages, such as the schools for initial formation up to those for older classes.

We believe that our greatest challenge is to search to live as religious in such a changing reality. This concern occupies the formators of our four seminaries with more than 70 young men in formation, called to “follow more closely the Divine Master in imitation of St. Joseph”, in line with our Holy Founder’s desire, and to carry the generous presence of the Congregation in Peru to future generations.



# The Feast of the **HOLY SPOUSES** in the Year of **ST. JOSEPH**

Fr. Alberto Antonio Santiago, OSJ



**E**very year on the 23rd of January, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Spouses Mary and Joseph. In parishes we speak about the Sacrament of Matrimony, relationships in couples, and devotional life lived together, taking as a model the connection between Mary and Joseph and their way of living out their faith.

Pastors seek to make up for the damage done through centuries of forgetfulness, which left the presence of St. Joseph in the shadows, and only much later exalted him as Spouse of Mary, but with the emphasis on his role of defending her honor, to guide her and provide support, without every considering his role as a spouse in the elements of their life together. Our Lady also, did not come out any better, since among her titles, that of mother, sometimes daughter emerges, rarely that of spouse, and if so, in reference to the Holy Spirit.

Today, even if things have not entirely improved, we can say that there is a changed perspective, and the Church considers how and how much that unique couple was open to the will of God, and even without realizing, at least at first, predisposed themselves to welcome Jesus.

To make up for lost time, it is a pleasure to see that in many parishes of the Oblates of St. Joseph and many others directed by religious and diocesan clergy, couples are renewing their marriage vows, seeking to see in themselves that ideal matrimony.



Within our own Institute? In its nearly six hundred year history, this feast, once upon a time called the “Espousals of Mary” was dedicated to reflecting on community life. And our ancestors in the Josephite life were right to see it so. If we completely overlook all the actions of Joseph and Mary as they fell in love, became engaged and ultimately married, since the Gospel doesn’t speak about them, we can still fruitfully reflect upon how they behaved with each other, and both in relation to God.

Fr. Cortona tells us that our Holy Founder, loved to speak to the first Oblates considering the interior life of St. Joseph, talking about many beautiful things which he had learned from the works of St. Francis de Sales, other approved authors and from his own personal reflections. Everything leads us to believe that Marelllo’s teachings, which were never written down, were transmitted through the life of the Congregation, and remembered on the occasions of the feasts of St. Joseph. And those dealing with fraternal life were brought up on the Feast of the Espousals.

We need to remember that the idea of fraternal life in community was not yet developed in the theology of Religious Life and the principles of a common life went very little beyond norms for living together, viewed as an exercise in virtue (prudence, self-denial, obedience, especially charity). Regarding duties towards one’s companions, the *Manual of Piety for Aspirants* said: “Avoid acting proudly, hurtful jokes, calling names, sharp words, lack of respect, gossip. One should avoid every argument, every exaggerated discussion, every form of annoyance...”. You can thus understand the noted saying of St. John Berchmans, patron of novices: “community life is for me the hardest of penances.”

The weight of hierarchical order, which conferred on superiors the authority of an abbot in the field of obedience, was tempered by the “spirit of family”, a theme which would merit its own separate reflection. However, for now, it would be enough to remember that the mission of superiors back then, like the true exercise of an authentic paternity, extended even to the smallest details of the life of the religious entrusted to them. In turn, the religious were all the more perfect the more they allowed themselves to be docilely lead in everything and for everything by the will of the superiors, because they represented the will of God in every circumstance. They were taught *oboedientia ac cadaver*, to be given to the superior, who was said to command them with *auctoritas qua fungor*. Decisions always came from above, without the participation of the base. The phrase of Fr. Cortona on obedience is insightful: “ask nothing, refuse nothing.”

Then there are the relations between the members of the community, regulated, as we said, by good manners, and which not rarely gave rise to true friendships with a strong spiritual emphasis, avoiding thus the detested particular friendships, which were considered a dangerous deviation. We can say, as a rule, the members of a community wished each other well and as regards the inevitable problems of jealousy, envy, irritations, etc...they turned to the superior.

In connection to our life today, we need to recognize that community life then was much simpler, of a simplicity which we have lost without knowing how to replace it with something similar.

However, we cannot allow ourselves to be blind to the point of losing ourselves in an unquestioned past. To think of the Feast of the Holy Spouses in the Year of St. Joseph obliges us to examine our community life as it is today, in its social and ecclesial contexts. We cannot pretend to continue living as if nothing impacted our lives, more than past generations could, with the influence of persons like Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Foucault... and events like Vatican II and the various reactions it stirred up and the denunciations in our times of the various abuses of power, etc...

For some time, not only the context in which we live has changed, but our very concept of God and ways of relating to Him as well. Once upon a time obedience meant unconditional submission to the mediations between men and God: the Church, superiors, various authorities... The model was the obedience of a child, rooted in a misunderstood spiritual infancy. Today we are called more than ever to an obedience that is intelligent and active, which becomes responsible participation. We are humbled in recognizing that we are still far from this. Keeping with our previous image, we are no longer children, because we have lost our innocence: we notice people's defects and those of institutions, which do not allow us to accept uncritically the mediations of the past. However, neither are we adults capable of managing our relations with maturity, able to assume the consequences of our choices. What are we then? I would say we are adolescents. We are no longer children, but not yet adults. When we decide to "remain in the Temple", we certainly still want to hear the tender words of a loving mother, but we also want to be heard with our explanations by a silent father.

We know that the superior has the grace of state, but this doesn't make him an angel, and does not exempt him from being subject to his defects and from every urge of ambition, pursuing a career, of imposing himself, of seeking money, of ingratiating highly placed persons and other like things. Even the Church, moved by the emergence of scandals like that of the "Maciel Case" seems to have re-considered its once well consolidated practice of always supporting the superior, something which recent reporting has noted. Thus, while members of a community are indeed moved by the desire to serve God authentically, yet they perceive obstacles due to egoism, pride, individualism and indifference towards others. Today we are called to take up our Religious Life with personal responsibility without an unproductive fideism.

So how does a 21st century man live his relationship with God? Here too we are in an adolescent phase. We have moved beyond the stage of the fear of hell which kept us good. The appeals of preachers to the justice of God and the relative threats of His implacable punishments is no longer helpful, except to produce ongoing feelings of guilt which still do not eliminate present occasions of sin. As children who are about to become adults, we do not want to sin, but to experience the good things of life, pushing ourselves to the very limits between our freedom and what is prohibited.

In the area of sexuality, for example, once upon a time the Church sought to regulate an abundance of particulars, while today it is considered rather a sphere of clearly personal decision. However, it has also led to a greater sensitivity to other people's pain, to respect, to the suffering of specific groups, to discrimination of every kind, to racism, to tolerance, to differences, to ecology...

The realization that we have our rights does not permit us to passively accept any kind of mistreatment, psychological violence or humiliation (which was once an integral part of



certain teaching methods), bullying and exploitation by anyone. We above all value the person for who he is. It isn't important whether he has money, if he is a bishop or cardinal, if he has letters of recommendation, if he represents some grand personage, if he has a political office....thus so many injustices within our communities, once considered as insignificant, today are not easily put up with and become sources of dissatisfaction and the abandonment of Religious Life.

We realize that in this Year of St. Joseph, looking to the future recovery of our spirit of family, we have a lot to do. The first step, I think, is to invest time and energy, not in the return to ancient ways (as some would want) but in putting into practice those mechanisms of participation (in truth, now not so new!) foreseen by our Rules.

So as to not draw out excessively what is to be a simple article without any other pretension except to stir some reflection and perhaps a community discussion, I will but touch lightly upon, an example, the situation of our Community Councils. Is it not true that in many places (not due to anyone's bad will but by demand) they have become a mere organizational meeting, where a sharing of opinions and participation in decision making is seen as a waste of time? Isn't it true that many decisions that effect the lives of individual members are made from above, without even a minimal regard for personal needs? Isn't it true that, if by chance a superior were to let confreres speak, he is met with silence, because no one is used to a procedure which, after 50 years from Vatican II, has still remained foreign to us?

We truly have a journey to make towards a life of true fraternity, where the members of a community wish each other well, respect one another, where there is an acceptance and care for one another and we are capable of fraternal correction. And where superiors exercise more authority and less power.

This is what I would call a journey which promises to be long, slow and difficult, whose endpoint is not clearly visible to human sight, but - what can we say? - with you O Joseph, we are sure to journey well.



# The Contemplative Dimension **PRIMACY** of the **INTERIOR LIFE**

Fr. Severino Dalmaso, OSJ



**I**t might seem obvious to affirm that in the life of an Oblate of St. Joseph the spiritual dimension comes first and that the interior life is the source for both spiritual energy and missionary apostolate.

The Constitutions affirm that “the Oblates of St. Joseph are called to reproduce in their lives and in the ministry the Christian mystery as it was lived by St. Joseph in union with God, in humility, in a hidden life, in hard work and in total commitment to the interests of Jesus” (art. 3).

Other articles of the Constitutions in this regard: “The Oblates of St. Joseph should strive above everything else to love God who first loved them. They should make every effort to foster a life hidden with Christ in God. Therefore, they must constantly cultivate the spirit of prayer and prayer itself, drawing from the genuine sources of Christian spirituality” (art. 10). This is even more so insofar as “just as the life of the one who dwells in Christ draws strength and bears fruit in proportion to the humble and persevering efforts he makes to become one with him, so also does the work of the one





who proclaims Christ to his brothers” (art. 11).

2. Here we find principles of spiritual theology in the context of Oblate spirituality, nourished by the consistent teaching of the Founder St. Joseph Marelllo. Pope John Paul II has re-presented the principles of the spiritual life in the encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, recalling all Christians to the “heights of holiness.” The Congregation for Religious has recalled all religious to the duty of holiness with the Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, presenting Christ as the living foundation and inspiring source for consecrated persons. The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the XV General Chapter of the Oblates of St. Joseph calls us, “in our specific Josephite-Marellian spirit, to place at the center of our ‘being a sign’ for the Church, our living a life hidden with Christ in God, in imitation of St. Joseph” (n. 3). There is then, even for us Oblates, the urgent call to take up again the discussion of the interior life, as lived by St. Joseph.

3. Father Cortona, speaking to the confreres in 1921, confirmed that the Pauline text of Colossians 3:3, “our life is hidden with Christ in God, was the favorite saying, that [Bishop Joseph Marelllo] practiced and recommended to his children” (cf. *Marellianum* n.8, p. 16). And he commented: “Since after the first General Chapter, we have the desire to perfect our Congregation, we ought to begin by perfecting our spirit, which is the spirit that our Founder recommended to us so much during all his life, since the spirit that forms a Congregation is the spirit by which it given life. To second his holy intention, we ought to have a spirit of prayer, holy recollection, and the practice of the presence of God reign in our midst, because these are necessary for us to maintain our life of union with God which ought to be the soul of our religious life, and, without which, our life would no longer be a religious life but confusion” (ibid). There are harsh words, which we also need to hear as we prepare for the XV General Chapter, the goal of which is to examine our identity as “Children of Marelllo, True Disciples of Jesus Christ”. Fr. Cortona’s admonition that the “life of union with God ought to be the soul of our religious life” is still true today. It is also true that if we are lacking in our interior life we are no longer living a religious life but “confusion”. The word “confusion” comes from St. Frances de Chantal, who said to her nuns: “A house where holy recollection does not reign is not a religious family, but confusion”.

4. St. Joseph Marelllo presents to example of the Family of Nazareth to us: “Look to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the three greatest people who ever lived on the earth. What did they do in Nazareth? Nothing great or extraordinary to all appearances; the only took care of the humble, ordinary tasks of a poor, working class family. But since they were animated by a spirit of prayer and union with God, all of their actions assumed an immense value and splendor to the eyes of heaven. It is not, therefore, a matter of doing great and extraordinary things, but to do in all things the will of God. Whether we are asked to do great or small things, it is enough that we do them out of obedience to the will of God in order for us to acquire great merit” (*Scritti*, p. 247). In this very simple teaching of St. Marelllo we find the secret of the contemplative dimension of our life as Oblates, that of being “Carthusians indoors”, which is the prelude of being “Apostles outdoors”, or better, that of being both Carthusians and apostles always, whether at home or away, which will allow us to live constantly united to God and to always work for him. “In the house of Nazareth, in fact, humility and fidelity, hidden life and silence, hard work and dedication to the interests of Jesus were lived perfectly” (*Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 3).

5. From the above quotations, we can see the importance of adopting the still of life that was proper to the Family of Nazareth, putting Christ at the center, as did Joseph and Mary. But it is



not easy today to have faith in these fundamental values precisely because they are so simple. This is in conflict with the complexity of the modern world in which even the values of religious life are wrapped up in the smoke of so many pseudo-values that their significance is obscured. "Greed, the craving of pleasure, the idolatry of power, the triple concupiscence which marks history and is also at the root of present evils can only be overcome if the Gospel values of poverty, chastity and service are rediscovered. Consecrated persons must know how to proclaim, with their lives and with their words, the beauty of poverty of spirit and of chastity of heart which free one for service to brothers and sisters and of obedience which gives longevity to the fruits of charity" (*Starting Afresh*, n. 45).

What does all of this mean for us as Oblates, who are called to live the evangelical counsels according to the Marellian charism? St. Joseph Marelli said: "Nothing can satisfy our hearts, not riches, not pleasures, not honors, but only God. We ought to always have our sights set on God, remembering that our goal is this: to know, love and serve God. God is all, everything else is nothing. Therefore, we ought to reject anything that can separate us from God, no matter how beautiful and attractive it might be, and embrace all that leads us closer to God, no matter how ugly, painful and repugnant it might be to our nature. Let us say to the Lord, like St. Paul: Lord, what would you have me do? I am ready to do what the Lord wants, without reservation" (*Scritti*, p. 241)

6. We need to be aware of the social, religious and anthropological circumstances in which we live, also in relation to the various places and cultures in which our confreres work. This will permit us to bring clarity to the messy situations in which we find ourselves, and to allow us to be led by faith in every situation, always placing in first place our Oblate evangelical and religious values. Even more so from the anthropological point of view, we need to start from Christ, to live in Christ, for Christ, with Christ, giving all honor and glory to God!

We need to avoid making a distinction or creating opposition between: the life of prayer (the prayers that we ought to do) and the apostolate (in the field where obedience places us); the practice of the evangelical counsels and our Josephite-Marellian charism: in the sense that our charism needs to be the spiritual nucleus of all our spirituality. We ought to live our religious vows in the light of our charism; we ought to love and identify ourselves with the Congregation that we have embraced; we ought to see our apostolate in the light of our charism, whether



pastoral, youth or vocation ministry. In this way we will create in our lives a great interior and exterior unity, capable of confronting the vacuous superficiality of the world that surrounds us and to make us salt that gives flavor and light that illumines history. This interior and exterior order will also help us to overcome every form of stress and of running in vain, as St. Paul said.

7. In order to complete well this program, we need to give a theological center to our Oblate life. The practice of the simple and hidden virtues can become insignificant to our eyes if we do not live them in light of the Paschal mystery, which is a mystery of death and resurrection. The hidden life of the house of Nazareth had a redemptive significance for Jesus, since, as the *Imitation of Christ* says: “the whole life of Christ was cross and martyrdom”, then all of Christ’s life had a redemptive significance. The humility of Christ in the house of Nazareth has a paschal significance of destruction and salvation, and we are invited, according to our charism, to discover the salvific dimension of the mystery of Christ by living it as did Mary and Joseph alongside Jesus.

For this reason, the *Instrumentum Laboris* poses some powerful questions for us: “Do we know adequately the connection between our Oblate devotion and the mystery of the Incarnation and of Easter? Do we see the virtues proper to our charism in only a moral light or also in light of the theology of the Incarnation?”

These are serious questions, which perhaps we have not posed to ourselves enough, and which are capable of giving a strong push to our spiritual life, above all if from the mystery of Nazareth we know how to arrive at the mystery of the Eucharist, with its very lofty Christological and paschal significance.

8. Today, youth have a strong attraction to a person who is rich in values that identify him as a complete religious and priest. They make of this person a model, witness and spiritual guide.

Instead of the word “complete” it might be better to use a word more full of meaning: Josephite-Marellian religious identity, priestly identity of true Oblates of St. Joseph. Such an identity has to be based on the contemplative dimension of our entire life, without all kinds of fractures, above all between our belonging to the world or to God, to the Congregation or, perhaps, to the Diocesan clergy seen as an alternative to the insignificant life that is lived within the Oblate family.

9. We often admire the great spiritual charge of the new ecclesial movements or of the new religious institutes that spring up in the Church, where fervor is palpable and the spiritual dimension attracts people to new ways in the life of faith. We ought not to forget that such were also the sentiments of our Founder and of the first Brothers of St. Joseph, with a strong christocentric and Eucharistic vision of their life, which led them to dedicate themselves to the Lord with all of their strength in the House of St. Joseph. Here they “in imitation of that great Model of the poor and obscure life, found a way to make themselves true disciples of Jesus Christ.”

To carry out the program of the next General Chapter – “Children of Marengo, true Disciples of Jesus Christ” – we need to enter the house of St. Joseph with these same dispositions, where the practice of humility, poverty, self-denial, hard-work, piety, charity, are not seen only in our outward behavior,



but become our authentic interior dispositions, strong theological and Christological attitudes, capable of conforming our lives to the life of Christ, as was the life of St. Joseph.

“In following Jesus Christ, their Teacher and Lord, the Oblates of St. Joseph live their proper oblation and proper service in intimate union with God (celebration and contemplation, life offered in obedience, chastity, poverty) and in authentic fraternal life. The term “intimate” expresses well the overarching need to live alongside the God of salvation and holiness, as did St. Joseph in the house of Nazareth” (*Instrumentum Laboris* n. 5).

10. The next General Chapter has the enormous task of reawakening in us Oblates this reality, un-nailing it from the wall of our laments and replanting it in the furrow of hope, so that it might bring new and holy fruits to the Congregation for a new spiritual, religious and josephite vitality. We will set sail, as Pope John Paul II exhorted us, on new waters: “Be the road long or short, easy or difficult, whether the goal is seen or unseen, whether quickly or slowly, with you, O Joseph, we are sure to arrive safely” (L. 208).

The contemplative dimension of our life means, in a certain way, to know how to remain faithful to our life of union with the Lord in the midst of many difficulties, as good “Children of Mareello, true disciples of Jesus Christ.” The theme of the next General Chapter calls us to once again reflect on this aspect of our spirituality. The word “Children” reminds us of our joyful belonging to the Congregation. The word “Mareello” brings us back to our origins where we find, more than a spirituality, a living example of the type of holiness that he has presented to each one of us. The word “Disciples” places us in the way of ongoing formation, in the evangelical discipleship school of Jesus, our Teacher and Guide.

At this school, the evangelical counsels, which we have embraced by the profession of vows, find their meaning and life. At this school, we find St. Joseph in his intimate relationship with the Divine Word. At this school, we find ourselves in the company of Confreres of generations past and present, in silent hard-work and full of faith, which was and is a characteristic of the Oblates of St. Joseph of every age. At this school, we learn to walk together as true brothers in community and as apostles outdoors.

“Starting Afresh from Christ” makes a practical and compelling argument, like starting afresh from “liturgical, community and private prayer nourished by the word of God and by personal meditation” (C. art 46). The contemplative dimension of our life means today to remain faithful to the simplest things, like our practices of piety, to sanctify the ordinary activities of our life, to examine our character, our sentiments, to open ourselves up to the needs of others, in our communities and outside our communities with others.

One consequence of a good spiritual life are a great love for our vocation and for our Congregation, where we find all that we need for our sanctification and for the carrying out of our apostolate.

Another consequence of the life of union with God are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, among which I would like to highlight the gift of counsel, which makes us masters of prayer and spiritual guides for others. Our communities can become “schools of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed and not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly falls in love” (NMI, 33).





# PRIMACY of the INTERIOR LIFE in REDEMPTORIS CUSTOS

Fr. Jan Pelczarski, OSJ

## 1. Meaning of “Interior Life”

**W**ithout trying to enter into the discussion of the history of the concept of the “interior life”, it does seem important to give some insights into the term, which at first sight might sound a little old fashioned and in fact, is not much used today. Effectively the concept becomes ambivalent or even suspicious, if it becomes linked to the idea of a flight from historical reality or as an introversion which pulls away from any historical or ecclesial context.

In the dictionary, the word “interior” usually refers to “that which happens within the soul, in the conscience, in the depths of a man”. The word “interiority” is defined as the sphere of the spirit and of the conscience, as the complex of thoughts, affections, aspirations, interests and beliefs that make up the psychological and spiritual dimensions of man. In the end, it is a space of personal reflection and silence which requires the ability to listen and to reflect so as to find meaning in what is happening.



In the Bible, the sign of interiority is the heart, seat of the will and of decision. St. Peter uses an insightful image when he speaks of “the hidden man of the heart” (1Pt 3,4) and St. Paul contrasts the interior man with the exterior man (2Cor 4,16-18).

Interiority is a theme throughout the Christian tradition. Taking up the ancient admonition: “Know yourself”, which draws together into an invitation to reflect upon the meaning of life, the interior life examines what you are living on the outside and asks essential questions: who am I? From where do I come? Where am I going? What is the meaning of what I do? Who are others to me? Only by means of interiorizing can we become “subjects” of our lives. (E. Bianchi). St. Augustine wrote: “Do not go out of yourself, go into yourself: truth lives in the depths of man”.

## **2. The Interior Life today**

In contemporary society, based on the cult of appearances and activity, many are living focused outwards, continuously searching for exterior stimulation and novelties. In the studies focusing on the current condition of man you will notice the appearance of an interior emptiness which leads to the search for compensations in the abusive use of drugs, alcohol, games or in dependency on the internet and social media in general. You discover interior fragmentation that needs to recompose itself. You find paths that distance man from a relationship with himself and move the center of the person to exterior things. You uncover, in the end, the attempt to forget interior unwellness brought about by the loss of a sense of the transcendent in human life.

The psychiatrist Vittorio Andreoli, in his book *L'uomo di superficie* (*The Superficial Man*) speaks of our civilization as directed towards the outside, living an institutionalized evasion, everything being reduced to what you see and what attracts you, and therefore little by little canceling out our interiority. To this can be added a further fact, evident to many: the disappearance of silence, held to be unnatural and superfluous. Thus the principal problem of man today is his lacerated heart, which has lost the essential element of life: interiority, the reality which offers meaning, inspiration and the motivation to conscious existence, and which is the privileged place of encounter with God.

## **3. St. Joseph of Nazareth and the Interior Life**

So as to avoid misunderstanding, it is important to remember that St. Joseph is not a theologian in the literal sense of the word, one who has given himself to the theoretical study of the interior life and its implications in relationship to the Absolute. Neither is he a cloistered monk who left us a diary of his soul from which to draw, so as to know the path to follow in search of God.

Apart from all this, the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* speaks of the “interior profile of this figure” (n. 25) and of his “limitless depth of interior life” (ibid.). He lives in daily contact with the mystery “hidden from the ages” and which “dwelled” under the roof of his house (ibid). The text of the Apostolic Exhortation does not fail to emphasize that precisely due to the limitless depth of his interior life, marked by daily contact with the mystery of the Incarnate Word, he receives the most singular orders and comforts, and from him comes the logic and the strength of great decisions, that belongs to pure and simple souls. (RC 26).

Ultimately, the root of the great decisions does not derive itself from human calculation, but the ability to embrace the will of God, the sacrifice which Joseph makes of his entire existence to the needs of the Messiah coming to his own home, the constant readiness and faithfulness to his mission, his simple and domestic virtues, his style of life admired by throngs of devotees and saints over the centuries; all of which finds its foundation and source in the “limitless depth of his interior life” (RC 25).

#### 4. The ABC's of the Interior Life of St. Joseph

If on the one hand, *Redemptoris Custos* defines the interior life of St. Joseph to be a “limitless depth”, on the other it proposes a few fundamental aspects which make manifest its richness and which call out to us. We will focus on four dimensions which seem to be the most distinctive and unique in the journey of our Saint.

##### 4.1 Listening to God - the Primacy of the Word of God

Listening to the Word of God is the first principle of the interior life and a biblical commandment. God urges His people: “...Hear O Israel...”(Dt 6,4-9). On his part, man, conscious of his own vocation and dependence upon God, responds: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1Sam 3,10). This affirmation well expresses the fact that listening constitutes the first act of man and a fundamental attitude in biblical anthropology, since man is called to listen so as to be able to enter into communion with God.

St. Joseph is present in the Gospel as one who hears the message, and without hesitation, dodging, excuses or requests for explanation and clarification, puts it into practice. It is interesting to emphasize that this readiness to listen occurs in the circumstances of daily





life, in the silences of the night and through a dream. Thus it is clear that the mission of Joseph depends upon a word and the fact that by means of a word, he enters into connection with God. The attitude of listening is an essential aspect of his way of life and draws upon his interiority. It is in this that he perceives the messages and matches his deeds. On the other hand, Joseph's response is not expressed in words, but manifested with action, for which the Apostolic Exhortation says that "the Gospels speak exclusively of what Joseph 'did'" (n.25) without mentioning any of his words. Three times by dreams and every other time, he only receives a message and a partial explanation. Joseph listens through the interiority of his being, that is to say, his "heart", which in biblical anthropology is not the seat of sentiments and emotions, but of the intellect and personal identity. In the heart he matures his plans and choices, and from it come his decisions and judgments. The heart is the organ with which God "is heard", and in it is measured one's dedication to God, and by means of it one can discern the order of the world and of life according to God's teachings. (M. Pina Scanu).

#### 4.2. In the presence of the Mystery, Silence

Silence, capstone and guardian of interiority, is recognized by spiritual tradition as the essential element for an authentic spiritual life and for prayer. Our Saint seeks to discern the will of God in silence, and then, without comment, leaves Nazareth with his young pregnant spouse, to go to Bethlehem. There, in silence, he contemplates the miracle of the Birth of the Son of God, the arrival of the shepherds and the visit of the Magi. Alongside the manger, after the birth of Jesus, he not only hears the song of the angels, the voices of the shepherds and the wise words of those from the east, but also perceives the silent presence of his spouse, Mary. He too takes on Mary's attitude of "keeping everything and meditating on it in her heart" (Lk 2,19).

The text of the Apostolic Exhortation adds: "Even to his work as a carpenter at his home in Nazareth, he extends the atmosphere of silence, which accompanies everything that refers to the figure of Joseph. It is in the silence though, that the interior profile of this figure is revealed in a special way. The Gospels speak exclusively of that which Joseph 'did'; however, they also allow us to discover in his 'deeds', wrapped in silence, a climate of profound contemplation" (25).

#### 4.3. Interior Struggle

In the interiority of the heart, place of spiritual struggle, among the various possibilities, options, thoughts, suggestions and dynamics, occurs Joseph's discernment process, a category of Ignatian spirituality, re-proposed to us today, with new energy in the pontificate of Pope Francis.

In Matthew, the Guardian of the Redeemer makes his first appearance as a man in torment, searching for a response to the problem of the pregnancy of his spouse. The manifestation and the closeness of this mystery *fascinans et tremendum* shakes his life and causes his personal plans to crumble. However, God takes the initiative and offers him a time of discernment to be able to embrace the incomprehensible.

In interior solitude, he examines the options which come to him and matures his decision. His discernment and interior struggle, marked by the obscurity and the uncertainty as to what steps to take, concludes with the words revealed to us by the angel: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1,20).4.4 The unique synthesis of Joseph: a life unified

To harmonize the interior life of a person with its necessary external activities is one of the greater problems and challenges of our times. Yet, Joseph of Nazareth presents himself as one capable of harmonizing both the daily routine of a worker with the consciousness of living in the presence of the Son of God. His daily work is in harmony with his contemplation of the mystery "hidden from the ages", which "has come to dwell in his house" (n.25). In Joseph, the interior life is never separated from exterior life, but, on the contrary, guides and appreciates the concrete, daily and historical dimension of life.

The limitless depth of the interior life of Joseph, as the Apostolic Exhortation calls it, is the source of his motivation, dedication, his zeal and his service. The text mentions some exterior manifestations which come from the interior: "the great decisions"(n.25); "the readiness of the will to dedicate itself to those things belonging to his service"(n.26); "the strength typical of simple and pure souls"(ibid); the willingness to do the will of God and his capacity to renounce natural conjugal love for an incomparable virginal love which is his foundation and nourishment"(n.27).



Furthermore, the synthesis between his interior and exterior is highlighted by other expressions of the Apostolic Exhortation: “To his work, the carpenter of the house of Nazareth extends the same atmosphere of silence”(n.25) and also you can “discover in his actions, wrapped in silence, a climate of profound contemplation” (ibid); and finally, he lives, “in daily contact with the mystery ‘hidden from the ages’ which ‘came to dwell’ in his home”(n.25).

Equally precious is the text of the Apostolic Exhortation which indicates the source of what overcomes the apparent contradiction between the interior and exterior: “The apparent tension between the active life and the contemplative, finds in him an ideal transcendence, possible for one who possesses perfect charity”(n.27). Perfect charity allows Joseph, and whoever follows his path, to harmonize and join together the apparent contradictions between the closing of historical experience to interiority and the evasion of historical experience which falls into self-centered intimacy.

## 5. **Ite ad Joseph**

The figure of St. Joseph, model of the interior life, illustrated by the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, draws us to what is essential and returns us to the primacy of those values which lately have been obscured and forgotten. Therefore it is worth the effort to allow ourselves to be inspired by him and to commend ourselves “to the protection of him, to whom God Himself ‘entrusted the care of his greatest and most precious treasures’”(Quemadmodum Deus).

This is the lesson which the Guardian of the Redeemer leaves us who are called to give witness to Christ and maintain a constant dialog with God without neglecting our responsibilities in the world. Our holy Founder recommends: “Let us ask St. Joseph to be our spiritual director”, and adds: “St. Joseph, protector of the interior life, be my Teacher”.





# The THEOLOGY of ST. JOSEPH according to REDEMPTORIS CUSTOS



Fr. Beniamino Bertoni, OSJ

**A**fter the Encyclicals dedicate to the Word Incarnate, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary in the magisterial work of John Paul II, a document on St. Joseph could not be lacking, with the title “*Redemptoris Custos*”, in which the accent is placed both on the mystery of the Incarnation and on that of the Redemption.



San Giovanni Paolo II

Redemptoris  
Custos



The central point in which God reveals together himself and his holy salvific will, Jesus Christ, must not be disconnected from those who were, by free but not arbitrary divine choice, intimately and indissolubly involved in his coming in the flesh.

The Pope proceeds in a theological manner but he also carries out a meditation. After having recalled the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Encyclical “*Quamquam pluries*” of Pope Leo XIII, John Paul II draws the outlines for a theology of St. Joseph.

His starting point is a passage from the Gospel of Matthew (1:20-21.24). In these words, the Pope sees a strict analogy with the annunciation to Mary. Just as for Mary, in his generous response to this announcement is found the true greatness of St. Joseph: just as Mary is great for having conceived the Word “first with her mind and then with her body” so

also the justice of St. Joseph is found in his obedience to the words of the Lord. In truth, Joseph did not respond to the announcement of the angel of the Lord like Mary, but he did that which the angel had ordered him to do and took his wife to himself. That which he did is pure obedience of faith. One can say that that which Joseph did united him in a special way to Mary's faith: he accepted as truth coming from God that which she had accepted already in the Annunciation. The Council teaches: the obedience of faith is due to God who reveals himself, making the full submission of intellect and will to Him and willingly assenting to His revelation.

This perfectly applied to Joseph of Nazareth. That which Joseph did is recounted in the stories of the Gospel, where the paternal role of Joseph toward Jesus is clearly presented. In fact, salvation comes by means of Jesus' humanity, it is realized in the gestures which are found in daily family life. The Evangelists are very careful to show how in Jesus' life nothing happens by chance, but all proceeds according to the pre-established Divine plan: this happened in order to fulfill...

By the Incarnation the promises and figures of the Old Testament become reality: places and events come together following precise divine orders.

St. Joseph's mission is enclosed in the paradox of the absolute truth of his marriage with Mary and of his fatherhood as regards Jesus, on the one hand, and the virginal conception of the Son of God by the work of the Holy Spirit on the other. They are two rings of the chain which cannot be unfastened.

The Davidic line has for the Jews a significance which it is difficult to understand today. The genealogies of Matthew and Luke, which attest Jesus being of the Davidic line and so of his being the Messiah, come through Joseph, though not seeking to hide that his fatherhood is not physical. Also the imposition of the name is seen in a typically paternal function, a role of very high value in the biblical and traditional world in general. But, Joseph's fatherhood has an even more elevated real foundation: he received this mission from God, who creates all the objective conditions for its fulfilment.

Faced with the pregnancy, of which he is not the cause, Joseph is disturbed such as to decide in his heart to send his wife away. The Exhortation does not get into the exegetical question; still, it underlines the disturbance connected to accepting humbly and generously the mission received from God. Joseph's disturbance is that of the just man who, at the threshold of a mystery which is greater than he, of which it is difficult to believe he had not been made aware, does not know how to decide without first having understood God's will. Once his vocation is known, his life is marked by silent and perseverant fidelity, a very pure model of the obedience of faith.

The truth of the marriage and fatherhood of Jesus has very important consequences for the theology of marriage and love in general. They evidence a major fact: marriage, which is love between a man and a woman, does not consist in sexuality, without taking anything away from the importance and holiness of sexuality between spouses. A minimalist and false conception of marriage has fatally favored the conviction that sexual relations are an essential element of marriage; precisely the reflection on this point in the Christian mystery has led the best

theological tradition to see the formal element of marriage in the “indivisible union of souls”. Also from this point of view, the virtuous behavior of Joseph is particularly eloquent for our time.

As for Mary, so also for Joseph, the mission received from God does not end with his earthly “pilgrimage of faith” but continues in heaven. In fact, as he is in relationship with the Head so he is in relationship with the body and with its members. Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church, from the first centuries, have underlined that St. Joseph as he cared lovingly for Mary and dedicated himself with joyful dedication to the education of Jesus Christ, so he guards and protects his mystical body, the Church, of which the Blessed Virgin is figure and model. For this reason Blessed Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph “Patron of the Universal Church”.

Pope John Paul II recalled with particular veneration the prayer to the Saint by Pope Leo XIII. In this prayer, St. Joseph is asked to continue his mission as Protector, to dispel “the evil of falsehood and sin”, assisting us “in this struggle with the powers of darkness” and defending us from “the snares of our enemies and from all adversity”.

Today still, the Pope assures us, we have many reasons to pray to and recommend each person to St. Joseph. With St. Joseph Marengo we say: “You, O Joseph, show us the way, protect us in each step, and lead us where Divine Providence wants us to go”.

### **Activities of the “St. Joseph Marengo” Province for devotion to St. Joseph**

One of the special characteristics of our ministry in parishes and in our social works is the devotion to St. Joseph which is to be lived and spread.

We point out here that which are the activities of devotion to St. Joseph in our Various Communities. In all of them there is the weekly prayer of the “Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph”, recited in common and often with the people of the parish. The votive masses are of St. Joseph.

ALBA – On Wednesday, votive masses of St. Joseph

Monthly meeting of the Josephite Laity on the person of St. Joseph. For the Solemnity of March 19, there is a triduum in preparation.

A group of laity take care of the spreading of Josephite publications.

ASTI , MOTHER HOUSE – Besides the votive masses of St. Joseph every Wednesday, the 1st Wednesday of the month there is an evening MEETING of prayer, song, adoration, catechesis and Holy Mass, which a large number of people attend. There are many confessions. This takes place from 8:15pm until 11:00pm.

At the beginning of the social year the Josephite Laity renew their Promise.

On the Solemnity of St. Joseph, March 19, the Mass is presided over by the Bishop and concelebrated by the confreres from the nearby houses, by the Pastors of the City and the diocese. This ends with a fraternal reception.



CANELLI- Wednesday votive Mass with the faithful. Triduum in preparation for the Solemnity of St. Joseph

CASTAGNETO DONORATICO – On Wednesday the votive Mass and Sorrows and Joy with the Faithful. The Solemnity of St. Joseph on March 19 is preceded by a Triduum and the Holy Mass is concelebrated with the pastors of the deanery.

IMPERIA – The Sorrows and Joys are prayed with the faithful on Wednesday – There is the tradition of the Josephite Week in preparation for the Solemnity – On the Feast of March 19 for years the Bishop and pastors of the city have participated and there is a Procession with the Statue of St. Joseph through the streets of the Parish.

MILAN – Votive mass and recitation of the Sorrows and Joys with the faithful. March 19 the Josephite Laity renew their Promise and there is 9:00pm Mass with the participation of many faithful.

NUORO - Votive mass– Sorrows and Joys with the people the 1st Wednesday Triduum for the Feast of St. Joseph -.

ROME AURELIO – Nine days of preparation for the Feast of St. Joseph, Procession with the Statute. Each 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday there is a formation meeting with the Laity on the spirituality of St. Joseph for two groups from the two Roman parishes held by Fr. Bronzini.

SESTO FIORENTINO Votive mass on Wednesday– Sorrows and Joys with the faithful. Solemn Feast on March 19; May 1 is the Patronal Feast preceded by Triduum.

Beginning in October, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month a Mass is celebrated for deceased Benefactors in which a teaching on St. Joseph is held.







# To Be **OBLATES** like **ST. JOSEPH**

Fr. Francesco Russo, OSJ

**T**he occasion of the World Day of Consecrated Life (Feb. 2) offers us the opportunity to reflect on our own personal consecration, starting with our identity as “Oblates of St. Joseph” and, I would add, of “Oblates *like* St. Joseph”. We should look at him as the successful model of consecration to God.

## 1. The first 3 “Oblates” (Mary, Joseph and Jesus)



A search for the meaning of our being “oblates” takes us to the Latin word composed of a preposition and a verb: *oblatum*, from *ob-fero*, to bring towards or bring before and can be translated with to offer/offered. The richness of this term allows us to understand that the “oblate” is he who brings his life before God, who brings to the Lord all of his existential experience made of his dreams, plans, desires, successes, failures, weaknesses....

In this sense we can understand that the first 3 “oblates” from whom we draw inspiration are in fact Mary, Joseph and Jesus. In chronological order, the first who offers herself is without a doubt, Mary: “*Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me as He said.*”(Lk 1,38). From a teleological point of view instead, the primacy of offering

belongs to Jesus: *“Entering into the world Christ says: ‘You wanted neither sacrifice or offering, instead a body you prepared; You neither delighted in holocausts or sacrifices due to sin.’ Then I said: ‘Behold I come - because it was written of me in the scroll - to do Your will O God’.* (Heb 10, 5-7).

Mary with her FIAT, *brings her life towards God* (before God), and offers herself to Him and all that is precious which she possesses: her youth, her virginity, her plans, her capacity to generate life.

The fullness of offering will be incarnated in Jesus, because He will offer His very divinity, and further, place His body completely (which is to say His life) at the disposal of others with His sacrifice on the Cross: “despite being of divine nature, He did not consider a jealous treasure His equality with God, but despoiling Himself, assuming the nature of a servant and becoming like unto men, He appeared in human form, humbling Himself, making Himself obedient unto to death, to death on the cross” (Phil 2, 6-8).

Between these two exalted models of “offering” we find our St. Joseph, who with his FECIT, is no less a figure in terms of generosity and oblation.

## 2. The Oblation of St. Joseph

In the life of St. Joseph, his being an “oblate” carries all the richness, strength, decisiveness, passion and determination that would be typical of a young man of his age, enamored of his beloved, but also a man of faith and “just”, ready to bow his head so as to allow the will of God to take shape and become concrete in his daily life.

The evangelical presentation of Matthew shows us a man, an adult in his faith, in whom his active energy in absolutely any no stands in contrast with a rich interior life. In fact, precisely due to this he is able to find strength and hope to seek and “do” the will of God, and thus meriting to be associated to the category of the “just” in the Old Testament.

The oblation of St. Joseph is his “bringing of himself before God”, offering all of himself. This is not just a “*docilitas*” (a docility) which runs the risk of presenting us with a man who is passive before the plan of God. Rather, we speak of a “*docibilitas*” which could be translated as “teachableness”, an openness of liberty of the subject to let himself be taught, educated, formed and transformed by life, by others, by every existential situation - learning life and learning to do so for his whole life.

Joseph decides to consign his life into the hands of God and allow himself to be molded by Him. He embraced all the events that would take place from there and which would mark his existence, as motivations to grow, mature and be transformed. Even the renunciations, adversities, dangers, and spiritual upheavals become for him an occasion of growth, not only at the beginning of his vocational journey, but for his whole life.



In this process of *docibilitas*, Joseph is actively and responsibly involved. He is the genuine protagonist of change, because he pays attention to every event that could become formative; because he accomplishes his discernment ("while he was pondering these things" Mt 1,20) and, in total obedience to the Voice of God, he decides to "do" (*fecit*) the Will of God.

To be an "oblate" for St. Joseph is not just his renouncing to follow his own plans, but more about his profound interior freedom to allow himself to be "taught" by whatever fragment of truth and beauty around him, in things and persons, trusting totally in the plan of happiness offered to him by God: "in your will is my joy...great peace for who loves Your Law." (Ps 118).

### 3. To simply be Oblates

On the 4th of November, 1877, Marelli wrote a letter to Fr. Cesare Rolla (a spiritual son) in which he presented "the first draft of a foundational Rule" for the Company of St. Joseph, manifesting yet more clearly his desire to find his inspiration in his model, St. Joseph. This is Letter 108, which, with good reason, can be considered the true letter of foundation for our Congregation.

AUTOGRAFO DI MONS. GIUSEPPE MARELLO  
ABBOZZO DELLA COMPAGNIA DI  
SAN GIUSEPPE NEL 1877

Compagnia di S. Giuseppe

A chi per qualsiasi ragione (chi maltrattato, difetto di studio etc.) non possa aspirare allo stato teologico o religioso, si suggerisce l'idea di seguire da vicino il divino Maestro col osservanza dei Consigli evangelici, e soprattutto l'imitazione di S. Giuseppe, dove si desidera col proposito di permanere, nascosta mente e silenziosamente operando, nell'imitazione di quel grande Modello di vita, per arrivare a farsi vero discepolo di Gesù Cristo.

Il fratello di S. Giuseppe non è religioso professo ma semplicemente Oblato, che si offre di cuore a Dio, per tendere alla perfezione, staccato da ogni terreno giumento di corpo e di spirito.

Le obbligazioni della Compagnia di S. Giuseppe sono tracciate dalle parole stesse di M. S. P. Q. che dice: «chi non si distacca da tutto ciò che possiede...

... chi non rinuncia all'amore dei parenti e perfino del stesso non può essere mio discepolo, parole che racchiudono i tre punti essenziali della vita di perfezione: povertà ossia rinuncia dei beni della terra; castità ossia rinuncia dei

piaceri; obbedienza ossia rinuncia della volontà. S. Benedetto, Patriarca della vita religiosa in Occidente, esprime questa triplice rinuncia con una mirabile precisione espressa nella seguente Regola: Non deve avere il fratello alcuna cosa di propria: niente del tutto; non essendo affatto tenuto avere alcuna arbitria sopra il proprio corpo, o la propria volontà. Reg. S. B. cap. 58.

La Casa di S. Giuseppe non meglio affettuosamente il fratello, affettivo dalle sue lezioni si riconosce per la sua indispensabile relazione esterne, con i fratelli Essistenti, e quindi, nel rispetto loro stato, viene dato il distacco affettivo col parente o spinto alla mortificazione dei sensi e della subdanza. Il proprio fratello profanato essere vero membro della Compagnia, e quindi, nel rispetto del servizio temporale prestato ai fratelli Oblati, la propria Compagnia di tutti i loro fratelli spirituali.

Luigi Don





Presenting his plan, after a preamble, already well known to us (“To whom, for whatever reason...”), the Founder makes use of a few words, to which perhaps, a proper importance has not been given. He wrote: **“the Brother of St. Joseph is not a professed religious, but simply an Oblate, who offers himself continuously to God...”**. While Marelli foresaw a life of acute poverty and humility for the Oblates, nevertheless, the adverb “*simply*” is not meant to be just about that. Instead, he wanted to indicate the essence of being an Oblate, above and beyond, the sum of all the contingent situations that might arise from roles assumed, from apostolic situations, from states of mind or exterior conditions. . .

Whoever enters in the Congregation and chooses St. Joseph as their model and spiritual master, is to think solely of the complete giving of themselves to the Father, like the Carpenter of Nazareth gave himself concretely to God to serve Jesus and Mary. The life of the Oblate of St. Joseph has no sense if it is not based exclusively on his “oblation”, his total self-offering, just like it was for Jesus Christ, for Mary and for Joseph. In essence, you are “bringing before” God all that we are: dreams, ideals, plans, successes, failures, delusions, frailties, sins... Our consecration as “oblates” has taken all of this and made of it a holocaust pleasing to the Lord.

Further, the offering of self is made “*continuously*”, for one’s entire life. This is not a transitory act or something situated in a determined phase of our lives, perhaps limited to the day of our religious profession. Instead, it must be a constant disposition of the heart, lived in the present moment, well understanding that one moment is different from the next. Thus, I must be able to offer myself to God with the enthusiasm of my youth and the weariness of old age, in the satisfactions of goals achieved and in the disappointments of failures that happened, in the joy of my feeling “all” for God and in the suffering of not being able to give to the Lord naught but the worst of myself.... The situations and circumstances may change, and thus the manner of our oblation may change, but the desire of offering all to God, and doing it for our entire life must never diminish. As our Father Founder taught us, that in every moment our salvation is decided...every moment is a link in the chain which leads to God...”every moment which passes is a new occasion which we must make use of and for which one day we will answer before the presence of God.”(Letter 54)





# TOTUS TUUS

## A Reflection on the Prayer of Entrustment written by our Founder

Fr. Francesco Russo, OSJ

### Entrustment to St. Joseph

**B***ehold us all for you, O Joseph, and may you be all for us.  
You mark out for us the way, you assist our every step,  
you lead us where Divine Providence wants us to arrive.  
Whether the way be long or short, rough or smooth,  
Whether the goal may  
or may not be visible to human sight,  
Whether slowly or quickly  
With you we are sure to always go well.*





We have said it many times. It has appeared throughout the days of this special Year dedicated to our Holy Patron. It has expressed the emotions and inner state with which we turn to him.... However, what does this prayer truly represent for our Founder? What is behind its every phrase and the images that it contains?

Making use, with the due distinctions, of a typical method of our Faith, we can say that its necessary to go from the *lex orandi* to the *lex credendi* to the *lex vivendi*. The *lex orandi* represents a prayer recited many times, that becomes *lex credendi* by way of a deepening which leads to understanding, thereby making it *lex vivendi*, making our own the attitudes expressed by the text.

The title given to this reflection, could become the new name by which we today know this prayer: the **Josephite Totus tuus** (on the same level as the Marian expression) because from its first to its last word, as we will see, it speaks of an attitude of total surrender and entrustment to the protection and guidance of St. Joseph.

## 1. The context in which this prayer is born

This prayer is found within Letter 237, written by the Founder to Don Cortona on March 8, 1891. The date of this letter (4 years before his death) helps us to understand that we are before a humanly and spiritually mature Marello, who in making certain affirmations, knows well that he is not transmitting some theoretical teaching, taken from the study of some devotional book, but a direct and real experience of life.

The occasion which led to the genesis of this letter is a situation of practical need. Fr. Cortona had brought before the Founder a series of projects regarding the expansion of the house of Santa Chiara in Asti, so as to deal with the growing needs of the Congregation. They had a certain amount of money available, which created a certain enthusiasm in Fr. Cortona and others of the Brothers. However, it was still insufficient to cover all the anticipated expenses and those which might come about due to unforeseen events. For this reason, Marello, who at other times had shown himself courageous and enterprising, sustained and motivated by the confidence he placed in God, now discourages the undertaking of the works if the necessary funding cannot be found, and also so as to not diminish the example of trustworthiness and poverty that it was necessary to have before the citizens of Asti. Nevertheless, his reasoning, inspired by great wisdom and prudence, concludes with these words: "let us stop and wait, that St. Joseph may allow us to hear his voice." Total entrustment to St. Joseph invites us to not rush, but rather to wait confidently for the response of Divine Providence through the mediation of our Patron: "St. Joseph, who has provided up to now will certainly provide even in the future," the Founder will write in a later letter (Letter 240).

The text of the letter continues, showing a moment of great excitement that they were living in Santa Chiara in those days: "We are in his beautiful month; Fr. Cortona preaches his glories; the Brothers and the whole house invoke his protection with united hearts; Bro. Stefano offers him the homage of his tribulations and Bro. Massimo, if he in the name of God should ask, offers his sacrifice - painful but at the same time glorious - of his very life." Even the suffering

of the two Brothers (who will in fact shortly thereafter die) becomes a homage to our Holy Patron.

In this context of “joys and sorrows”, worries and gratifications, the Founder concludes his letter placing himself ideally alongside his Sons and inviting them to an extreme trust in the guidance of St. Joseph: “let us therefore say to our great Patriarch: here we are all for You, and You be all for us. You mark out the way, you sustain every step, you lead us where Diving Providence wants us to arrive. Whether the journey is long or short, rough or smooth, the goal seen or unseen by human eyes, quick or slow, with You we are sure to always go well.”

## 2. The “Josephite Theology” of the Founder

In the prayer we are examining, the concept and role of “guide”, which the Founder attributes to St. Joseph quickly emerges. This idea is associated with the fact that Marengo understands the spiritual life as a “journey”, which therefore requires someone who will act as a guide.

Now, for the Founder, there is no doubt that the guide par excellence is the Holy Spirit. This was recorded in a beautiful homily (May 19, 1889, Writings. 344) which is entirely a vigorous testimony to the action of the Spirit as “guide” in our lives. From this homily we have even drawn that invocation which we usually make use of in our meetings. Nevertheless, Marengo associates the Holy Spirit, in his role as guide, with the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph.

In particular, we can say that he chooses St. Joseph for at least 3 fundamental reasons:

### A. St. Joseph is a guide in “intimate relationship with the Divine Word” (Letter 37).

In Letter 37 written on March 19, 1869 to his like-named friend Fr. Giuseppe Riccio, Marengo presents a beautiful parallel between the mission of St. Joseph and that of the priest: “O glorious Patriarch Joseph, do not forget us who go about struggling with this miserable flesh in our hard earthly exile. You who after the blessed Virgin, were the first to hold in your arms Jesus the Redeemer, be also our exemplar in our ministry, which like your own, is a ministry of intimate relationship with the Divine Word. Teach us, assist us, make us worthy members of the Holy Family.” The parallel regards the relationship between St. Joseph and the Child Jesus, and with St. Joseph and the ministerial priesthood (“ministry of intimate relationship” with Jesus). Something similar is to be found in the “Draft for a Company of St. Joseph”, in Letter 83: “Everyone is to take their inspiration from St. Joseph, who was the first upon the earth to care for the interests of Jesus.” We do not go off track if we also imagine the same similarity to be applied, in general, to our religious consecration: what otherwise would the Vows of chastity, poverty and obedience be if not an “intimate relationship” with Jesus himself?

### B. St. Joseph is a guide in caring for the “interests of Jesus”(Letter 83).

This is a key concept in the spirituality of Marengo, and we can say, center of the entire letter of foundation. In fact, the expression returns multiple times in fundamental passages:

- *I gathered some of my friends in the same spirit of union under the auspices of St. Joseph to serve the interests of Jesus in his new Church...*

- Draft for a Company of St. Joseph which promotes the interests of Jesus...
- This has a kind of natural right to reside in the house and officiate in the church of Jesus...
- Everyone is to take their inspiration from their Model St. Joseph who was the first upon the earth to care for the interests of Jesus...
- Everyone can take part in the Company; it is enough to aggregate oneself by secret resolution to have with it a communion of interests...
- Who thinks to participate in the Company must, however, make before the Lord a sincere promise to work, within the limits of his abilities, to promote the dear interests of Jesus...
- There is no time or place in which you cannot do something. Every word, every step, every desire, can be the raw material of the interests of Jesus...

The phrase interests of Jesus has its biblical basis in the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, with its strong affirmation: "Everyone, in reality, seeks their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." (2,21) Fr. Marelli gave capital importance to this phrase, without however, stopping to go into detail about the sense and latitude that he intended. He spoke always by means of allusion, as if it were something known, obvious, immediately intuited. He was convinced that: "in a frightening variety of ways the Kingdom of God is demolished" for which it became necessary to "do everywhere our work of restoration, with the help of Heaven." St. Joseph, without question, is the model in this: "everyone take their inspiration from their model St. Joseph, who was the first upon earth to care for the interests of Jesus." (Letter 83).

### **C. St. Joseph is our guide in the attitude of trust that directs our steps** (Letter 185)

The letter written to Fr. Cortona on September 23, 1889 is full of material concerns, especially for the difficult financial conditions. The Founder has his feet on the ground, and thus seeks to deal with the problem very concretely, offering even suggestions for obtaining the funds necessary for the complex reality of Santa Chiara to keep going. However, at a certain point he shows all of his spirituality and greatness of heart which leads him to





affirm: *“The question of money has kept us far too low and its time to say sursum corda. Lift up your heart. On the occasion of the spiritual retreat may God fill them with that trust that reigned in the our Holy Patron in all the steps of his life. In those holy days, with the spirit of piety, may the spiritus consilii et fortitudinis descend on the Brothers of St. Joseph. May the heavenly light allow them to see quae agenda sunt and may divine grace help them ut quae recta sunt complere valeant.”* St. Joseph is the model because, in the presence of human and material concerns (welcoming Mary, the flight into Egypt...) he jumps in without thought and without complaint into the mystery which God proposes to him and he welcomes Mary and begins his “pilgrimage of faith” with an unshaken trust in Providence.

The reason for having such an unshaken faith in Providence is a recurring theme in Marellian spirituality, precisely because it comes from imitating St. Joseph. Once again in Letter 83, the Founder writes: *“the works of the Saints, which the centuries have respected, were always marked by this character of simplicity [...] this motive power which is, in the end, nothing other than unshakeable faith in Providence, faith alone and bereft of every human concern.”*

The theme of the “pilgrimage of faith” instead, we find well described by St. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Custos*, in n.4. The Pope first cites Vatican II with regards to the faith of Mary: “The blessed Virgin grew in her pilgrimage of faith and faithfully preserved her union with her Son unto the Cross”, and then adds: “Now at the beginning of this pilgrimage Mary’s faith encounters the faith of Joseph [...]. What he did is purest ‘obedience of faith’. (Cf. Rm 1,5; 16,26; 2Cor 10,5-6). One can say that that which Joseph did united him in an altogether special way with the faith of Mary. He accepted as a truth coming from God that which she had already accepted in the Annunciation. The Council teaches: ‘to God who reveals, is due ‘the obedience of faith’, in which man abandons himself totally and freely to God, offering Him the “full submission of his intellect and will” and willingly assenting to the revelation made by Him’(Dei Verbum, 5). The above cited phrase, which touches the essence of faith, applies perfectly to Joseph of Nazareth.”

### 3. Exegesis of the Text

After these necessary premises, it is now possible to attempt to do a deeper analysis of the text of the prayer, drawing out what could be the spiritual meaning which the Founder wanted to express. We have already said that it could become for us the “*Josephite Totus Tuus*”: it is already an expression of Marelllo’s total abandonment to St. Joseph, because he is a man of interior depth but also a “practical” man, all for God, all for men.

#### A. Behold us all for You, O Joseph, and You be all for us

We notice first, a reference to the *behold* of important biblical personages: Abraham, Isaiah, Mary... It is an expression which expresses full acceptance, sharing of the divine plan which one is part of, an intelligent and active cooperation.

St. Joseph is the model of consecration and of mission, a perfect synthesis of contemplation and action. In our “behold” we find the strength of his “behold” which teaches us to sanctify all of our earthly realities (family, work, institutions). For Joseph, every action is important and becomes part of our story of salvation. There is no room for “half measures”. The totality of this consecration, this offering, this “oblation”, allows us to be one with the holiness of Joseph, fully enjoying his protection, as well as follow his example.

### **B. You mark out for us the way**

Joseph is the teacher because he shows us the way to follow. The verb, in Italian (*segnare*), refers to those who act as guides in the mountain when they “mark” or show the paths they go upon, indicating the type of path, the difficulties to be met with, where the resting places are...all so that the rest of the party may walk in security, even not knowing the way.

### **C. You assist our every step**

How can we not see in this expression the “paternal” attitude of Joseph in the presence of the young Jesus? It is the responsibility of one who assists, that while evoking confidence when attempting to take those first steps, he is watchful that the child does not stumble and if he falls, is ready to raise him up.

### **D. You lead us where Divine Providence wants us to arrive**

Joseph has become an expert in Providence. He who was foremost in struggling in the dark, has also learned to recognize the voice, even the whispers, the inspirations and above all has learned to trust in it. He has learned to review his own ideas and plans by it and link his own discernment to it (*“while he was thinking of these things...”*), surrendering himself to the supreme Will of God.

### **E. Whether the way be long or short**

Joseph helps us to different conception of the “time it will take”, because in his life, there is a continuous “recalculating of of the way”. God is never predictable and just when you seem to have nailed Him down, He is ready to surprise you and “break up your plans”.

### **F. Rough or Smooth**

The experience of the life of the Founder was already such as to allow him to view the spiritual journey as a mixture of situations, some beautiful others difficult, level ways and rough ways. Further, the very life of the Patron he chose, St. Joseph, was a joining of “joys and sorrows”. This is why Marelli looks: *“to our good father Joseph, who is the Patriarch of people in trouble, and the secret Comforter of our weaknesses - (he who himself was so often in trouble)”*(Letter 86)

## **G. Whether the goal may or may not be visible to human sight**

This expression of puts our custom of “always having clear ideas”, of making well detailed plans, and always knowing which way to go, into crisis. In the Gospel, Joseph dreams four times, but each time the angel brings only a partial announcement, each time a brief, all too brief prophecy. In leaving and then leaving again, Joseph does not pretend to have everything clear, to see the horizon completely, but only “enough light for the first step” (H. Newman), enough courage needed for the first night, enough strength to begin.

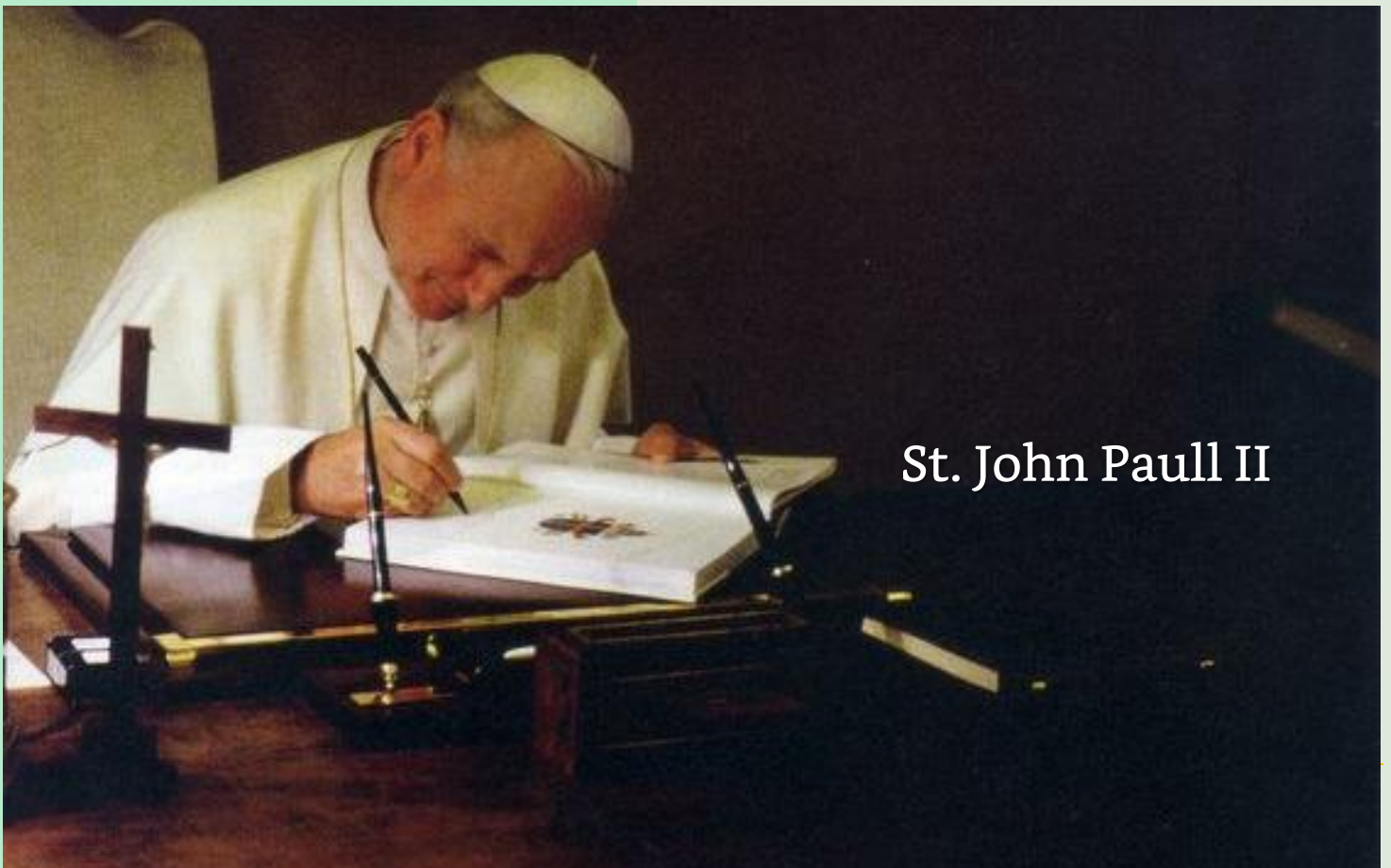
## **H. Whether slowly or quickly**

Here we are trying to measure our time with God’s clock! The “pilgrimages” of Joseph, first with a pregnant Mary, and later with the Child Jesus, do not ever seem to have had a clear time frame. They are “flights” but with the “slowness” of God’s times. Even the Founder begins to “dream” of the birth of the “Company of St. Joseph” back in 1872 (date of the first letter to Canon Cerruti), but he must wait another 6 years before God decides to “bring it to light”.

## **I. With you we are always sure to go well**

This is the apex of our profession of trust in St. Joseph: he never fails to meet expectations. He succeeds in “caring”, protecting and guiding Jesus and Mary, and he will know how to do so with us. The Founder breathed in the enthusiasm which circulated in the Church with respect to St. Joseph, especially thanks to the two Popes of his times: Pius IX and Leo XIII.

Pius IX, already on December 8, 1870, with the decree *Quemadmodum Deus*, embracing the instinct of faith which the Christian people had for some time received and lived, solemnly



**St. John Paul II**



proclaimed the Patronage of St. Joseph for the Universal Church. A few years later (1889) Leo XIII explained the reasons in his Encyclical *Quamquam pluries*: “It is therefore convenient and supremely worthy of blessed Joseph, that in that way in which once upon a time he was used to guiding in a holy way and in every event, the Family of Nazareth, so now he protects and defends with his heavenly patronage the Church of Christ.”

Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Custos*, speaks with particular veneration in regards to the prayer which Leo XIII placed at the conclusion of his Encyclical, and in which he asks St. Joseph to continue his mission as protector, keeping away from us “the plague of errors and vices”, assisting us “in this battle with the powers of darkness”, and defending us “from the insidious snares and every adversity”. “Today too - the Holy Father assures us - we have numerous motives to pray in the same way [...]. Today too, we have enduring motives for commending every person to St. Joseph.”

#### 4. Conclusion

As a confirmation and conclusion of what we have up to now written, we would like to remember the final words of the Founder to the Oblates, contained in his last letter written to his sons in Santa Chiara two months before his death. It is as if it were his “spiritual testament” to us Oblates.

This would be Letter 321, written from Acqui to Fr. Cortona on March 4, 1895. Once again we are in the presence of a very difficult situation. Besides the serious problems we were having with the Little House of Cottolengo in Turin, the greatest sufferings for the Brothers of St. Joseph were due to the climate of pettiness and criticism that was diffuse in the city and that moved also among the people, nurtured by that part of the clergy who supported the reasoning of the Little House. The financial difficulties were increasingly greater, because between the boarding students and the aspirants, living both in Asti and in Frinco, they had reached the number of 200. The benefactors, seeing the situation and considering the physical distance of Marengo, becoming worried, were withdrawing the loans that they had offered. It even had come about that the Brothers were accused of using for themselves the offerings made for the poor.

So, in this climate of uncertainty, worry and anguish, the Founder recognizes that: “the Brothers of St. Joseph, in the month dedicated to their Patron, more than at any other time of the year, imitating him, *miscent gaudia fletibus*”. However, they do not need to become discouraged! Whoever has chosen St. Joseph as Guide and Model of spiritual life will know joys and sorrows are the ingredients of which the Will of God is made. Therefore, thinking to bid farewell to his sons, the Founder leaves to them and to each of us this last recommendation: “*Be of good cheer under the paternal mantle of St. Joseph, the most secure place of refuge in tribulationibus et angustiis.*”

Once again, it is the confirmation of a life and spirituality totally consigned into the hands of the great Patriarch St. Joseph. *Totus tuus!*



# WORK has a special place in the GOSPEL

## JESUS WORKED IN THE SHOP OF HIS FATHER

*excerpted from*  
**St. Joseph and the Redemption of Work**

Fr. Tarcisio Stramare, OSJ

***“Jesus did not think it unworthy to labor in the shop of His father.  
He wanted to consecrate human work with His divine perspiration.”***

Pius XII,  
Encyclical *Fulgens radiatur*  
March 21, 1947



**W**e do not meditate enough on the mystery of the Incarnation.

“In the human growth of Jesus, ‘in wisdom, age and grace’ the virtue of work had a notable part, since it is ‘human labor’ which ‘transforms nature’ and made makes man ‘in a certain sense more human’(*Redemptoris Custos*, n.23).

Considering the importance that work has in the life and the transformation of man, you can understand why “human labor, and in particular, manual labor have a special emphasis in the Gospel. Together with the humanity of the Son of God, it has been embraced by the mystery of the Incarnation, as well as being in a special way redeemed. Thanks to the workbench upon which, together with Jesus, he exercised his craft,

Joseph drew together human work and the mystery of the Redemption.” (*Redemptoris Custos*, n. 22)

In reality, alongside Joseph, Jesus not only learned the trade of His father, but also shared and took on that concrete and human dimension which characterizes the world of work, the “civil state, the social category, the economic condition, the professional experience, the family environment and human education.” (Paul VI, *Allocuzione* of March 19, 1964). The participation of Jesus in Joseph’s work thus goes well beyond a mere activity occasionally exercised alongside someone else. It is an act of submission, whose meaning qualifies and defines all of Jesus’ life. When Luke, after the episode of Jesus being found in the Temple, affirms that He “went with them and returned to Nazareth and was obedient to them” (2,51) he does not, with this expression, intend to simply conclude a phase of Jesus’ earthly life, the preparation for his public ministry.

A computer exegesis, ever more fashionable today, searching for how often a word recurs in a sacred text so as to infer its importance, might underestimate, due to its frequency, the middle participle *hypotassomenos*, used by Luke to define the entire hidden life of Jesus. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* interprets this text masterfully: “in the submission of Jesus to His mother and legal father, the perfect observance of the 4th Commandment is realized. This submission is the image in time of His filial obedience to His Heavenly Father. The daily submission of Jesus to Joseph and Mary announced and anticipated the submission of Holy Thursday: ‘Not...my will...’ (Lk 22,42). The obedience of Christ in His daily hidden life already inaugurates the work of restoration of that which the disobedience of Adam destroyed.” (n. 532)

The Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* follows the same lines of explanation, developing the idea of “submission” through historical example. “This submission”, the obedience of Jesus in the house of Nazareth, is understood to also mean participating in Joseph’s work. He who was called the “son of the carpenter” learned his work from his reputed “father”. If the Holy Family of Nazareth, both in the order of salvation and of holiness, is the example and model for human families, so also, analogously, is the work of Jesus at the side of Joseph the carpenter. In our times the Church has underscored this by means of the liturgical memorial of St. Joseph the Worker, established on May 1.” (n. 22). Thus due to this necessary “submission” in the economy of salvation, the presence of Joseph alongside that of Jesus is not in any way merely decorative.

In relation to the redemption of work, Joseph is a *minister salutis* in two ways. The first is better known. It views work, as considered by John Paul II as an expression of love, the work “by means of which Joseph sought to assure the wellbeing of his family.” For this alone Joseph merits mention by the Church in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, alongside that of the glorious ever Virgin Mary, because Joseph “nourished He whom the faithful would eat as the bread of eternal life.” (*Redemptoris Custos*, n. 16, cf. n. 6).

The second, more closely linked to the work “taken up” by Jesus, consists in the fact that precisely “thanks to the workbench at which he exercised his craft together with Jesus, Joseph drew together human work and the mystery of the Redemption.” (*Redemptoris Custos* n. 22). In this affirmation it is clear, based on the principle that “that which is taken



up is redeemed”, Jesus wanted to personally submit Himself to the law of labor so as to “purify and sanctify it”, making use of the ministry of Joseph for that purpose: “On His part Jesus was obedient to them” (Lk 2,51) responding with respect to the attentions of His “parents”. In this way He wanted to sanctify the duties of the family and of work, which he undertook alongside Joseph” (*Redemptoris Custos*, n. 16). Because there can be no doubt that this is the purest of theology, it is a wonder that it is not more spoken of or appreciated in catechisms and scholastic textbooks that deal with the Incarnation, to which all of this directly belongs. This is also true regarding the presence of St. Joseph in the life of Christ, an aspect especially brought out by the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, which is entirely focused on the mystery of the Incarnation.

However, what can you say about the presence of St. Joseph in relation to work, with regards to the life of the Church? In other words, what does the figure of St. Joseph have to say to Christians today?

Pius XII, on May 1, 1955, on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the *Christian Association of Italian Workers* (ACLI), proposed St. Joseph as patron and model of workers, and instituted the liturgical feast of “St. Joseph the Worker”. Its importance for that historical moment was underlined by the fact that on April 24, 1956 a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites put it in the place of the Solemnity of St. Joseph and assigned it the rank of a double first class. With the promulgation of the Calendar of Paul VI in 1969, May 1 was reduced to an “optional memorial”.

The celebration of St. Joseph the Worker comes from the ever valid consideration that no



one among mankind, after Mary, was as close to the hands, mind, will and heart of Jesus as was St. Joseph. As Pius XII said well, St. Joseph was the one in whose life the spirit of the Gospel most deeply penetrated. If this spirit in fact, flows from the heart of the God-Man to all men, “it is thus certain that no worker was more perfectly and deeply penetrated by it than the putative Father of Jesus, who lived with Him in the greatest intimacy and sharing of family and of work.”

From this, the same Pontiff, makes a permanent invitation to workers: “if you would be close to Christ, ‘Ite ad Joseph’ (Gen 41,45), ‘Go to Joseph’! The humble artisan of Nazareth not only represents the dignity of those who work with their hands before God and the holy Church, but will also always be the provident guardian of you and your families.”



# At the **ORIGINS** of the **CONGREGATION** of the **OBLATES** of the **ST. JOSEPH**

Fr. Severino Dalmaso, OSJ



## LAY DIMENSION

1 – **A** particularly important period in the life of Saint Joseph Marello was the birth and first years of the Congregation of the Oblates of St. Joseph. This is a period which remains in the shadows due to a lack of information and of writings from the Founder, except for the three letters from the Fall of 1877 in which the basis for the Congregation was established. Paradoxically, we have more information about the life of the Congregation from the years in which Saint Joseph Marello was Bishop of Acqui (1889 – 1895), than we do from 1878 to 1888, which are the most important and decisive years for its future development. That is due to the numerous letters which Bishop Marello wrote to his Oblates, letters which constitute a true treasure for knowing his spirituality and how much he loved his Sons.



2 – Shedding light on the years of foundation is important so as to understand the finality and spirit of the Congregation itself. I will do this from a principally historical point of view, avoiding personal interpretations, which are not based on the facts. In this first study we will look at the years from 1870 – 1878, those years which determined in the life of Marengo the priest his vocation and decision to start up a Religious Congregation. We will examine first the lay dimensions gathering them from the happenings of the Church of that time. In a further study, we will seek to understand how it came to pass from an attempt to form a lay based association to that of one of religious life.

3 – The year 1870 saw in Italy, in Rome, two events which humanly speaking were opposed to one another: the First Vatican Council and the end of the temporal power of the Pope with the taking of Rome by the Italians. From the first event of the Council, in so far as it was unable to complete its work, there were born and developed always more various spiritual and apostolic initiatives, such as catechesis (the text on catechesis had been discussed during the Council but there had not been time to bring it to a vote in the council chambers), the liturgy, the missionary movement, etc. After the taking of Rome, the conflict between the Church and the Italian government increased. In vain was the attempt to relieve this conflict with the “Guarentigie” laws (1871), seeking to guarantee for the Pope a freedom which was watched over by government offices, following the principle of a “free Church in a free State”, which could be translated a “free Church but under a free State”.

4 – In the midst of the spiritual tensions which emerged after the Council (which developed over the last thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) and the political and civil tensions which produced a true laceration in the consciences of Italian Catholics, the figure of the Pope gained increasing importance, which in the Council had received the highest importance with the definition of his Primacy and Infallibility.

The persecuted Pope became ever more the loved Pope, the Pope defended by a Catholic laity which became more and more ardent in the face of the liberal-masonic attacks. Pius IX, refusing the protection of the Italian state, entrusted himself the public oblations of the faithful through the Peter’s Pence, which, born in France through the efforts of Montalembert (1859), was given an official status in 1871 (August 15) with the Encyclical “Saepe, Venerabiles Fratres”.

5 – This was like a sign which brought Catholics, first of all the youth, to rally around the Pope and to organize themselves into Catholic Associations of Catholic Youth, which were born in those years, with the precise purpose of upholding the rights of the Church and to be close to the Pope in all things and for all things. The first “Italian Catholic Youth Society” was born in Bologna with Mario Fani and the Youth of Acquaderno, on February 11, 1867: it was more like a development of the “Marian Congregations” which flourished in the Jesuit colleges and which now came out from hiding with their “pure and strong” programs, in which the word “pure” expressed the Marian youth spirituality and “strong” gave them a push to place themselves at the service of the Pope and the Church.

Other Associations were born in Florence in 1870, Rome in 1871, and Turin the “Sebastian Valfre Circle” in that same year: this was the work of Bishop Balma, about whom the cleric



Marello speaks in his first letters from 1864. (Bishop Balma was an Oblate of the Virgin Mary expelled from the Missions of Cocincina; he will become later Archbishop of Cagliari; in the meantime he lived in Turin at the Mother House of the Congregation which had been founded by Venerable Pio Lanteri).

6 – In 1871, the Bishops of Piedmont gathered in Turin, discussed greatly about recent events in the Church in Italy and on the pastoral consequences which came from them.

The Bishops found themselves facing mostly new social problems brought about by the first industrialization movements which, particularly in Turin, where being felt with greater urgency. In Turin, the “Worker Societies”, with an anarchist-socialist bent, were being established, modeled after those which already were prospering in nearby France.

All of this left the Bishops not at peace. Those who got to work on this were the Piedmont Saints: Don Bosco for the youth, Fr. Leonardo Murialdo for the workers, Francis Faa di Bruno for the domestic servants, etc. An authoritative word from the Bishops was needed and so there is this from the minutes of their gathering: “If there is need to make some sort of grave decision regarding the worker Societies and among other things encourage the Holy See to prohibit them; they were unanimous (...) in deploring the great evils coming from the worker Societies, but all were of the opinion that it was not expedient to obtain a prohibition from the Holy See also because such a condemnation, instead of diminishing the evils born from the Societies, could actually increase them and that **therefore it is more the case that each Ordinary adopts in his Diocese as much as he can and knows how to so as to bring them to an end, seeking to establish Catholic worker Societies, cultivating Confraternities, in order to lead them to revive the spirit for which they were begun, and exhorting them to introduce into their rules charitable giving and public assistance**”.

Adhering to this invitation, there began in Turin, and later in all of Piedmont, a race to institute Catholic Associations, both youth models and worker Society models. The one and the other were both at the origins of the reawakening of the Catholic laity and of the social action of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

7 – All of the introduction was necessary in order to understand the birth in Asti (or at least the attempt) of the “COMPANY OF ST. JOSEPH”, in the following year of 1872.

Asti was a small, provincial town of a agricultural, commercial character, with very few factories which has just been started at that time; there were the factories of matchsticks, the Vetraria and the first canteens (the Vinciola) of an industrial character. Asti was still not fertile soil for this type of novelty. The first youth Association which arose in Asti was the “Silvio Pellico Circle” in 1885, in the Parish of St. Martin, run by the Barnabites (the pastor Father Pezzuti).

But we can imagine Bishop Savio, after that gathering, in which his Secretary Marello had also participated, accompanying him to Turin, asking himself the question: what can we do here in Asti? The elderly Bishop found no other answer than in the intuitions of his young Secretary;

and that was how the idea of instituting a “Company of St. Joseph” was born, with goals also of social promotion, above all among the youth, who were the most in need.

8 – The idea could possibly be successful if linked to the only social work existing in Asti in favor of youth: the Michelerio, which precisely in that year was planning, under the direction of Canon Giovanni Cerruti, to expand, acquiring the large “Gesù” complex, made up of the Church called the “Gesù” and the ancient monastery of the Poor Clare nuns, extending over four streets (the older part from the 1500’s, the more recent from the 1700’s). The other Catholic social work was the **Cerrato Hospice**, which in those years was showing signs of age and which later Fr. Marellò will take up and start again some years later (involving the Congregation in the project). He wrote, therefore, to Canon Cerutti, and the tone of the letter of October 25, 1872, gives a vague sense of being afraid of not being understood by the ancient Canon Penitentiary, so new was the proposal he was making to him for Asti.

9 – We will skip over all of the preambles which set the stage for the true and proper discussion before getting to the heart of the matter. Instead we will look at the program which Fr. Marellò presented to the Canon, which in substance was a petition to be able to use the Church called the “Gesù”, once it was ready again for worship, in order to set up there a center for spirituality and a ministerial association. I think that Canon Cerutti saw in the Secretary’s request the will of Him who was behind him, that is the Bishop himself, and this was the principal reason which led him to receive enthusiastically the petition made of him made with so much reverential fear on the part of the young Marellò. Even if accepting it did not mean completely understanding where Marellò wanted to take it.

For this reason, he limited himself to presenting the spiritual program, only noting in the second part some of the possible practical things that could be immediately realized since they were along the lines of assistance and charitable works (which was that which the Canon understood best).



Beyond all of this, the program contains the central nucleus of Marellò’s thought, which will later be developed unexpectedly also in the Congregation which will follow six years later, in 1878.

Here, for example, is the original interior inspiration: **“Each member draws his own inspiration from his exemplar St Joseph, who was the first on earth to look after the interests of Jesus.** One who decides to participate in this Company must, however, promise in the presence of God to strive within his means to promote the interests of Jesus...

Let everything proceed according to the dictates of faith, with boundless trust in the help of Heaven and an unfailing gratitude to God, and to Him alone, whether in abundance or privation, mindful that “sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.”

10 – Regarding the organizational structure, it must be said that Fr. Mareello had no more confidence in human calculations. He had overcome already the period of his youth with all the signs of youth: “the political friendships of the preparatory works”, “the humanitarian apostolate”, “journalism”, “the political arena”, “doctrinal and practical proselytism”: all things which he had left behind, in order to concentrate on the faith and on the unbounded love for the Church, the true promoter of good in society in all times. He wrote therefore: “The work of the Saints which the centuries have left intact were always marked by this trait of simplicity... how much more effective is one charitable thought nurtured in the heart of our Cottolengo than a thousand philanthropical projects to be promoted at the cost of millions squeezed from the blood of the people”. With this principle of simplicity, one had to begin with what was possible at the moment and then develop the work according to that which from day to day Providence would lead one to do. The important thing was to never give up and to be completely faithful to that principle.

11 – What did concretely the Company of St. Joseph aim to accomplish and with which arms would it need to fight its holy battle? It had as its aim the goals proper to the Associations which had already been formed elsewhere (even if only in the great cities of that time): that is take care of the interests of Jesus, an expression of Pauline origin, very much used at that time, so much that the first Associations formed in Rome called itself the “Association for Catholic interests”.

The weapons, that is the means, were to be prayers in the Church called the “Gesù”, culture with the mobile library of books collected among his ordination companions (cared for by Delaude), work for the needs of the poor churches, catechesis, etc.

All of these things Mareello began to develop in the following year (1873) and the most successful (and remembered) was the Eucharistic Adoration on Thursdays, present in his intentions from the very beginning: “I shall offer up my private prayers in union with those that you yourself may wish to offer for that same purpose, possibly through some morning or evening reading or period of ADORATION or other devout exercise in the new church...”

From this Eucharistic adoration was also born the “Pious Union of Perpetual Adorers in the Century”, which Fr. Mareello promoted and for which he prepared a little book of prayers and of useful spiritual counsels. Many people in the city came to the Church called the “Gesù” for the Eucharistic adorations preached by Mareello, who in this way began to become a point of reference for confessions and spiritual direction forming apostolic souls and promoting vocations to the religious life, above all the sisterhood.

12 – A boy from the Michelerio, who later became a Brother in the Congregation, Giuseppe Coppo (Bro. Benedetto), recalled those Thursdays in the Church called the “Gesù”: “Orphaned by my father and my mother having to go with her relatives who were going to France, I was placed in the Michelerio Orphanage at the age of eleven. I was first in the carpenter shop, then the

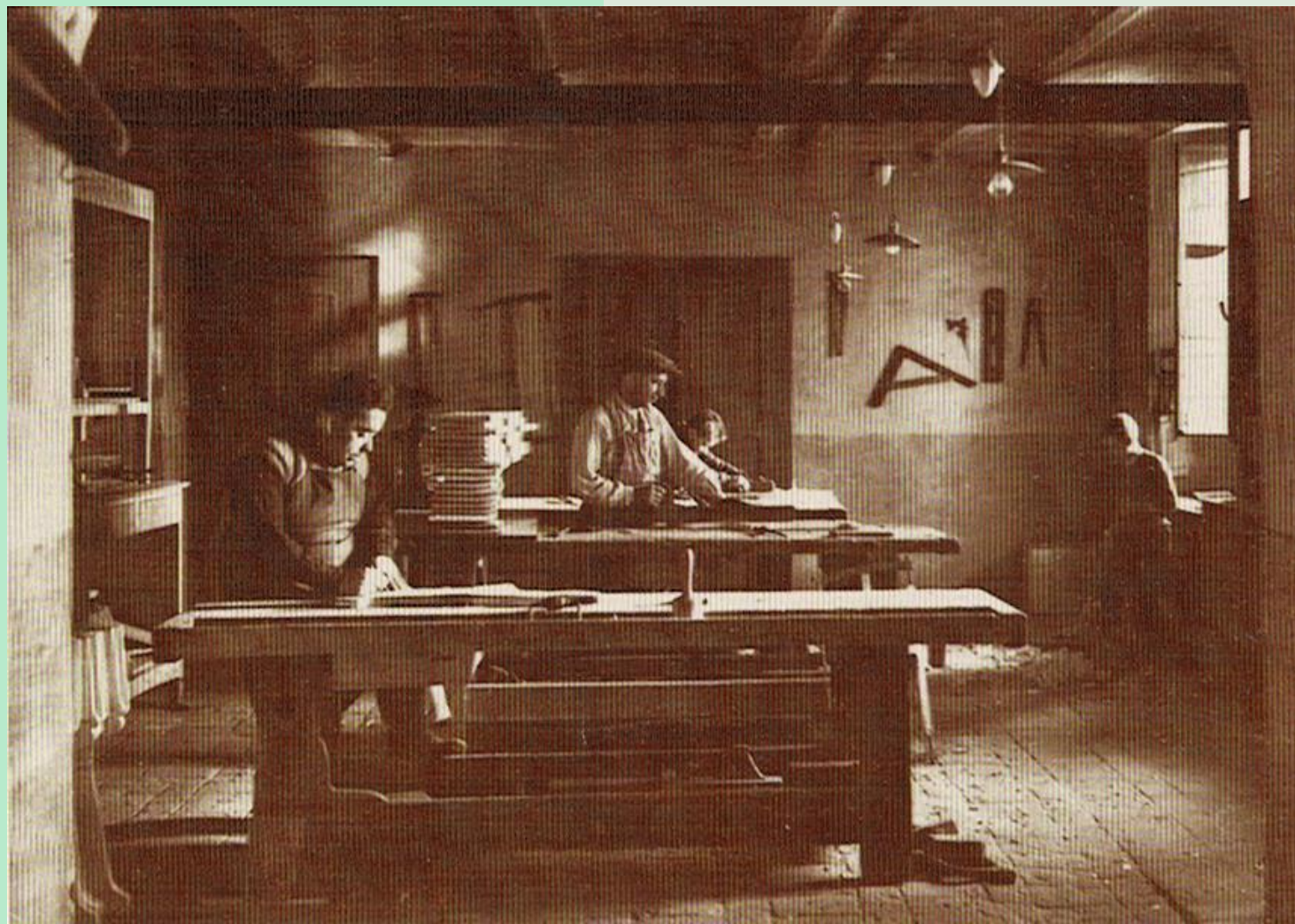


printing shop, and finally the tailor shop. Some times I had to go to the chancery for jobs, and I met with Fr. Marello, who was the Secretary of the Bishop. He was so courteous and kind with me that I was filled with admiration and this admiration increased over the years. I never lost sight of the Servant of God, who I saw often in the Cathedral and more often in the **Michelerio where he frequently came on Thursday to preach the Hour of Adoration**. I was especially struck by seeing him during the sacred functions in the Cathedral. It seemed that Our Lord was filling him with a special light" (From the Processes). Around this more notable activity there were flourishing other works of the apostolate, about which there is more to be discovered historically, in order to reconstruct that which was born from them in the course of the years. It cannot be said that a true and proper youth Association arose as a type of external apostolate. But it is also not possible to dismiss the experience of those years as of now consequence.

13 – Proof of this is that Canon Cerutti was very happy about it, and when Fr. Marello was not there he preached, and all of that coming to the Church called the "Gesù" brought also benefactors to his orphanage and charitable assistance in general.

It was in that climate that Marello's idea developed of setting up a Congregation there where the atmosphere was already established: it could only be in the Michelerio where Marello was already at home. Have we never thought about why the Congregation was born in the Michelerio and not elsewhere?

In 1878, there was no longer need to write a long letter like the one in 1872, in order to be welcomed by Canon Cerutti. Actually the Canon was the first in a way to search for, or at least



to offer, vocations to the new Congregation, and of the first four who joined the community (they joined in brotherhood, according to the expression of the Founder), three of them came from the Michelerio itself: Biamino Pietro who had grown up at the Michelerio where he was the head tailor, Vincenzo Franco, and Giuseppe Luigi Rey. Only Giorgio Medico was found by Marelo, and he was the only one of the first four who persevered.

14 – The conclusion, on the level of history, can be the following: if for the Company of St. Joseph there were no great developments on the level of lay organization, there was a development, unexpected at the beginning, but a true one, on the spiritual and formative level. The most important development then was the Congregation of the Oblates of St. Joseph, which can be said to be the most beautiful and long lasting fruit of the Company of St. Joseph, thought up by the Founder in 1872, and later transformed in 1878 into a Company of a new kind, still lay in the beginning, but enriched by the new spiritual and religious improvements which were well under way in the heart of Marelo in those years, most of all after the death of his father, Vincenzo, on May 17, 1873.

15 – If then we move from the historical to the spiritual level, we can come to a second conclusion and that is that the Congregation of the Oblates of St. Joseph was born from the fundamental stump of Eucharistic devotion, a devotion which Fr. Marelo cultivated in the Church entitled in the name of Jesus, remembering that at that time such a title was linked to that of the Sacred Heart and that the month of January, in which the celebration of the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus took place, was also the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. From this comes the devotion to the Sacred Heart which the Founder passed on to the Congregation and which was demonstrated right from the beginning with liturgical and devotional celebrations centered around the Eucharist. We recall the Eucharistic processions in the Mother House on the Feast of the Sacred Heart and the adorations which continued in the church of Santa Chiara as well, which later became the Shrine of St. Joseph.



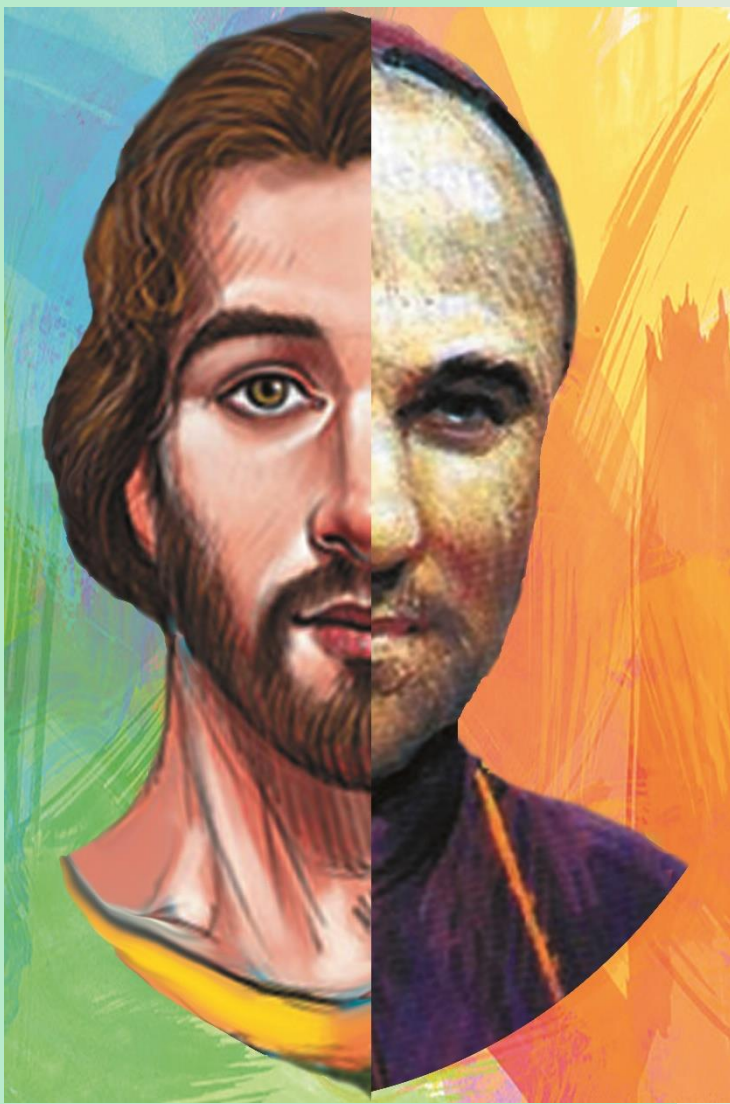




# ST. JOSEPH & ST. JOSEPH MARELLO

Fr. Paolo Re, OSJ

**O**ur Holy Founder did not give us a guide who was a stranger to the interior life, but had the most profound things in his heart. When he was teaching the first brothers about the virtues proper to St. Joseph, he was doing nothing less than depicting himself and his own spiritual life. He shared who he was, what he himself lived.



Fr. Cortona, the first disciple of the Founder, was right to write: "The thought of St. Joseph produced an unalterable peace in the soul of Msgr. Marello, and such a tranquility so as to constrain all of his impulses to the most perfect calm. The great Patriarch was never cast down, never sad, never discouraged in setbacks, and never too exhilarated in joy." Imitating and re-proposing to himself the life of St. Joseph, it was easy for the first Brothers to admire in the Founder the same virtues which he attributed to St. Joseph.

The spiritual characteristics of our Religious Family can be summarized in abandonment to Divine Providence, thus imitating St. Joseph who lived in a continuous listening to the Word of God, and in a hidden life of intimacy with Jesus. These virtues were also specifically apparent in St. Joseph Marello where they took on a strong emphasis, because they were lived in the school



of Mary and Joseph in the style of the virtues of the House of Nazareth. They are virtues which we must live in the school of St. Joseph, Father and Model, if we want to be faithful to our identity.

For our Founder, devotion to St. Joseph was more than just a devotion. It was a way of living, a *total* spiritual composition of life. He lived this devotion, this intimate relationship with St. Joseph with a sense of totality which stirs up a great wonder. You do not find this in any other Saint, not even in St. Theresa d'Avila who is considered to be the greatest devotee of St. Joseph. She "loves" St. Joseph, but does not reproduce his life.

Let us think on a succinct and definitive expression of St. Joseph Marelllo: "*We will thus say to our Great Patriarch: Behold us all for You, and You be all for us*" (Letter 237, St. Joseph Marelllo, Letters, edited by S. Dalmaso, A. Santiago, G. Miglietta, Acqui Terme, AL, 2010, p. 594). These are not half terms, no reduction, no compromise: *All of us for You and You all for us*. This Josephite characteristic has always been preserved and deeply rooted in our Congregation. It is up to us to defend it, and to make it clearer and more effective in our lives, both personal and community, and through the institutionalizing of the Josephite spirit, in our presence in the Church. *Filial intimacy*. From this indispensable characteristic of the relationship between St. Joseph Marelllo and St. Joseph, comes this other aspect of his devotion: filial intimacy with him and unparalleled confidence in him in all the moments of his life and that of the Congregation. We are thinking of invocations like: "*You, O Joseph, mark the way for us, you support us in every step and you lead us where Divine Providence wants us to arrive.*" (ivi).

Therefore, the "pilot" who *marks out the way* is St. Joseph. But it is also him who gives strength to those who need strength, because on their own they cannot make it. *You support*, every day and even *every moment*. This guide is absolutely sure to make us arrive at the goal established by Providence. St. Joseph was for him "*the guide and teacher of the spiritual life, the unsurpassable model of hidden and interior virtues.*" He also adds with a touching confidence: "*our good Papa`*", "*the first upon the earth to care for the interests of Jesus.*" He is the *sure guide*. Marelllo thought of the spiritual life as a journey, a continuous progressing and growth so as to realize "*the spiritual plan that the Lord has laid out for us*" (*Insegnamenti, Consigli spirituali e omelie raccolti da Bice Graglia e Sr. Albertina Fasolis*, in Studi Marelliani 9, 2017, p.282). Obviously, for our Holy Founder, the supreme guide is the Holy Spirit, to Whom he submits with extreme docility. Just think of the phrase: "*We must not move tongue, heart, or hands without first consulting the Holy Spirit*" (ibid, p. 146). However, along with the Holy Spirit, almost as the model of fidelity to the Holy Spirit, he takes Joseph. This pervades all of his spiritual life, his thoughts and his sentiments, his activities and his way of living. St. Joseph becomes the inspirational motivation for everything: "*Let everyone take their inspirations from their Model St. Joseph, who was the first upon the earth to care for the interests of Jesus...*" (Letter 83 in op.cit.p.275). In what way did St. Joseph become the secure guide of our Founder? He became the guide precisely in everything, by means of that absolute principle which he had adopted. However, analytically, we can see three particular areas: 1) guide in relationship with Jesus; 2) guide in the spiritual (religious) life; and 3) guide in apostolic activity.

## 1. Guide in relationship with Jesus.

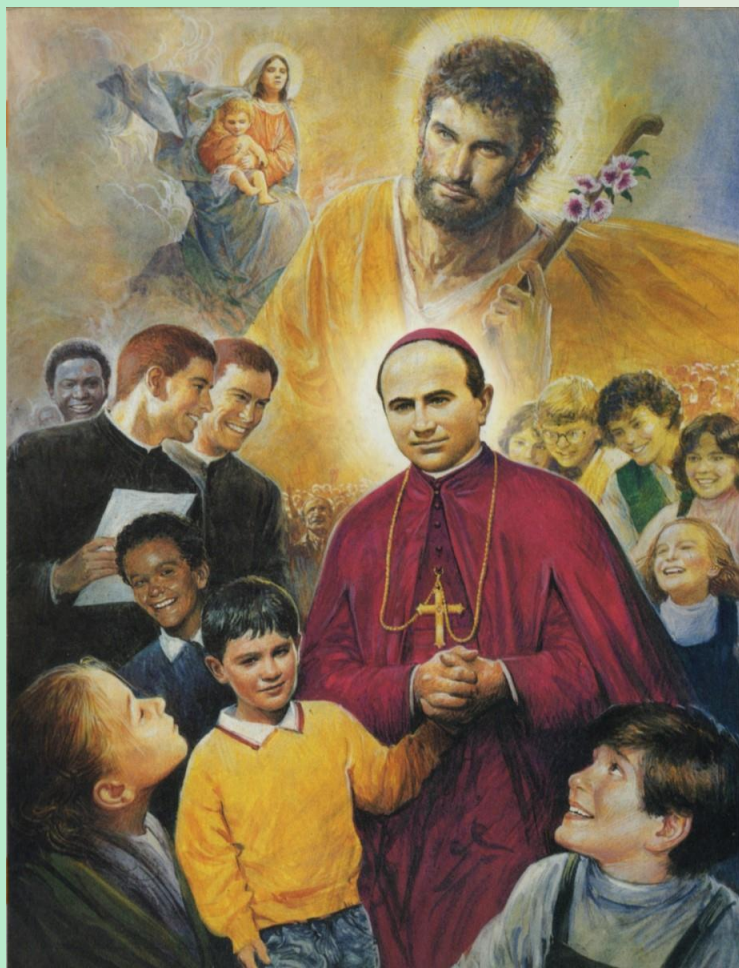
St. Joseph Marelllo, not even a year from his priestly Ordination, writes in a stupendously revealing letter: "*O glorious Patriarch St. Joseph, do not forget us. You after the Blessed Virgin, were the first to hold in your arms Jesus the Redeemer, be our exemplar in our ministry, which like your own,*

is a ministry of intimate relationship to the Divine Word. Teach us, assist us, and make us worthy members of the Holy Family.”(Letter 37, op.cit.p.157). Having been ordained a priest on September 19, 1868, he wrote these words to his friend Fr. Giuseppe Riccio in the middle of March, 1869, that is, six months later. From these words comes the core of his devotion to St. Joseph. Here, brothers, let us stay a moment to meditate on the greatness of the heart of St. Joseph under this aspect of his intimate relationship with Jesus: relationship which is communion of life, a sharing of intentions, and exchange of sublime affection, a service of love. St. Joseph Marello intuitively understands all these things in the first months of his priesthood, understanding well that this priest must also live a *ministerial relationship of intimacy with the Divine Word.*” It is a priestly life understood in the light of the mission of Joseph: *ministry of intimate relationship with Jesus.* Today, at the distance of more than a hundred years, this teaching, this invitation to live our priesthood like this is addressed to every Oblate of St. Joseph, priest or brother.

## 2. Guide in the religious life.

The Holy Founder chose, ten years later (ordained a priest in 1868 - Founder in 1878 at 34 years of age), for himself and his children, a model of religious life: *“the service of God in imitation of St. Joseph.”* He expressed himself thus: *“Let us commend ourselves to glorious St. Joseph, guide and master of the spiritual life, unsurpassable model of the interior life.”* If we are willing, we can find, in these expressions of his, a very clear reference to the virtues proper to the religious vows. **As regards chastity**, in letter 254 written to Fr. Cortona, he invites the Brothers *“to learn the language of the Saints so as to not lose their purity of life and not neglect their blossoms of piety and good manners”*. Chastity is seen as transparency of thinking, of words and purity of life. **As regards poverty**, he refers again and again to the poverty of St. Joseph, even in the little things, those which we would say were of little importance. Even as to the positioning of the statue of St. Joseph and the arrangement of the chapel. The writings of St. Joseph Marello are filled with such

remarks. **As regards obedience**, that phrase is striking where he speaks about the greatness of it, together with fear and sadness when it is not observed. It is the fear of a father who foresees the ruin of some of his children: *“Ah, obedience (not that which is only occasionally to open an eye to one’s advantage, but rather that said to be blind), how many graces are attracted by it from heaven...let us mourn that not a few brothers have let dry up the sprouting of this virtue which St. Joseph wanted firmly rooted in their hearts. Let us deplore their fate and make it an object of our meditation.”* (Letter 263, op.cit.,p. 646). He recommended the imitation of St. Joseph in **“common and ordinary virtues”**, writing: *“He was entirely dedicated to work and his exterior occupations for the support of the Holy Family, and therefore was able to pray but little...He practiced humble and hidden virtues, always calm, serene and tranquil, even in the midst of exterior cares. He was perfectly conformed to the divine will... Let us*





also learn from this beautiful model to be totally abandoned to the divine will, certain that God permits all these things for the greater good of our soul.” (Insegnamenti, Consigli spirituali e Omelie, op.cit.,p. 62)

### 3. Guide in apostolic activity.

St. Joseph Marello sees the Guardian of the Redeemer as profoundly and realistically inserted into the mystery and story of Salvation: *“He was the first upon the earth to care for the interests of Jesus, who cared for Him as an infant and protected Him as a child, and was as a father to Him in the first thirty years of His life here on the earth.”* (Letters, op.cit., p.275). The Church, in opposition to its enemies (anti-clericals, liberals, masons....) initiates a re-awakening around the figure of St. Joseph, who Pius IX solemnly declared to be Patron of the Universal Church. Every Particular Church has its own patron Saint, according to its traditions. However, the Church as a universal whole has one single Patron, St. Joseph. St. Joseph Marello, while still young, only four years after his First Mass, in 1872, proposes to found a *Company of St Joseph for Laity*, *“promoting the interests of Jesus”* (cf. the draft of Letter 83 to Canon Giovanni Cerruti), with the purpose of launching in the Diocese, an apostolate of Christian life and witness. The Lord will call him to found a Congregation in the name of St. Joseph, which bases itself entirely on that figure and the imitation of the Great Patriarch. This will happen with two clear dynamics: interior life and apostolic life. It is the moment of *“Certosini in casa e apostoli fuori casa”*. It is the imitation of the soul and the life of St. Joseph, the Saint who contemplates the mysteries of God and of the Incarnation, of the Redemption (*“You will give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins”*) and who works to save, defend and prepare Jesus his son for his mission.

Now, let us ask ourselves: are we accomplishing all this in the life of the Congregation? In our Province and in our personal lives? It is a pressing question, to which we must give a response.





# ST. JOSEPH & ST. JOSEPH MARELLO MODELS FOR THE OBLATE VOCATION



Fr. Edwin Tolentino, OSJ

**V**ocation is a mystery. It is a mystery, not because we cannot know or fully understand the meaning of vocation, but because there is always more to learn about God's calling. It is in this sense that I consider vocation a mystery, not to mention the fact that it is God who is calling. If we are to ask, the what and why or the how and when of our personal calling, we cannot even give a definite answer all at once. We can only say yes after a long process of discernment. It is also then that we start to discover the mystery of our vocation. Only when we have said yes to God's call can we get answers to our many questions. And when we get the answers, it is then that we understand more the mystery of our vocation. The unfolding of the mystery of our vocation begins with our response.



In the gospel passage from St. Matthew, chapter 1, verse 20 – 25, we read: *“He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophets: Look! The virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord*



*had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus."*

Reflecting deeply on the vocation story of St. Joseph, we can truly say his vocation is a mystery. A simple man called to be the "foster father" of the Son of God. He is a carpenter chosen to handle a complicated masterpiece. And the manner of how St. Joseph responded to this call is another mystery. No ordinary human being can fully comprehend the mystery of God's calling. No ordinary human being can fully understand the manner on how to conduct himself and respond to the call. Indeed, this calling put St. Joseph in a most difficult situation. He had his plans already when the angel of the Lord spoke to him. God's plan was revealed, and it was totally different from what St. Joseph was planning to do. But his response and his character made the situation appear easier. He just did what the angel had told him. He just did as simple as that: he obeyed. This is how he responded to the call. But simple as it may appear, self-denial or total self-giving is very difficult. St. Joseph just made it seem very easy. But it was really easy for St. Joseph. Remember, he was in the state of deep prayer, in which he had a vision, and the will of God was revealed. Obedience is only difficult when you do not know what the will of God is. St. Joseph knew and understood his vocation through prayer and so, he responded perfectly. He submitted himself totally to the will of God.

In the case of our founder, St. Joseph Marello, we know his story: *that he fell ill and his condition worsened to the point that his relatives feared for his life. They prayed to Our Lady of Consolation for him to obtain the grace of his cure. And Joseph Marello heard something like a voice within him that said: "If you go back to the seminary you will be cured." He told this to his father who agreed*





*wholeheartedly: "As long as you are cured!"* We see in this story, another time where the voice of God revealed his divine will which is again totally different from the will of man. We know that Vincenzo Marelo had a different plan for his son. This is another time where the voice of God told St. Joseph Marelo what to do and how to do it.

This is another story of a vocation wrapped in mystery. God reveals Himself in mysterious ways. Indeed, when God calls, it is always a mystery. Joseph Marelo was also in a difficult situation. He is torn between his first vocation and his father's plan for him. He also did what the "voice" had told him. He went back to the seminary in Asti. It looks very simple. He just obeyed. Indeed it is, because Joseph Marelo knew very well what the will of God for him was. Obedience is only difficult when you do not know what the will of God is. This is total self-denial, to let go of our total self and obey the will of God totally.

In these vocations stories of St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo, we can see some common elements. First, St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo are both *religious*. They both consecrated themselves totally to God. For both of them, everything is for God. This must be the most important thing in the Life of the members of the Oblates of Saint Joseph, our Consecration. We are committed to God and to God alone. As St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo did nothing for themselves after they had committed themselves to God, so we must do everything for God. When we are called and the plan of God is revealed to us, it might be totally different from what we are planning to do in our life. But the moment we respond to his call, we set aside our personal plans and do everything God wants us to do. The priority of St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo is to do the will of God. It must also be our priority now. And everything they do leads and points to God.

This leads us to the second element, *prayer*. We can only know the will of God in the silence of our hearts. It was in their deepest moments that God talked to St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo. It was also in their deepest moments that St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo talked to God. It was through prayer that they knew the will of God. We cannot separate our consecration from prayer. Prayer must be our most important apostolate, in the same way that our apostolate must be our prayer. And when St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo learned what the will of God for them was, they both *obeyed*.

This is the third common element we can see in the vocation stories of St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo: *obedience*. St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo obeyed God because they knew his will. It was no longer difficult on their part to obey God's will. This was shown by both St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo, that obedience is difficult only when you do not know what the will of God is. As members of the Oblates of St. Joseph, our obedience to God is expressed by our obedience to our superior.

St. Joseph is our Patron. St. Joseph Marelo is our Founder. We are Oblates of Saint Joseph. As members, we are sons of St. Joseph and of St. Joseph Marelo. Reflecting on the mysteries of the vocation stories of our Fathers, and seeing how they consecrated themselves to God, how they prayed to discern God's will and how they surrender themselves totally to his divine will, there is no reason why St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelo cannot be the models of OSJ vocations.



# “ ET VOCAVIT AD SE EOS... UT ESSENT CUM ILLO ET UT MITTERET EOS PRAEDICARE ”

Fr. Michele Piscopo, OSJ



*Reflection in preparation for the XVII General Chapter*

**I**n this sentence from the Gospel we can see four important elements:

- 1) He summoned those he wanted (Vocation, Call)
- 2) That they might be with him (Intimacy with Jesus)
- 3) That they might live together in communion in the Apostolic College (Community Life)
- 4) And to send them forth to preach (Evangelization and Human Promotion)

We Oblates of St. Joseph must live all of this in our Josephite-Marellian Charism and Spirituality. As children of Marelllo, we want to follow Jesus, living in continual intimacy with Him, in a fraternal life in community, in order to go to the existential and geographical outskirts to live the Gospel and witness to Him who has chosen us. We want to deepen and give new life to our human, religious identity, to our identity as Oblates of St. Joseph. This is a personal and communal "refounding" of our existence, to relive a deep sense of belonging to Him and to our Religious Family.

I propose to myself and to you some reflections.

## 1) Vocation, Choice, Call.

- I am "God's dream": "let us make the man in our own image and likeness" (Gen 1:26)
- Like Isaiah: chosen from his mother's womb to be light to the nations (Is 49: 1-6)
- Like Jeremiah: chosen before my birth. (1:4-11)



- He loves me and wants me to love Him as well; He treasures me, respects me, trusts me and ask something great of me: to be His friend and His Prophet. I am important to Him.
- *"..he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love..."* (Eph. 1:4)
- *"Jesus, looking at him, loved him"* (Mk. 10:21): this is a spousal and jealous love, which is not shared with others and with other things. To be with Him and to share his life, his choices and his loves.
- *"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you ..."* (Jn. 15:16).
- The Consecrated Life: *"Is a priceless gift of God who chooses, calls and sends"* (General Directory 52)
- He has chosen me from among His people for the good of His people. (Hebrews 5:1-4)
- He has consecrated me, that is he has *"set me apart"* for his exclusive *"use"*.
- Our imperfection must not discourage us, they must not be used as an excuse to deny His Call. We need to destroy that which denies God or is contrary to the Gospel within us in order to be worthy of His Call.
- *"I am with you"* (Jer. 1:8): the *"call"* is guided, protected by God.
- Do not be afraid for *" behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age "* (Mt. 28:20). This is our assurance.
- In the important moments of the history of humanity, Christ calls the right people who are able to give an answer to the signs of the times. You are someone who is *"needed"* for the present times.
  - Consider:
    - ✓ God loves you and respects you. In which moments in your life have you experienced this?
    - ✓ When, where and how have you felt His gaze fixed upon you, have you felt His Call?
    - ✓ What has been the role of the Congregation in helping you to *"understand and discern"* His Call?

## 2) To be with Him

- *" Christ lives in me"*(Gal. 2:20)
- *"For to me life is Christ"* (Phil. 1:21)
- *"I no longer call you slaves" (but) "friends"* (Jn. 15:16)
- *"So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."* (Mt. 5:48)
- *"Do not conform yourselves to this age"* (Rom. 12:2)
- *"Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 2:5)
- We are called to Holiness: see Mt 5:48 / Lk. 19:2 / Lk. 11:44-45 / I Pt. 1:15-16 / Jm. 1:4.
- The Congregation has as *"Its purpose... to promote the glory of God by the sanctification of its members"* (Const. 2).
- *"The Oblates of St. Joseph are called to reproduce in their lives...the Christian mystery ..."* (Const. 3). Chosen to reproduce, by means of the Evangelical Counsels, the characteristic traits of Jesus: virgin, poor and obedient.
- We are Oblates, the exclusive and permanent property of God. Everyday we must offer to God a heart which is not *"second hand"*, used or dirty...He is the only love, the only treasure, the only thing to which I aspire. I belong only to him.

- I am for the exclusive use of God, I have placed my live totally at His service. I am his property, his right. He is to be the only thing necessary for me. I belong to him completely, I must give myself to Him continuously, at every moment.
- Called to serve the Gospel to its extreme consequences. It is to bind oneself more intimately and exclusively to Christ.
- Our life has an eschatological dimension: to realize here on earth that which will be later in heaven.
- We are consecrated: ours is a *special "love"* also with a *"special mission"* in mind.
- To be with Him: I let go of my family relationships: *"whoever loves father and mother..."* (Mt 10:37); I let go of material goods: *"go, sell what you have and give to the poor...Then come, follow me."* (Mt 19:21).
- The Consecrated Life is a gift which God gave to me and it is the way of life which Jesus led and proposed to his disciples.
- Joy is the characteristic virtue of Jesus' followers, even in the midst of trials: *"My joy is complete"*: (Jn. 3:29).
- Love for Jesus Christ, then, is both the starting point and the goal of our religious life.
- Even in a world which is upset, distracted and caught up in so many things, He is my all. I am called to sense and to show that God is able to fill my heart and to make me happy, without seeking my happiness somewhere else.
- Pope Francis: *"Consecrated persons must not have sad faces; they must not be unhappy and unsatisfied people, since "a sad following is to follow sadness"*.
- I need to find the right and fruitful balance between activity and contemplation, between prayer and charity toward others, between the concrete commitment in the history of each day and eschatological aspirations.
  - Consider:
    - ✓ Do I live the Gospel radically and sincerely?
    - ✓ Is Jesus still today my first and only love, as I promised when I made my first profession of Vows?
    - ✓ Is Christ still my ideal and do I have a passionate love for him?
    - ✓ Do I live joyfully (as Pope Francis says) my Consecrated Life and show forth the beauty of living the Gospel?





### 3) Our Spirituality

- *“Open to the voice of the Spirit, Saint Joseph Marello founded the Congregation. ...”* (Const. 2), giving to the Church a new Religious family in its spirituality and charism and placing it at the service of the Gospel.
- The first motivation for our foundation was not pastoral (the lack of clergy in the Diocese of Asti), but theological and Christological.
- *“How many true disciples of Jesus Christ do we still have today in this country of ours which for many centuries was the classical land of monasticism. Hardly anyone gives any thought to the practice of the evangelical counsels.... I the novitiates of monasteries remain deserted ... , the evangelical counsels must be practiced by a certain number of Christian at all times, otherwise Jesus Christ has spoken in vain ... Therefore, let us strive to open up... the more perfect state of life”* (Letter 107, formerly 94)
- *“Whoever...desires to follow closely the Divine Master by the observance of the Evangelical Counsels, is welcome to the House of St. Joseph. Withdrawing therein with the resolve to remain hidden and silently active in imitation of that great Model of a poor and obscure life, he will have an opportunity to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ”* (Letter 108, formerly 95)
- Biblical foundations for our spirituality:
  - ✓ *“Life hidden with Christ in God”* (Col 3:1-3).  
St. Paul, with this expression, places us in the heart of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, which is the mystery of his death and resurrection, the fundamental mystery of the entire Christian life. We need to be able to read the Easter thought of the life hidden with Christ in God in the Spirituality of St. Joseph. We must not see the hidden life as only a disposition to being hidden exteriorly, as something obscure and negative, but as a Biblical spirituality of very high value for our religious life, if we know how to read it in light of the life of St. Joseph.
  - ✓ Have in our hearts the interests of Jesus (cf. Phil. 2:19-22)... as St. Joseph did.
  - ✓ *“In this way he will imitate St. Joseph, the first exemplar of the religious life, who had continually under his gaze the Divine Exemplar, sent in His mercy by the Eternal Father to the world to teach the way to Heaven.”* (Rules of 1892)

### 4) St. Joseph

- St. Joseph Marello wanted his followers to live the experience of God, the love of God, consecrating themselves to Him, abandoning themselves into his hands, in a life of total consecration, in imitation of St. Joseph.
- We Oblates of St. Joseph are to contemplate the face of Jesus through the eyes of St. Joseph, who in this way becomes our charismatic model for carrying out the *“Sequela Christi”*. In St. Joseph we see:
  - ✓ his availability to carry out the will of God and in this way become a model for *“doing that which Divine Providence points out from time to time”*
  - ✓ his hardworking silence in the house of Nazareth and we learn from him to be hardworking and not waste time pursuing useless and hurtful things
  - ✓ in his intimacy with Jesus and Mary an example for our life of prayer and of union with the Lord
  - ✓ his abandonment to the will of God which moved him to always do that which the Angel of the Lord directed him to do

- ✓ a life of sorrows and joys, in the full and continuous fulfillment of the will of God
- ✓ a guide for us to be able to *“choose to serve the Church in humble tasks and places...happy to dedicate themselves to the most ordinary and simple work with extraordinary love”* (Const. 58).
- Here is how St. Joseph Mareello presents our spirituality as well as our style of apostolic work. We need to enter into the *“House of St. Joseph. Withdrawing therein with the resolve to remain hidden and silently active in imitation of that great Model of a poor and obscure life, he will have an opportunity to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ”*.
- Our Founder proposed to his sons a special spirituality, described by Fr. Cortona in his writings.
  - He had his sons meditate continually upon the hidden life of St. Joseph; he presented him as close to Mary and Jesus, the three of them together.
  - He liked to repeat the expression of St. Paul: *“our life is hidden with Christ in God, in imitation of St. Joseph”*
  - In the Church there are Congregations which have for their goal a particular meditation on the sorrows of Mary (Servants of Mary), others to meditate on the Passion of the Lord (the Passionists); so also the Oblates of St. Joseph are to study how to imitate more closely the hidden life of St. Joseph.
  - He also said: how fortunate are those who understand the value of the hidden life, these will certainly give great glory to God, because a soul which desires the hidden life, ignored by the world, all intent on serving God and seeking only Him, most certainly gives him the maximum joy.
- We Oblates must be ready *“with our belts fastened, walking stick in hand and sandals on our feet”*, in a continual state of exodus and of permanent commitment, without ever diminishing, in our consciences, the meaning of our consecration.
- We also live amongst the problems of this world, which is caught up in superficiality and secular customs, where it is not easy to live an interior life according to the guiding principles of our spirituality.
- We need to rediscover the value of our *“Carthusian”* spirit.
- We need to acquire a true ecclesial spirit and a good Oblate identity, which is able to withstand every temptation to secularism.
- We live with the danger of wasting time on the internet or in something similar, not knowing how to use our free time and so to empty ourselves spiritually, losing that characteristic which should be proper to our spirituality...: to live *“hidden and silently active in imitation of St. Joseph”*, as we are taught by our Founder (Letter 108, formerly 95).
- *“So we shall say to our great Patriarch: We belong entirely to you, and may you be all ours. Show us the way; support us at every step; guide us where Providence wants us to go. ... with you we are sure of always going along the right path”* (Letter 237, formerly 208).

## 5) **Our Apostolic Charism.**

- *“The Founder, Saint Joseph Mareello, wished his sons to be “apostles outdoors”<sup>12</sup> and to bring Christ to the world with that generous spirit with which St. Joseph, called to service by the Eternal Father, nurtured Jesus and prepared Him for His ministry of salvation”* (Const. 57).



- *“What characterizes the apostolate of the Oblates of St. Joseph is the spirit with which they perform their ministry. In imitation of St. Joseph, the saint of the humble and hidden life and of total trust in Divine Providence, the Oblates choose to serve the Church in humble tasks and places. They are happy to dedicate themselves to the most ordinary and simple work with extraordinary love” (Const. 58).*
- *“The apostolate of religious consists first of all in the witness of their consecrated life, which they are bound to nurture by prayer and penance (c. 673). It is also a call to the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is essential, therefore, that in their pastoral ministry the Oblates have the ability to accept and coordinate the variety of gifts bestowed on the confreres and the diversity of all possible methods of action. We are all working for the same cause. A genuine apostolate creates unity. It is the responsibility of superiors to insure the continuity of ministry by a prudent selection of confreres” (Const. 59).*
- *“Among the forms of apostolic ministry of the Oblates of St. Joseph, the Christian education of youth holds a position of privilege. If concern for young people is everyone’s obligation, for the Oblates it is demanded by fidelity to the spirit of their Founder” (Cost. 60).*
- The spirit of work of St. Joseph is translated in the words *“service of the most urgent needs of the Church”*, in dedication to the *“poor youth, so much abandoned”* and to the forms of apostolate directed toward compensating, in all possible ways, for the deficiencies in diocesan ministry: supplying for the diocesan ministry .
- About these principles there is not much doubt...The doubts and problems come in carrying them out practically.
- One problem comes about when, in our past and present history, we confuse the forms of apostolate adapted to times and places as if they were our apostolic goal. That is the types of local and temporary apostolate become the apostolic goals of the Congregation.



- For example: caring for youth is a goal, but in the practical action it needs to be adapted to the way God disposes in the circumstance of time and place.
- The forms must change, but the double ministerial goal from our beginnings must remain: the care of youth, most of all through catechesis and supply ministry.
- Our Charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit received from St. Joseph Marelli, is not a static reality, but dynamic and existential, which must accompany the life of the Congregation and be incarnated in the historical situations of the moment.
- We Oblates must always *update* our apostolic Charism. We must ask ourselves always: here and now how can we best educate youth and carry out our apostolic ministry? We must pay attention to the signs of the times, discover the input which the Spirit gives us in so many



ways, know well the people and the area in which we are called to live, know the culture, history and idiosyncracies of the people.

- In our apostolate we cannot just conserve that which we have, but we must be open to mission. Today in fact is not a time for conservation. Faced with situations which seem to show a faith which is tired, repetitive, or turned in on itself, we need to grow in the awareness that we must not content ourselves with doing that which we have always done, without asking ourselves if the Spirit of the Lord is not calling us to take up new pathways. We have need of new ministerial pathways, in the sense of mission, which are able to give strong and convincing witness to the truth of the Gospel. We need to broaden our horizons and come up with new apostolic intuitions.
- Pope John Paul II, in the document "Vita Consecrata", says that there needs to be "*creative fidelity*" (= "*do that which Divine Providence shall point out from day to day*") Rules 1892, ch. 1)
- We need to continually discern that which is good and that which is no longer effective: to seek to perfect that which the Founder has left us, keeping alive the initial spirit of humble and silent hardwork, which becomes zeal and love for one's work and for ongoing improvement.
- Ongoing discernment is important so that none of the fundamental points of our spirituality and apostolic charism are allowed to die.
- Today there is need for innovation in fidelity to the Marellian principles: continually comparing the texts of our tradition with the needs of the modern world and with the documents of the Church.
- "*St. Joseph, guardian of Jesus and our protector, welcome us as your companions in the ministries which you merited to perform on earth*" (Letter 83, formerly 76)

## 6). Conclusion

- "*You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things*" (St. John Paul II, Vita Consecrata).
- Look at the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, embrace the future with hope.
- We ask ourselves:
  - ✓ Are we reading with the eyes of faith the signs of the times and are we responding creatively to the present needs of the Church?
  - ✓ Does our present apostolate correspond to that which the Spirit asked of our Founder?
  - ✓ Are we continuously enriching and adapting our Charism without losing its genuine character, in order to place it at the service of the Church?
  - ✓ Are we convinced that living the present with passion means: having a serious, personal and intimate relationship with Jesus; to live the spirit of communion in community; to give soul and body in the building up of the Kingdom?



# ST. JOSEPH MARELLO

## How did he pray to ST. JOSEPH?

Fr. Guido Miglietta, OSJ

**L**ooking through the Letters of St. Joseph Marello, along with his Teachings (Spiritual counsels and homilies collected by Bice Graglia and Sr. Albertina Fasolis) and we have found 12 prayers to St. Joseph: 5 from among his Letters, 5 from his counsels to Sr. Albertina Fasolis and 2 from his Communications of Pontifical Acts and his pastoral ministry in Acqui.

The first three prayers to St. Joseph, from among his **Letters** come from letters to his priest friends Stefano Delaude and Giuseppe Riccio. All of them were written during his first year as a priest. Fr. Marello was 24 years old, ordained only a few months, and the devotion to St. Joseph was growing within him.



The first prayer with which he turns to St. Joseph is a common prayer that echoes his desire for holiness together with inner turmoil with regards to acquiring holiness. He writes: *“Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Angels and Saints our holy protectors, we want to go with you - what is the most secure way?”* This is from Letter 26 to Stefano Delaude, his friend. This is the very first time that Joseph Marello mentions St. Joseph and calls upon him. It is January 11, 1869.

Is this, so to speak, a discovery of St. Joseph by the priest Marello? Most certainly, and it comes about gradually, which we can see based on numerous other elements, not just his prayers themselves, but also from the intentions for prayer which are entrusted to St. Joseph. At the same time he sets forth in



his writings, both the *Letters* and the *Teachings*, the style of life of St. Joseph which he will propose to himself, to his friends, to his Oblates, and in the testimonies of those to whom he gave spiritual direction.

The second time, from his *Letters* in which he turns to St. Joseph with a prayer is during the days preceding the Feast of March 19, 1869, in a letter to his friend Fr. Giuseppe Riccio (Letter 37): *“O glorious Patriarch Joseph, do not forget us who go about dragging this miserable flesh through our earthly exile. You who after the blessed Virgin, were the first to hold in your arms Jesus the Redeemer, be the exemplar of our ministry, which like your own, is a ministry of intimate relationship to the Divine Word. May you teach us, and assist us and make us worthy members of the Holy Family...”* It is a prayer that has become a definite part of our spiritual patrimony. It has illuminated generations of Oblates of St. Joseph. It is the prayer which is foundational for our Josephite Marellian spirituality, because it establishes the essence of what it means to have St. Joseph as our exemplar: St. Joseph, as the prayer says, is the example of our ministry, which like his own, is a ministry of having an intimate relationship to the Word of God made man, Jesus. It is due to this, in a perfect symmetry, that St. Joseph is for us a Teacher, that he assists us - that he is our protector. He introduces us worthily into the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the fullness of His House. All of this is the “intimate relationship”, an emotional intimacy and a spiritual intimacy - “You, who after the blessed Virgin, were the first to hold in your arms Jesus the Redeemer”.

The third prayer is but an invocation to St. Joseph, an ejaculation: *“Sancte Joseph, ora pro nobis”* found in Letter 41, once again to his friend Fr. Giuseppe Riccio, written a few days after the preceding one - March 28, 1869.

The fourth prayer is like a seal, a summing up written by him in a lengthy letter from October 25, 1872 to Canon Cerrutti (Letter 83) on the foundation of the Company of St. Joseph. It occurs following the intentions and explanations given to the Canon - particularly regarding the interests of Jesus, the building of the Kingdom, the means, virtues and principles - and at the end, a prayer, the theological dimension which sums up everything: *“Sancte Joseph Custos Jesu et Protector noster accipe nos comites tuos in ministeriis quae in terris persolvere meruisti”* - St Joseph, Guardian of Jesus and our Protector, welcome us as your companions in the ministries you merited to undertake on the earth.

The fifth prayer of St. Joseph Marelllo to St. Joseph from among the Letters, is specifically for us Oblates of St. Joseph. Written to Fr. Giovanni Battista Cortona, it is an invocation to St. Joseph in preparation for the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19. On March 8, 1891, St. Joseph Marelllo, then Bishop of Acqui, writes: *“Let us therefore say to our Great Patriarch: Behold us all for You and You be all for us. You point the way, you uphold us in every step, you lead us where Divine Providence desires that we arrive, whether the path be long or*





*short, smooth or rough, whether the goal be seen or unseen to human sight, or whether quick or slow, with You we are sure to always go well.*" This entrustment to St. Joseph, and this prayer should accompany us throughout the entire Year of St. Joseph which we are living. "The value of this prayer is that Monsignor Marelo places himself alongside us, his sons, so as to be able to say to St. Joseph that we are united around Him and from Him expect sure guidance. He is our *Great Patriarch!*" (Fr. S. Dalmaso)

Then we have another five prayers to St. Joseph brought to us by **Sr. Albertina Fasolis**, from the Milliavacca Institute, where Canon Joseph Marelo was spiritual director. The Sister mentions that the second, third and fourth prayers were prayers suggested to her by Marelo himself. Let's take a look at them.

The first prayer of Sr. Albertina Fasolis is on the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises preached by Canon Marelo to the nuns of the Milliavacca Institute, which began on October 8, 1881 and is found in the ninth sermon - on the Incarnation - of the eighteen preached by Marelo: *"And you, St. Joseph, so humble and present at all the actions of Jesus, speak to my heart, make me learn everything about this so holy life, which gives us so much to imitate."* (Cf. Teachings, p. 234). The thought here corresponds fully to the thought of St. Joseph Marelo, which you can also find from other sources.

The second, third and fourth prayers were proposed by Marelo to Sr. Albertina, and will be listed here. The first of these is contained in a *"Prayer to Mary for a good Confession"* and goes like this: *"My great St. Joseph, be to me a Protector in life and in death, in times of temptation and of discernment"* (without date, p. 209). The second, longer prayer, carries the title: *To the Patronage of St. Joseph:* *"O St. Joseph, be my Protector in life and especially in death, and may I join together your name with that of Jesus and Mary; grant me the desire to imitate you and with humility, and perfect resignation to the Divine Will, and thus will come that spirit of prayer, that charity, which equals in merit St. Vincent and St. Joseph. See that I imitate you and have a great gratitude for the favors done me. St. Joseph, I want you to be present in all the moments and actions of my life, all the circumstances.' Thus as St. Joseph has done, invoke him so that you may do: offices, words, actions...."* (without date, p.209). The third of this group carries the date of July 1, 1886 with the title: *"Prayer requested from him"*, requested from the spiritual director, one would suppose. It is a prayer directed to the Heart of Jesus, the Heart of Mary and to the Heart of St. Joseph, and in this last part it says: *"O Heart of St. Joseph, united to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, I venerate you and enter into these three Hearts so as to never leave, as also I enter your little house of Nazareth; and with these most pure Hearts I want to fly to Heaven and thank you for all the favors and benefits poured upon me and all those you caused the Holy Trinity to pour upon me."* (p. 211).

The last of the five prayers to St. Joseph noted down by Sr. Albertina is very basic and synthetic: *"St. Joseph, patron of the interior life, be a Teacher to me"* and fully corresponds to the thought of St. Joseph Marelo as we can see elsewhere. This spiritual counsel was given to the Sister on March 14, 1889 (Cf. Teachings, p.204). St. Joseph Marelo, already ordained a Bishop, had returned to Asti and was preparing to take leave of his Oblates so as to make his entrance into the Diocese of Acqui, which took place on June 16, 1889.

During his Episcopal Ministry, St. Joseph Marelo proposed two invocations to St. Joseph, when on January 25, 1893 he made use of a Circular Letter to Pastors promoting the Pious Association of Christian Families. He proposed a spirituality based upon St. Joseph in the world of lay people. The two prayers are these: *"...and you also, O glorious Patriarch St. Joseph, sustain us with your powerful mediation and offer, through the hands of Mary, our desires to Jesus;"* the other: *"Jesus, Mary, Joseph, enlighten us, help us, save us. Amen"*.

# *The Holy Spouses Rosary* **The Best Tool for the Popular Spread of a CHRISTOCENTRIC JOSEPHOLOGY**

Fr. Larry Toschi, OSJ



**T**he subtitle of this paper may seem pretentious, even contrary to the humble spirit of St. Joseph. The Holy Spouses Rosary was only formulated in 1991 and approved in 1993, was not presented to the St. Joseph Symposia until 2001,<sup>1</sup> and is still not widely known. How can it be “the best” manner for spreading sound devotion to St. Joseph?





Before answering that, we should ask what elements would be most important for the popular promotion of devotion to St. Joseph. Probably most of us would agree on the following list. Said devotion should:

- 1) Be Christocentric as emphasized by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>2</sup>
- 2) Depart from St. Joseph's most fundamental role, which is that of Husband of Mary.
- 3) Be based on a sound understanding of Sacred Scripture.
- 4) Include all principal aspects of St. Joseph's life and role in the mystery of salvation.
- 5) Lead to deeper contemplation.
- 6) Lead to more virtuous daily living.
- 7) Have great intercessory power.
- 8) Respond to the pastoral needs of our times, when a renewed appreciation of both marriage and virginity is so needed (as indicated by the general theme of this Symposium).
- 9) Be easily understood and easily practiced by the faithful.

Only after praying the Holy Spouses Rosary for more than twenty years in a rather hidden manner have I felt called to promote this devotion more zealously. I do so only out of the firm and well-founded conviction that our times demand a *new* devotion to apply better all nine of the principles listed above. This devotion and this conviction have both evolved from reflection on material presented over the years in these International Symposia and particularly from Fr. Stramare's<sup>3</sup> clear focus, situating Josephology in the proper context of the mystery of Christ, and from the teachings of John Paul II on the theology of the body,<sup>4</sup> on St. Joseph,<sup>5</sup> and on the rosary.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, all devotees of St. Joseph have their own prayer traditions and devotions. Without putting those aside, I dare ask listeners and readers also to try praying the devotion described here for a period of time, reflecting on the mysteries associated with it, and then to judge whether or not the nine criteria listed above are not satisfied in a heretofore unparalleled manner.



Here I will present the devotion in the space allowed, while recommending the more complete book entitled *The Holy Spouses Rosary*,<sup>7</sup> available in both English and Spanish. (An appendix in the book also has the basic prayer and mystery titles for praying this rosary in Latin, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Filipino, Malayalam, or Igbo.) The rest of this paper will then show how this devotion satisfies so well all nine of the requirements listed above.

### **What is the Holy Spouses Rosary?**

The Holy Spouses Rosary is based upon the venerable, time-tried, and officially approved devotion known as the Marian



Rosary. It complements and extends this devotion in a way that includes Saint Joseph, Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly (though not biological) father. It is prayed using the same beads, but the "Hail Mary" is substituted by a prayer patterned after it in a way that includes Joseph and is thus directed to the "Holy Spouses" together, rather than to Mary alone. While not a direct part of the Luminous, Sorrowful, or Glorious mysteries, St. Joseph is an integral part of proper reflection on the Joyful mysteries, which are here extended from five to ten in the Holy Spouses Mysteries of the Incarnation and the Hidden Life.

### **The Holy Spouses Prayer**

The Holy Spouses prayer, repeated ten times for each mystery, is patterned after the "Hail, Mary." It opens with the two titles with which the angel addresses Mary and Joseph at their respective annunciations: "Mary, full of grace, and Joseph, son of David" (Lk 1:28, Mt 1:20). Next, the Church's time-honored title for Mary, "Mother of God," is complemented by the Church's more recent choice of title for Joseph, "guardian of the Redeemer."<sup>8</sup> While Mary and Joseph are honored, the child Jesus is eternally praised: he is the center of their family, and his name remains at the very center of this prayer, as it should for every prayer. Mary and Joseph are invoked together as "Holy Spouses" and their prayers are sought not simply for ourselves as individuals, but also for our families and communities. The prayer is:

*Mary, full of grace, and Joseph, son of David; honor to you, Mother of God, and to you, guardian of the Redeemer. Eternal praise to the child with whom you formed a family, Jesus.*

*Holy Spouses, pray for us sinners, our families and communities, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

Bringing together the two annunciations to Mary and Joseph and their common role of parenting and raising Jesus, the words of this prayer provide a background for the events of the coming of the Messiah into the world and for his years of hidden preparation for his public ministry. Jesus is clearly the object of these annunciations and of this attentive upbringing. The prayer puts us into living communion with Jesus through the love of his mother and earthly father.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Mysteries of the Incarnation and Hidden Life**

Everything in Jesus' life was a sign of the mystery of redemption. His humanity appeared as a sacrament of his divinity and of the salvation he brings.<sup>10</sup> God's love is manifest in "Christ's whole earthly life – his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking."<sup>11</sup> The mystery of redemption that culminates in the cross was prepared for in advance by God's providence. It was at work in Jesus' entire life, including the mysteries of his infancy and hidden life.<sup>12</sup> The paschal mystery of his dying and rising was already present in the sorrows and joys that he experienced in the presence of Mary and Joseph. More than anyone else the Holy Spouses help us gaze upon the mysteries of the first 30 years of the life of the Redeemer.

It is likely that Mary and Joseph alone shared the secret of the virginal conception of Jesus,<sup>13</sup> a secret that is never mentioned throughout the public ministry. Even though Jesus clearly proclaims himself the Son of God, nowhere is it recorded that he revealed the manner of his

Incarnation. He was presumed to be the son of Joseph<sup>14</sup> through the normal manner of conception. It is likely that Mary would not feel free to reveal the mystery of conception by the Holy Spirit to anyone except Joseph, who accepted her word through faith and subsequently had his own annunciation confirming that word. Only after the resurrection, the ascension, and the coming of the same Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost, would Mary share this mystery with the apostles. This would be the source for the virginal conception being reported in the infancy narratives of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and nowhere else in the New Testament. Mary and Joseph therefore provide the only lens through which to view firsthand the mysteries of the Incarnation and hidden life of the Son of God.

The litany-like succession of the Holy Spouses prayer becomes “an unceasing praise of Christ,”<sup>15</sup> who is the providential reason for their betrothal, the object of their respective annunciations, and the center of their lives through their shared experience of his birth and growth. More completely than the traditional five joyful mysteries of the rosary, the following ten mysteries of the Holy Spouses Rosary prepare us for the relatively new luminous mysteries, and the traditional sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the Marian rosary, in which Joseph is no longer present. For the Holy Spouses Rosary, the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Hidden Life are as follows:

1. ***The Betrothal (Mt 1:18a, Lk 1:26-27, 2:4-5a).*** Before the Incarnation the immaculate virgin and the just man are wedded to each other in true married love. The mystery of the Savior’s coming into the world begins with a betrothed couple whose relationship is based upon a desire to give themselves entirely to God’s love. In ways they could not know, this betrothal “was part of the very plan of God.”<sup>16</sup>
2. ***The Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1:28-38).*** God chooses the virgin Mary, betrothed to Joseph of the house of David, for the miracle of his coming in human flesh. The Son of God becomes dependant on acceptance by a human mother, and thereupon takes the nature of a tiny being in her womb.
3. ***The Annunciation to Joseph (Mt 1:18b-23).*** God’s design is for Mary’s husband, the just man of the house of David, to continue with their plans to form a home together, and to name and act as father to the child conceived by the Holy Spirit.
4. ***Joseph Takes Mary his Wife into his Home (Mt 1:24-25).*** The Son of God depends upon a chosen human father, committed in a virginal marriage, to provide a loving, caring, and wholesome home for him.
5. ***The Birth of Jesus (Lk 2:6-16).*** The Son of God is born in the poverty of a stable in the town of David, received by the love of the humble Holy Spouses, and adored by poor shepherds.
6. ***The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus (Lk 2:21).*** The covenant of Abraham and the law are brought to fulfillment with the circumcision of the Son of God on the eighth day. The Holy Spouses give him the name they received from the angel, JESUS, indicating that the fullness of salvation has arrived.

**7. The Presentation of Jesus (Lk 2:22-35).** As the Holy Spouses fulfill all the prescriptions of the Law of the Lord in offering the pure child in the temple, they rejoice at Simeon's prophecy of light for the nations and they grieve at the thought of the sword of rejection.

**8. The Flight to and Return from Egypt (Mt 2:13-15).** The newborn King depends on Joseph to protect him from the bloody earthly king. Returning from Egypt, the Son of God establishes the New Covenant, leading us from the slavery of sin into the new promised land, his kingdom.

**9. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:41-50).** At the age of twelve Jesus stays behind in the temple, amazing the teachers by his understanding. His parents, Joseph and Mary, first are anguished at his being lost and then are confronted with the mystery of Jesus' reference to the temple as his "Father's house."

**10. The Hidden Life at Nazareth (Lk 2:51-52; 3:23).** The Incarnate Son of God for thirty years lives obedient to his parents in an ordinary, hidden life of prayer, family, and work, before beginning his public ministry. Mary and Joseph secretly ponder and guard the mystery of God sanctifying our everyday lives<sup>17</sup> and calling us to holiness in the ordinary.

With Pope John Paul II, we are "convinced that by reflecting upon the way that Mary's spouse shared in the divine mystery, the Church ... will be able to discover every anew her own identity within this redemptive plan, *which is founded on the mystery of the Incarnation.*"<sup>18</sup>

### When might this Rosary be prayed?

One suggestion is to use the Holy Spouses Rosary on the days suggested for the joyful mysteries,<sup>19</sup> perhaps mysteries 1-5 on Mondays and mysteries 6-10 on Saturdays. With this suggestion, the luminous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of the Marian Rosary would be prayed on the remaining days, as indicated. However, individuals, couples, families, and communities may also pray the Holy Spouses Rosary whenever most suited to them. This may range from one to ten mysteries daily or weekly. One might also give special attention to the

## Holy Spouses Rosary

*A devotion to Mary and Joseph, the most loving husband and wife who formed a family with the Savior*





23<sup>rd</sup> of each month, since in many proper liturgical calendars the Feast of the Holy Spouses is celebrated on January 23.<sup>20</sup>

## **The Mode of Recitation**

Pope John Paul II gave beautiful indications for helping make the rosary a fruitful exercise of contemplation.<sup>21</sup> The Holy Spouses Rosary is prayed according to these indications.

### ***The Opening***

Like the Marian rosary, this rosary may begin with the Sign of the Cross, followed by the Apostles' Creed prayed while touching the crucifix. A fundamental article of faith expressed in the Creed is that God's only Son "was conceived of the Holy Spirit, [and] born of the Virgin Mary." This central mystery, shared by the Holy Spouses, is key to all that is contemplated in the mysteries of the Holy Spouses Rosary. On the beads adjacent to the crucifix, a preparatory "Our Father" may follow and then three "Hail Marys" for faith, hope and charity and a "Glory be." These initial prayers center us on our Catholic faith in the Trinity, the Incarnation, the infused theological virtues, and Mary's motherhood over the Church. This readies us for the individual steps accompanying each mystery.

### ***Beginning Each Mystery***

After reading the title of the mystery we direct your attention and imagination to the physical reality that leads to contact with the mystery of God's presence in human form. Together with Mary and Joseph, we share the love and wonder present in that mystery.

Each of the ten mysteries is totally biblical. We read the Scriptural quotes provided from the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. We allow God to speak to us in our particular concrete situations each time we read it. We may seek to identify with the Holy Spouses' role in that mystery, to apply the mystery to ourselves, to choose a virtue for which to pray, or persons for whom to pray during that mystery. In any case it is important to have a silent pause of reflection before beginning the vocal prayers for the mystery.

### ***The Our Father***

"After listening to the Word and focusing on the mystery, it is natural for the mind to be lifted up toward the Father."<sup>22</sup> Christ and his Holy Family always lead us to the Father. Coming in our midst he makes us his brothers and sisters, able to call God "*Abba*, Father."<sup>23</sup> The "Our Father" joins us with the whole Church in praying the mystery, even when we pray it alone. It is a foundation for our meditation, which unfolds in the tenfold repetition of the Holy Spouses Prayer.

### ***Tenfold Repetition of the Holy Spouses Prayer***

This is the most substantial element and the one which most makes it a Holy Spouses rosary. As seen above, the prayer begins with biblical titles. Though addressed to Mary and Joseph, it is totally Christ-centered. It consists of two parts, the first being prayer of

praise and the second being prayer of intercessory petition. The center of gravity and the hinge joining these two parts is the name of Jesus. “[I]t is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to His mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary.”<sup>24</sup> The Holy Spouses lead us to profess our faith in the God-given name that Joseph bestowed on the child at his circumcision. It is the only name by which we may hope for salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Pope Paul VI encouraged adding to the name of Jesus a phrase referring to the mystery being contemplated.<sup>26</sup> Each mystery includes a biblical or doctrinal title added to each Holy Spouses prayer for that mystery. The Christological phrases corresponding to the ten mysteries are:

- 1) Jesus, the Promised One
- 2) Jesus Incarnate
- 3) Jesus, the Messiah
- 4) Jesus, Son of Man
- 5) Jesus, Emmanuel
- 6) Jesus, Savior
- 7) Jesus, Light of the nations
- 8) Jesus, our King
- 9) Jesus, Son of God
- 10) Jesus, obedient unto death.

Such additions help one to concentrate on each mystery being prayed.

### ***The Glory be***

Adoration of the Trinity “is the goal of all Christian contemplation. For Christ is the way that leads us to the Father in the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> This is the summit of contemplation, the purpose for which we were created, and the joy of the Holy Spouses in heaven. The *Glory be* at the end of each mystery could be given its proper prominence by being sung. A simple plain-chant melody is:

The image displays a plain-chant melody for 'The Glory be' in English and Spanish. It consists of three staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written using square neumes on a four-line staff. The English text is: 'Glo-ry be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Ho-ly Spir-it: as it was in the be-ginning, is now, and e-ver shall be, world without end. Amen.' The Spanish text is: 'Gloria al Padre, y al Hi-jo, y al Espí-ri-tu Santo: como e-ra en el princi-pio, a-ho-ra y siempre, por los si-glos de los si-glos. Amén.' The melody is a simple, repetitive sequence of notes, typical of plain-chant.

## *The Final Prayers*

After the mysteries of the Holy Spouses Rosary, one concludes with the “Hail, Holy Queen” to Mary who represents humanity’s highest participation in the salvation Christ won for us. She is honored by the whole heavenly court, beginning with Joseph, her holy spouse. This is followed by the accompanying prayer of Pope Leo XIII, “To you, O Blessed Joseph.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, there is the Holy Spouses Litany and concluding prayer:

Lord, have mercy  
 Christ, have mercy  
 Lord, have mercy  
 God our Father in heaven  
 God the Son, Redeemer of the world  
 God the Holy Spirit  
 Holy Trinity, one God  
 Holy Mary  
 Saint Joseph  
 Holy Spouses  
 Holy parents of Jesus  
 Holy protectors of the Body of Christ  
 Teachers of the Holy Child  
 Holy Virgins  
 Spouses most loving  
 Spouses most faithful  
 Spouses most pure  
 Spouses most just  
 Spouses most obedient  
 Spouses most humble  
 Spouses most generous  
 Models of family life  
 Models for couples  
 Models of parenthood  
 Parents to those without parents  
 Patrons of the unborn  
 Models for virgins  
 Lovers of poverty  
 Comfort of the troubled  
 Patrons of emigrants  
 Servants of the Lord  
 Ministers of Salvation  
 Mother and Patron of the Church

Lamb of God, who take ways the sins  
of the world

Lamb of God, who take ways the sins  
of the world

Lamb of God, who take ways the sins  
of the world

[illegible]

*spare us, O Lord*

*hear us, O Lord*

*have mercy on us.*



**Concluding Prayer:**

*Holy Father, who joined together by a virginal bond the glorious Mother of your Son and the just man, Saint Joseph, that they might be faithful cooperators in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, we beseech you, that by meditating upon the mysteries of the Incarnation and hidden life of your only begotten Son, we may live in more intimate union with Christ and may walk more joyfully in the way of love, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Why this devotion is a most excellent means for spreading devotion to St. Joseph today**

Having described the Holy Spouses Rosary here, I repeat the invitation to obtain the more complete book describing the biblical background and possible personal applications for each mystery, and also the handy leaflet for daily use. This is so that you may try praying the devotion individually, as well as in family or community, over a period of time. Then you yourself may judge whether or not this is “the best tool for the popular spread of a Christocentric Josephology.” I will go through the nine criteria for judging this, as I presented them at the beginning of this paper, and make my case for presenting this thesis.

**1) Christocentric:**

While St. Joseph is presented in his fullness throughout the ten mysteries of this devotion, he is never presented separately from his role as a minister of salvation. He is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ. His life is focused on the Redeemer and he leads us to focus our lives on Christ. As he shared intimately in the mysteries of the Incarnation and hidden life of Jesus, he leads us to appreciate God’s love poured out for us in Christ. Although the Holy Spouses prayer honors Mary and Joseph and seeks their intercession, it is clearly centered on the name Jesus, from which their roles derive. The ten titles added to Jesus’ Name for each of the ten mysteries also present ten separate aspects of Joseph’s relationship to the Son of God. What other devotion to St. Joseph could be more Christocentric than the praying of the Holy Spouses Prayer with Jesus’ Name and various titles at the center, while meditating upon the various mysteries of the Incarnation and Hidden Life of the Redeemer?

**2) Based on Joseph’s most fundamental role of Husband of Mary:**

Sacred Scripture, St. Augustine and other fathers of the Church, and the magisterium<sup>29</sup> agree that St. Joseph’s first role is that of “husband of Mary,”<sup>30</sup> and that his fatherhood over Jesus and his other consequent roles derive from this. Despite heroic efforts by Jean de Charlier de Gerson in the early fifteenth century to establish a universal celebration of the Betrothal of Mary and Joseph, and despite the acceptance of the feast in many proper liturgical calendars,<sup>31</sup> the Holy Spouses still do not have a universal liturgical feast. Part of the reason for this, is that our popular devotions have given too much emphasis to Mary and Joseph as isolated individuals, and precious little to them as a married couple. This has also weakened the spread of devotion to St. Joseph and has left Marian devotion incomplete. The Holy Spouses Rosary does not separate what God has joined, but honors the Holy Spouses together and seeks their intercession together. Joseph is in no way diminished by this, but rather is recognized in his most fundamental God-given identity. We gaze at the mysteries of Christ Incarnate together with him and Mary. The Holy Spouses Litany recognizes roles, virtues, and patronages that Mary and Joseph share. What other devotion to St. Joseph even begins to compare with this one for recognizing that Joseph’s role as Spouse of Mary is fundamental to all others?

### 3) Soundly Scriptural:

The Rosary has been called “a compendium of the Gospel.”<sup>32</sup> As seen above, each of the ten mysteries is directly derived from Sacred Scripture and can be preceded by reading the citations indicated for the mystery. In the published book referenced above, each mystery is accompanied by a section explaining “The Biblical Background.” These also provide a simple and comprehensible overview of what Josephology has concluded from sound exegesis. All biblical passages relevant to St. Joseph may be treated in the context of the ten mysteries. This devotion of meditating on the mysteries with the Holy Spouses is biblical in its very essence. It provides a most excellent opportunity for sound scriptural teaching on St. Joseph.

### 4) Inclusive of all principal aspects of St. Joseph’s life and role in the Mystery of Salvation:

This is a corollary to the preceding point. The mystery of salvation is revealed in Sacred Scripture, which therefore remains the unique and primary source for Joseph’s life and role in that mystery. “Together with Mary, Joseph is the first guardian of this divine mystery.”<sup>33</sup> Since the ten mysteries embrace all the primary source data, this devotion naturally meets this fourth criterion. Subsequent roles assigned to St. Joseph by the spiritual tradition of the Church may also be derived from reflection on the mysteries. For example, the Fifth Mystery, The Birth of Jesus, may lead to contemplating the Holy Spouses’ role as the first adorers of the Bread of Life; while the Tenth Mystery, The Hidden Life of Nazareth, together with the repeated prayer for the Holy Spouses’ intercession “at the hour of our death” open us to consider of St. Joseph as the Patron of a Happy Death. The titles in the Litany of the Holy Spouses may also cover other aspects of St. Joseph’s virtue and patronage.

### 5) Conducive to Contemplation:

Pope John Paul II wrote: “The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary’s own experience, is an exquisitely contemplative prayer.”<sup>34</sup> By including Joseph in the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Hidden Life and by departing from the reality of the experience of the Holy Spouses together, this Rosary is similarly an exquisitely contemplative prayer. In the book the description of each mystery concludes with a final “Contemplate” paragraph to aid in praying that mystery. This is the paragraph also included for each mystery in the leaflet. Both the book and leaflet have an artistic image of the mystery to also assist in contemplation. Contemplation of the Mystery is what most distinguishes this devotion from most all other vocal prayers to St. Joseph.

### 6) Conducive to a Virtuous Life:

Sound devotion to the saints leads to imitation of their virtues. Of all the saints, there are no better models of virtue than the Blessed Virgin Mary and her spouse, the just man, St. Joseph.<sup>35</sup> Their example “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>36</sup> For each of the mysteries, *The Holy Spouses Rosary* book has a section of “Possible Personal Applications.” These provide abundant examples for people in all states and circumstances of life to consider, such as for engaged or married couples, for youth, for those called to consecrated virginity, for parents. Some of the virtues randomly mentioned for only the first five mysteries are: faith, chastity, sacrifice, obedience, respect, love, trust, generosity, poverty, humility, and patience. Since the Holy Spouses exemplify all the virtues, their lives call us to spiritual growth in every aspect. Contemplation with the Holy Family calls us to desire to imitate the beauty of their lives.

## 7) **Powerful Intercession:**

The Holy Spouses' devotion joins the unsurpassed intercessory power of the Blessed Virgin with that of the Patron of the Church, who shares in that power through his unequalled relationship with her.<sup>37</sup> No other individual intercessors can compare with these two. Prayer to them together as spouses has no parallel. On earth they were more closely related to the Son of God than anyone else. They related to Jesus as a married couple and as parents.<sup>38</sup> In Heaven their unique intimate union with him continues eternally. Besides asking them to pray for us as individuals, we also ask them as a couple to pray for "our families and communities."

## 8) **Responsive to the pastoral needs of our times, especially with regard to Life and Love:**

This devotion is meant for every individual, and especially for anyone who already is familiar with praying the joyful mysteries of the Marian rosary. It has additional value, however, for families and family prayer. It is uniquely suited to couples, married, engaged, or courting. Since the theme of this Symposium focuses on "life and love" and since the Holy Spouses are particular models of life and love, allow me to spend a little more time on this point.

Since every Christian community is called to be a genuine school of prayer,<sup>39</sup> it is clear that the most basic of Christian communities, the family, is called to be the first school of prayer. In times when this primary cell of society is under such attack and even threatened by arrogant attempts at unnatural redefinition, contemplation of the Holy Family calls us back to firm grounding in God's beautiful plan for humanity. What John Paul II wrote about the Marian Rosary is even more pertinent to the Holy Spouses Rosary. It is "a prayer of and for the family."<sup>40</sup> As Fr. Patrick Peyton insisted while promoting the rosary, "the family that prays together stays together." When parents and children together identify with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, they are better able to grow together in unity, virtue, and covenant love. The image of Jesus Incarnate, subject to human parents, transcends ephemeral video images which often dominate the attention of children and family members. Every family is called to become a holy family with Jesus at the center. The growth and development of the children is entrusted to the intercession of Mary and Joseph, the best of parents and the model for all parents. Broken homes and single-parent families are also assisted by these most excellent spiritual parents. When families passing through strains or crises join in this intercessory prayer, they will find light, strength, and grace to grow beyond their imagining.

The family in God's plan begins with a married couple, joined by God for life in covenant love. The most basic cause of family disintegration is the attack on marriage's inseparable twofold purpose of life and love.<sup>41</sup> Mary and Joseph call couples to center their relationship on Christ. All selfishness, rivalry, and lust must yield to faithful, lifelong commitment in love. In the light of the coming of the Son of God to Mary's womb, children are to be valued as God's great gift. Spouses are called to be generous in receiving children as the greatest fruit and as the crown of their married love.

This rosary may help courting couples remain chaste in their relationship and thereby free to discern God's will with respect to that relationship. They will see marriage as a response to a God-given vocation, rather than simply the satisfaction of one's own desire, which would soon lead to



disillusionment. By meditating together on the Holy Spouses Rosary, engaged couples may prepare themselves for a sacramental union built upon faithful commitment and openness to children. Married couples who struggle in their relationship may find healing through this mutual prayer. Whatever the situation, couples who pray the Holy Spouses Rosary have powerful help for growing in virtue.<sup>42</sup>

### **9) Easily Understood and Practiced by the Faithful:**

While all the previous eight elements are most important to us, this ninth element is the one that has the most impact for the more universal acceptance of devotion to St. Joseph. We have so many beautiful age-old devotions, such as the annual St. Joseph Novena, the Wednesday recitation of the Seven Sorrows and Joys, the various popular celebrations of the Feasts of St. Joseph, and so on. Many groups practice their favorite devotion according to their own particular spiritual heritage.

While certain liturgical feasts honoring St. Joseph are celebrated by the universal Church, there is not a single devotion to St. Joseph that can claim universal practice. Why is this? It is due partly to the individual particular spiritual traditions of each religious congregation or fraternity, partly to the failure of many St. Joseph devotions to focus on the mystery of Christ and on Joseph's relationship with Mary, and partly due to failure to use a form of prayer easily accessible to common people.

If we really want to spread devotion to St. Joseph, we must get beyond this. Of all popular devotions, the most universally practiced, easily learned, and most often continued is the Rosary, prayed individually and in groups, in Church, in the car, or in bed. It "is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium."<sup>43</sup> The five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary are where St. Joseph belongs. Nothing of the Marian Rosary is lost by the Prayer of the Holy Spouses Rosary. Rather, Marian devotion is completed by honoring her in her role as Spouse, and by fuller contemplation of the ten Mysteries of the Incarnation and Hidden Life.

Learning this devotion is quite easy and requires little effort at memorization. Ordinary rosary beads are used. Repetition of the single short Holy Spouses Prayer quickly takes hold after prayerfully reading the rosary only a few times. Continuation of the devotion does not tire or bore people, since the Mystery upon which one gazes with Mary and Joseph is inexhaustible.

### **Concluding Appeal:**

I end by repeating again the appeal to try praying the Holy Spouses Rosary regularly over a period of time long enough to let it grow on you. Pray it also in your family, group, or community. Use the single Holy Spouses Prayer frequently to begin meetings or ministries. Once you have tried this, then judge for yourselves if this is not "the best tool for the popular spread of a Christocentric Josephology." Please consider joining together in a united promotion of the Holy Spouses Rosary as the universal St. Joseph devotion of the Church. The Guardian of Life and Love and his Most Holy Spouse will help bring renewal to our wounded world.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> L. TOSCHI, O.S.J
- <sup>2</sup> ., "St. Joseph, Model of Love and Life," Eighth International Symposium on St. Joseph, El Salvador
- <sup>3</sup> 2001, in St. Joseph Studies, Papers in English from the Seventh and Eighth International St. Joseph Symposia, Malta 1997 and El Salvador 2001, Santa Cruz CA 2002, 151-153.
- <sup>4</sup> Lumen Gentium, §§50-51; Sacrosanctum Concilium, §§103-111.
- <sup>5</sup> T. STRAMARE, O.S.J., Saint Joseph 'Guardian of the Redeemer,' Text and Reflections, Santa Cruz CA 1997, 69-73, 147-155; Vangelo dei Misteri della Vita Nascosta di Gesù, Bornato in Franciacorta BS Italy 1998; "Die Theologie des Mysteriums 'Passwort' für die Lektüre von 'Redemptoris Custos,'" in Die bedeutung des hl. Josef in der Heilsgeschichte, Akten des IX. Internationalen Symposions über den heiligen Josef, IMAK Kevelaer Germany 2006, 244-255; San José, Dignidad – Privilegios – Devociones, México D.F. 2009, 11-13; and in multiple publications translated in various languages.
- <sup>6</sup> Wednesday conferences 1979-84; Familiaris Consortio, 11/22/1981.
- <sup>7</sup> Redemptoris Custos (hereafter RC), 8/15/1989.
- <sup>8</sup> Rosarium Virginis Mariae (hereafter RVM), 10/16/2002.
- <sup>9</sup> TOSCHI, The Holy Spouses Rosary (or also El Rosario de los Santos Esposos), with Imprimatur from the Diocese of Fresno, Santa Cruz CA 2013, 123 pages, available also from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).
- <sup>10</sup> RC.
- <sup>11</sup> RVM, 2, 18.
- <sup>12</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereafter CCC), 515.
- <sup>13</sup> CCC, 516.
- <sup>14</sup> CCC, 517, 522.
- <sup>15</sup> G. BUCCELLATI, "The Prophetic Dimension of Joseph," Communio 33 (Spring 2006), 43-99.
- <sup>16</sup> Lk 3:23; 4:22; Mt 13:55; Jn 1:45; 6:42.
- <sup>17</sup> RVM, 18.
- <sup>18</sup> RC, 18.
- <sup>19</sup> YOUCAT, Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2011, 86.
- <sup>20</sup> RC, 1.
- <sup>21</sup> RVM, 38.
- <sup>22</sup> E.g. Oblates of St. Joseph Proper Mass Texts, Textos Propios de la Misa, Santa Cruz CA 1997, 7-15.
- <sup>23</sup> RVM, Chapter III.
- <sup>24</sup> RVM, 32.
- <sup>25</sup> Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6.
- <sup>26</sup> RVM, 33.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Acts 4:12; Phlp 2:9-11.
- <sup>28</sup> Marialis Cultus, 2/2/1974, 46. Also Congregation for Divine Worship, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, 12/17/2001, 201.
- <sup>29</sup> RVM, 34.
- <sup>30</sup> "Oratio ad Sanctum Iosephum," immediately after text of Quamquam Pluries, 8/15/1889; RC, 28, 31.
- <sup>31</sup> RC, 2-7, 17-21.
- <sup>32</sup> Mt 1:16, 19.
- <sup>33</sup> TOSCHI, "Liturgical Feasts of St. Joseph," Seventh International Symposium on St. Joseph, Malta 1997, in St. Joseph Studies, 2002, 32-35.
- <sup>34</sup> RVM, 18.
- <sup>35</sup> RC, 5.
- <sup>36</sup> RVM, 12.
- <sup>37</sup> RC, 20.
- <sup>38</sup> RC, 30.
- <sup>39</sup> Pius IX, Quemadmodum Deus, 12/8/1870. RC, chapter VI.
- <sup>40</sup> Lk 2:27, 41, 43.
- <sup>41</sup> RVM, 5.
- <sup>42</sup> RVM, 41-42.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Toschi, "St. Joseph, Model of Love and Life," in St. Joseph Studies, 143-158.
- <sup>44</sup> See also Family of St. Joseph Prayer Manual (also La Familia de San José en Oración), Santa Cruz CA, for the eightfold commitment of couples in the "Holy Spouse Society," as well as the rite of enrollment in this spiritual society, and the rite of enthronement of the Holy Spouses Image in one's home.



# The Second Mystery of the Incarnation & Hidden Life

## *The Annunciation to Mary*

Fr. Larry Toschi, OSJ

*During this year of exploring devotion to the Holy Spouses and during this month of our patron, St. Joseph, and also of the Annunciation to Mary, reflectively pray the Holy Spouses Rosary as a community and as individuals.*

### Listen to the Word of God:

**T**he angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not fear, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and



bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no carnal knowledge of my betrothed?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (Lk 1:26-38).



## **Consider the Christocentric Mystery of the Incarnation:**

Our Infinite, Eternal, Almighty God became *INCARNATE* at this particular moment in human history. Although Pure Spirit, he took on our human flesh, sharing in our human nature. He whom the entire universe cannot contain came in the form of a microscopic zygote in Mary's womb. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

In order to accomplish this incredible central act of human history, however, God makes himself dependant on the consent of a human mother, needing the support of her betrothed to act as his human father.

## **Consider the Blessed Virgin Mary, Full of Grace:**

God's messenger greets Mary with the astounding words that she is "full of grace," or fully favored by God, words that she could not totally fathom, and words that we understand in light of the developed doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. As is usual with announcements of birth and vocation in the Bible, these first words of the angel indicate her most important quality with respect to the mission to be entrusted to her. Her freedom from stain of sin most fittingly equips her to be mother to the all-holy Son of God. This greeting is followed by the standard biblical admonition "Do not fear." Mary is to trust God in her mission of conceiving in her womb and bearing Jesus, the awaited davidic king.

Yet, Mary searches for more clarity about what she is to do. How is the conception to come about? She remains a "virgin," as Luke has already taken care to state. It is at this point that the angel communicates the most overwhelming news of all: the child is the very Son of God, and is to be conceived virginally by the Holy Spirit!

In faith, Mary bows humbly and obediently before the power of the Most High and accepts his Son into her womb. This is the moment that God becomes *INCARNATE*.

Mary teaches all of us the importance of remaining in the state of grace and of following our vocation wherever it leads. She teaches us to listen to the Lord in prayer and to accept whatever challenges are presented. May we too always say a humble "yes" to the Lord as his humble servants.

## **Consider Joseph of Nazareth, of the House of David, Betrothed to Mary:**

We have all reflected upon the first joyful mystery of the Marian Rosary many times. We have pondered Luke's passage of the Annunciation to Mary repeatedly as it occurs in the Liturgy during Advent and on Marian Feasts. The overwhelming miracle of the Incarnation by virginal conception is certainly central to the event. Nevertheless, the fact of Mary's betrothal to Joseph is not insignificant. Looking at the mystery through the lens of the Holy Spouses completes and deepens appreciation of the Christocentric mystery. While St. Joseph is not present at the event or aware of it at the time, he is certainly an integral part of it.

The passage begins with mentioning Nazareth and Joseph in the same initial sentence. Joseph's name, more than Mary's, is associated with Nazareth (see Mt 2:19-23, Lk 2:4, Jn 1:45-46). Nazareth is an insignificant town where Jesus will live most of his life, hidden with Mary and Joseph, in preparation for his mission. This is also an important part of the mystery of the humility of God, tied to the humble Holy Spouses.

In this same first sentence of the passage, Mary is introduced not simply as a virgin, but as a "virgin betrothed." It is significant that although conception is by the Holy Spirit, it is not to an unwed mother. The Son of God becomes Incarnate to a betrothed couple, with a legal father from the moment of conception. Due to his betrothal to Mary, Joseph is not only an adoptive or "foster" father, who becomes father after conception or birth, but is father from the first moment of conception. He was chosen by God for this role from the start.

A most important part of Mary's identity as first presented is also that Joseph, her betrothed, is "of the house of David." The angel Gabriel explains the identity of the Son of the Most High to be conceived in her by saying that he will be given "the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." This fulfillment of the prophecies depends on descent from a human father of the house of David. Mary would naturally presume that davidic lineage would be passed through Joseph, her betrothed, and that indeed is God's plan.



The words “I do not know man” are the common biblical expression for stating that she has not had relations with her betrothed. Mary has no opportunity for consultation with Joseph, before accepting God’s Son into her womb. She knows her betrothed as a man of faith, and trusts him enough to presume that he will accept her and the child and raise Jesus together with her. Mary’s extraordinary encounter with God’s unfathomable plan deepens her faith, which will in turn deepen Joseph’s faith. This challenge to their plans for their marriage also deepens her love and trust in her betrothed. Joseph and Mary will be the most fruitful couple ever, but through virginity, rather than through conjugal relations.

The liturgical Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord occurs only six days after the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On March 25, 1890 in the introduction to a letter to our Congregation, our wise and holy Founder clearly stated that the feast of the Annunciation to Holy Mary was “by participation also of St. Joseph” (Letter 212 [185]). In fact, St. Joseph “unknowingly received so many graces along with his Holy Spouse though unaware of the great Mystery.” He ends the letter by desiring that we Oblate servants give God a glory that is reflected especially in Mary and her Spouse Joseph (“*singulariter in Maria eiusque Sponso Iosepho*”).

What a beautiful truth expressed by St. Joseph Marello: even before Joseph was aware of the Mystery, God was already giving him the graces to fulfill his role in that Mystery. As Mary is full of grace and able to say fiat to being the Mother of God, so also Joseph is already being given sufficient grace to be husband to the Mother of God and earthly father to the Son of God. God’s plan for Joseph is simple and yet transcendent. At the time of the Annunciation to Mary, Joseph is already humble, trusting, righteous, prayerful, obedient, and chaste, the qualities that he will need for the role as yet unknown to him.

Our spirituality is to imitate these same virtues of St. Joseph, our patron and model. God still has a plan for us, now and in the future. While we already know the vocation to which he has called us, we do not know how he is planning even now for it to unfold in our future. His plan is certainly beyond our imagining and he is already giving us graces of which we are unaware. Each of us is important for serving the interests of Jesus in the manner that God points out to us day by day. Whether you realize it or not, whether you feel ordinary or even insignificant in the community, or whether you envision yourself called to great things, you are a very important instrument for God to be incarnate in our world. For whatever role obedience may call you in the future, be open to it and trust that he is already giving you the anticipated graces necessary.

**Share in community** (as indicated by Resolution 4 of General Chapter XVI).

Each member may share on any one of the following questions. Some possible “rules for sharing” are reproduced as an Appendix to these sheets.

- 1) What does Joseph’s unwitting role in the Annunciation to Mary say to me about my own vocation?
- 2) How has God made my life of chastity fruitful for his kingdom?
- 3) In the past what graces have I received before I was aware of how I would need them?
- 4) How open am I to whatever role God may call me for the sake of his saving work?



## Contemplate:

Reflect upon Mary's humble heart filled with wonder at the appearance of the angel Gabriel choosing her for the greatest of all human missions. Admire the unreserved availability expressed in her fiat, "let it be done to me." Admire Joseph's unknowing readiness to believe and humbly cooperate with Mary as an integral instrument of God's plan.

## Pray:

Pray this second mystery of the Holy Spouses Rosary, repeating on the beads of a decade the prayer below. As you add to the name of Jesus the title "*INCARNATE*," exult with Mary (and indirectly with Joseph her betrothed) in the greatness of God's love poured out for you through his Son come to take on our human flesh in her womb.

We pray for a more humble and complete collaboration with God's plan for us.

Dear Mary and Joseph, pray that we may more closely imitate you in the virtue of obedience, always listening to God's will and following it in faith.

## The Our Father.

### Meditative Tenfold Repetition of the Holy Spouses Prayer:

*Mary, full of grace, and Joseph, son of David; honor to you, Mother of God, and to you, guardian of the Redeemer. Eternal praise to the child with whom you formed a family, JESUS, INCARNATE.*  
Holy Spouses, pray for us sinners, our families and communities, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## The Glory Be:

*St. Joseph Marello, pray for us.*

### APPENDIX – Rules for Sharing:

- 1) Accept meditative and respectful silence until someone decides to respond sincerely to one of the questions. Everyone listens without interrupting whatever God may tell us through our confrere's experience.
- 2) The one sharing tells the group when he has finished. Everyone can say "thank you," but no one should respond, comment, or judge what has been shared.
- 3) Everyone speaks once, no matter how briefly. No one speaks a second time until all have spoken once.
- 4) The rector or a designated group leader can guide the process, recall the rules if necessary, insure that everyone has a chance to speak and be heard without interruption, and close the sharing session. Not even the leader should comment or summarize what has been shared.

# Oblate Sisters of St. Joseph

## Taking care the interests of Jesus in imitation of **MARY & JOSEPH**

Sr. Marianna Cortellino, OSJ



**T**he Oblate Sisters of Saint Joseph were born as the result of Saint Joseph Marelllo's dream, he tried to found, next to the male branch, a female congregation with the same spirituality. His plan was blocked by his appointment as Bishop, which prevented him from fulfilling his intuition, but he placed everything in the hands of Divine Providence. And so in 1994, with the XIII General Chapter of the Oblates, the birth of the Oblate Sisters of Saint Joseph was made official as a female branch of the Congregation "so that the Josephite-Marellian spirituality could also be lived by consecrated women, enriching the Church with this gift of sanctification and apostolate, inspiration that comes from Saint Joseph, the Custodian of the Redeemer". Different experiences of community life among young women who wanted to live the Josephite-Marellian spirituality had begun and were consolidating in Brazil (1987), Philippines (1990), Peru (1994) and the XIII General Chapter of the Oblates wanted to give a juridical form to these experiences and a unitary formation to these young women. In 1997, the first sisters from these different nations were called to Rome, thus carrying out this project of unity and consolidation.

In our Constitutions, very similar to those of the Oblates, it is written: "The Oblate Sisters of Saint Joseph have as a finality the glory of God and their own sanctification. Inspired by the charism of St Joseph Marelllo, they intend to reproduce in their own life and in the apostolic service the mystery of Christ, as St Joseph lived beside Mary: in intimacy with God, in faith, in humbleness, in a simple and not perceived life, in labor, in 'dedication to serve the interests of Jesus'. They look after the



interests of Jesus by offering their service to the Church in the apostolic service which, 'day by day, Providence hands out', with special care to those most in need and choose preferably the most deprived situations and places.

In their apostolic service they collaborate preferably with the Oblates of Saint Joseph, particularly concerning: the moral and religious education of youth, especially through catechism; the different forms of apostolate suggested by the time and place, especially the pastoral service in parishes, in schools and in missions, with particular attention in the promotion of women and in service of the poor, of the elderly and of the ill; the transmission of the devotion to Saint Joseph, to be proposed as the Model and Patron of the Church and of the Christian Families." (art.3)

This article summarizes the spirituality and charism of the Congregation, taking up the main notes of the charism and spirituality of the male Oblates, revealing, so to speak, the feminine facade of a single medallion.

The Oblates of Saint Joseph seek to care for the interests of Jesus in imitation of Mary Most Holy and Saint Joseph . To understand this mission entrusted to the Oblates it is necessary to make an important premise. Mary and Joseph were, as individuals and as a couple, inclined towards Jesus. Their relationship with Jesus was unique and we could say, unrepeatable. Both had a specific role towards the Lord: they were the parents. Mary Most Holy as Mother and Saint Joseph as Father were called to love and serve Jesus in this role. The love of a father and a mother is great and at no cost. We as daughters have all had experience of this love, at least from one of the parents, if not both. The love of our parents, however great it may have been, is not free from limits and mistakes. The love of Mary and Joseph is still different from that of a common father and mother. Although Mary Most Holy is also, like us, a creature herself though Immaculate, therefore her love was most pure; Saint Joseph, for the special mission entrusted to him, had received the necessary graces to be able to respond to his vocation, so even his ability to love was different from any other earthly father. Starting from these premises we can begin to see how the Oblate sisters of Saint Joseph take care of the interests of Jesus, in imitation of Mary and Joseph.

If we remain united to Saint Joseph we could learn to live a profound relationship with Jesus and Mary and to give in community and in the apostolate what we have lived in a hidden life, with the Beloved Spouse. Joseph will accompany us and teach us to be faithful to our Vows, to trust Divine Providence and to look after the interests of Jesus, because with Joseph "we are sure of always going along the right path".

If we remain united with Mary we could experience what Elizabeth lived, be filled with the Holy Spirit to exclaim in a loud voice: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Mary will teach us to act as "mothers", to give ourselves without seeking to fulfill ourselves. She will accompany us in daily life and will repeat to us to do what Jesus tells us to do.



For Mary and Joseph it was not easy to be parents of the son of God, this involved a stripping of oneself, to focus on Jesus.

Oblate means offering, we are called to offer our life, our will, our dreams, ourselves to God, through the hands of Joseph and Mary. We are called to think no more of what we want, but of what is best according to the will of God, living for Him and in Him, in the Church.

As Mary and Joseph cared for their only Son, giving their life with love, teaching him to become a mature person, of sound principles and values, so are we called to care for the Church, giving spiritual life to others, without pretending to become their masters, in the space of gratuitousness, and indicating the right way, the way of Life. In imitation of Mary and Joseph, the Oblate sisters are called to generate the spiritual life in the Church, that is, to give the Saviour. Through the Vow of Chastity we serve others without asking for recompense, through the Vow of Obedience we choose to obey our superiors, no longer thinking of ourselves but of what God wants, through the Vow of Poverty we share material goods, not looking for other than the essential, not seeking for our interests. Mary and Joseph cared for Jesus with great love and we Oblates are also called to serve others with love.

First of all, Mary and Joseph have "custodied" Jesus. We too, especially as consecrated persons, are called to safeguard him. Mary and Joseph recognized in the Lord their greatest good, and as any good parent would be willing to do, they would give their lives to protect Jesus. We too have been given this Good, which we consider the most precious good, the good to be preserved at the cost of our own lives. And how do we be custodians to Jesus? Each of us is called in a personal way to safeguard Him, keeping alive his divine presence in his own heart and in his own life. Each of us is called to live a personal and continuous relationship with the Lord, removing everything that endangers His presence: guarding our eyes, our hearing, our senses and our heart, our feelings and affections. By maintaining a state of grace and avoiding everything that secularism and worldliness put in contrast with the purity of heart and body. This is the first way in which we Oblate sisters of Saint Joseph, called to be the House of Nazareth for Him, take care of Jesus' interests in a personal way.

In a community way, meaning the house of Nazareth not only in the temple of our heart, but also as a community, the custody of Jesus consists in ensuring an environment where these values can be preserved and grow, through attentive and fervent community prayer, distributed diligently in the daily schedule, a fraternal life lived in a serene and cordial atmosphere, in an apostolate that is directed towards all those whom we meet,



without distinction , children, adults, Italians, immigrants, poor, rich, Christians, Muslims, like Mary and Joseph, took care of Jesus in every place they traveled: in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth and even in Egypt, continuing to be a light for all, because they provided for the custody, nourishment and growth of Jesus. This means also helping others to guard the Lord, to provide for the spiritual and material needs of those we meet: to give a piece of bread to those who ask for it, clothes, or a word of consolation and hope. We can do this everywhere, even in the center of Rome, where there are those who come to knock at the convent to ask for a hot meal, those who stop in prayer in the Church of San Lorenzo in Fonte or guests at our Hostel Marelo.

Our apostolate is carried out mainly in the Oblate schools and parishes, through the religious and moral education of youth, but every moment of life is an opportunity to guard Jesus in us or in others . The apostolate takes its inspiration and strength from the life of prayer and union with God. The consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the life of Jesus .

The service we provide in schools and parishes seeks to be a sign of this personal and community custody and also wishes to take care of the custody of the pupil, because for us he represents Jesus. To care for the interests of Jesus means for us to take care of the true good of those around me, because it is in the interest of Jesus the good of the person, of the child or of the boy who attends catechism, or who participates in lessons at school, of the family, with whom we try to maintain a relationship, a continuous dialogue, of the sick to whom we bring the Eucharist, of the group of young people we guide . In our different realities, beyond the house of formation there is at least one community that works in the pastoral field alongside the Oblates: in Brazil, in Apucarana, the sisters collaborate in youth and vocational ministry in the parish led by the Oblates; in the Philippines some sisters teach in the schools of the Oblates of Saint Joseph, others teach catechesis in the parishes of the Oblates; in Peru in Manzanilla-Lima the sisters animate various youth groups and catechesis for children and adults in the Oblate parish, a sister teaches religion in a school run by the Oblates and a few years ago in Lima we opened a community that collaborates in a parish and a diocesan school. In Nigeria the sisters collaborate in the parish in the catechetical, youth, vocational and family pastoral service, in a hostel and in the clinic led by the Oblates of Saint Joseph. In Italy, in addition to taking care of Hostel Marelo and the Liturgy in the Church of San Lorenzo in Fonte, in Bari (Ceglie del Campo) they collaborate in an Oblate parish through catechesis, the guidance of the altar servers, the pastoral care for the sick and families.



Naturally, gratuitousness and purity of heart and intention play a decisive role in the care of Jesus' interests, because as so Mary and Joseph took care of Him.

Like Mary and Joseph we are called to nurture Jesus and we know that the Lord is hungry and thirsty for souls. As Oblate sisters of Saint Joseph we are called to share with the Lord the purpose for which he himself came among us. In all that we do, to all those we meet, not letting ourselves be



carried away by sympathy or antipathy, between affinity or not with each person's character, we must care for the interests of Jesus, care for the salvation of souls, which was the main interest of Jesus, in the style of Joseph and Mary, with their gentleness, attention, care, being also willing to suffer, "as long as the Lord is pleased".

Mary and Joseph worked hard for the growth of Jesus. As Oblates, following the example and style of Mary and Joseph, we want Jesus to grow, for His kingdom to extend. Through catechesis to children, adults, couples and families, therefore our collaboration in parishes and in other pastoral and apostolic activities of the Oblates, is very important for the development of our common spirituality. Of course, the first evangelization is the example of life, which must be coherent with the Gospel we proclaim.

Even before Jesus' arrival, Mary and Joseph were building their family, in simplicity and humility. We Oblate sisters are inspired by the Holy Family, even if ours is not perfect and our limits are felt and seen; yet ours is a strong family, because it is bound by the bonds that the Lord himself has established among us, the moment he chose us from different parts of the world. The reason why we live fraternal life in community is Jesus and we ask Him to help us build our family, seeking to live in an authentic way the spirit of the house of Nazareth. If we can help each other, to serve each other in charity, to forgive each other, to listen to each other and speak to each other, to carry out the simple daily actions, common to each family, with "extraordinary" love, to safeguard the family itself, to create union and harmony between us, we will build a community in imitation of the Holy Family of Nazareth and so we can extend it to those we meet: at Hostel Marelló, in the parish, at school, in the missions, despite the difficulties we may encounter. In this way we can build a bigger family and help the laity to build their family. In this way the dream of Mary and Joseph and the interests of Jesus would be fully realized.

The family spirit is a characteristic of our spirituality and if we take care of it with seriousness and commitment, giving it the right importance, always having our sight towards the Holy Family, it will be one of the strengths for the Church. Today the family is hindered and undermined on different fronts and we Oblate sisters have the task of "living it fully", in simplicity, in humility, in mercy, in hard work, in collaboration, in respect of roles, in sharing and in brotherly love. If we "live" the family as from the example of the Holy Family, we will be the leaven that ferments all the dough and the Church, the whole society, will benefit from it.







# OSJ YOUTH APOSTOLATE

## A Continuity of ST. JOSEPH'S PATERNAL EDUCATIVE PRESENCE

Fr. Alfie Polistico, OSJ

### I. Introduction

**T**his work is a reflection on OSJ Youth Apostolate in the light of St. Joseph as a fearful Jew. Mt 1:18-25 will serve as the main biblical reference of this reflection. In interpreting the said pericope, I will use the Theory of Religious Awe through which we shall discover the notable virtues of St. Joseph which aided his paternity of Jesus. After showing the virtues of the saint, I will contend that the same virtues are needed by the Oblates today in order to continue *Joseph's paternity of Jesus* to the youth for these virtues constitute genuine witnessing.

### II. St. Joseph's Fear: The Root of His Justice, Wisdom and Obedience



In Mt 1:19, we read that Joseph, “being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her [Mary] to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly” (NRSV). Matthew’s account of Joseph planning to divorce Mary has been interpreted in many ways. Among them, three theories emerged as the most popular: “Assumed Adultery,” “Incomprehension,” and “Religious Awe.”<sup>1</sup>

#### a. His fear is religious justice

Nil Guillemette, SJ, one of the prolific bible scholars today, favors and argues well for the Theory of Religious Awe. “In this theory it is assumed that Joseph knew of the virginal conception of Mary *before* the message of the angel was communicated to him. And, in typical Jewish awe or fear at the presence of God, his instinctive reaction was to draw

back...”<sup>2</sup> This drawing back clearly shows St. Joseph’s righteousness or justice. For Guillemette, this justice is religious justice.

This kind of justice prevented St. Joseph from thinking that he deserved to take Mary, the chosen vessel of God, as his wife and to “appropriate for himself the paternity of the Messiah.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Joseph planned to divorce Mary not because the latter was adulterous but because the former was fearful of God. This must be the very reason why the Angel of the Lord told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, “for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:20). According to Guillemette, the function of “for” in v. 20 is “not to bring any new information to Joseph but merely confirms what Joseph already knows.”<sup>4</sup>

## **b. His fear is the “beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7)**

Proverbs 1:7 declares the “key principle in the wisdom enterprise—the religious grounding of all intellectual pursuits: *The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*”<sup>5</sup> The term “beginning” can mean “the most important part, the essence.” Here, fear should not be understood as literally an existential fear but as a “deep awe and reverence for God one must have in order to live properly. One must be aware that there is a God and that he holds person responsible for their action.”<sup>6</sup>

The fear of St. Joseph mirrors well Prov. 1:7. If the fear of St. Joseph is essentially manifested in his religious justice, then such justice is the beginning of his wisdom. Because Joseph was just, he was able to see the action of God in his life and in turn configured his action according to the will of God. This configuration is a radical surrender of his life in silence. In Mt 1:19-20 we see words closely related to silence: “quietly” in v. 19 and “in a dream” in v. 20. These words appeared when Joseph was making a crucial decision. Thus, it can rightly be stated the Joseph became wise because he allowed God to speak to him in silence.

## **c. His fear is fulfilled in obedience**

“When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (Mt 1:24). Joseph obeyed the plan God has set for him. His obedience proved his fear of God in the sense that he lived his life according to His will. It is not unreasonable to surmise that Jesus also learned how to obey the will of God from Joseph. If Jesus was taught by Joseph how to obey, it is implied then that Jesus also learned the way of the just and the way of the wise from Joseph since these virtues are concretely expressed in the saint’s obedience to God.

Although Joseph did not see his Son crucified for the sake of the will of the Father, the saint must have already envisaged this. Joseph must have anticipated also the fear of Jesus: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want” (Mt 26:39, NRSV). But he was confident that Jesus would indeed obey the Father. By showing Jesus how to obey, Joseph was able to transmit the virtues of justice and wisdom to Him. Through the paternal educative presence of Joseph, Jesus succeeded in fulfilling the will of the Father.





### III. OSJ's Today: Fathers of Genuine Witnessing

#### a. Talking in the Air?

While the youth of today seriously need catechism, the way we catechize them seems to be disconnected from their real world. That is why it is not surprising anymore that majority of the youth easily get bored and lost when we TALK about God. "We are not speaking of thinking about and interpreting the Word of God or of organizing doctrines that are to be transmitted in order to help youth in their lives."<sup>7</sup> Rather, we need to be genuinely present among them if we really want to become fathers to them.

#### b. Fathers "like St. Joseph"

"It is precisely in the direct contact with them that we ought to discover their [the youth] hopes and frustrations, their desires and aspirations, their contradictions, etc."<sup>8</sup> Implied in this statement is the vitality of the presence of the OSJ's among the youth. This paternal presence has to be anchored on genuine witnessing because "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."<sup>9</sup> Hence, for us to succeed in youth apostolate, we must be genuine witnesses.

As Oblates, to become genuine witnesses we need to be faithful to our charism: to serve the interests of Jesus like St. Joseph. Here, I want to focus on the phrase "like St. Joseph." If this is to be taken seriously, then *we have to be fearful also like St. Joseph* in serving the interests of Jesus. By fearful, I mean we need to imitate the religious justice, wisdom, and obedience of our patron for us to become genuine witnesses.

#### c. Concluding Statement: St. Joseph's Philosophy of Education

From what has been stated above, it is clear that Joseph's philosophy of education is praxis-based. However, this does not mean that we no longer need theories in educating the youth. We need theories. The challenge for us is to be able to successfully translate these theories into action. By action, I mean genuine witnessing. We will succeed in educating the youth if our presence becomes a means for them to learn holy fear of God, wisdom and obedience. If they succeed in assimilating these virtues in their lives, our job is not done yet but we are assured of the fact that our paternal educative presence has borne fruit. That means that we have more people like St. Joseph ready to serve the interests of Jesus.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a more comprehensive understanding of these theories see Nil Guillemette, *Your Heart's Treasure: Exploring Difficult Bible Texts* (Pasay City: Paulines, 2010), 73-98.

<sup>2</sup>Nil Guillemette, *Your Heart's Treasure: Exploring Difficult Bible Texts* (Pasay City: Paulines, 2010), 87.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>10</sup>December 1975, no. 41.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>5</sup>Anthony R. Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000), 55.

<sup>6</sup>Barry L. Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wadsworth: Thomson, 2004), 442.

<sup>7</sup>The Second Oblate Youth Ministry Congress Concluding Document, *Step by Step: Oblate Youth Following The Way in the Third Millennium* (Asti, August 8-13, 2005), 7. [Emphasis mine].

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Evangelization in the Modern World], 8



# THE CONGREGATION & THE LAITY in the Thoughts of ST. JOSEPH MARELLO

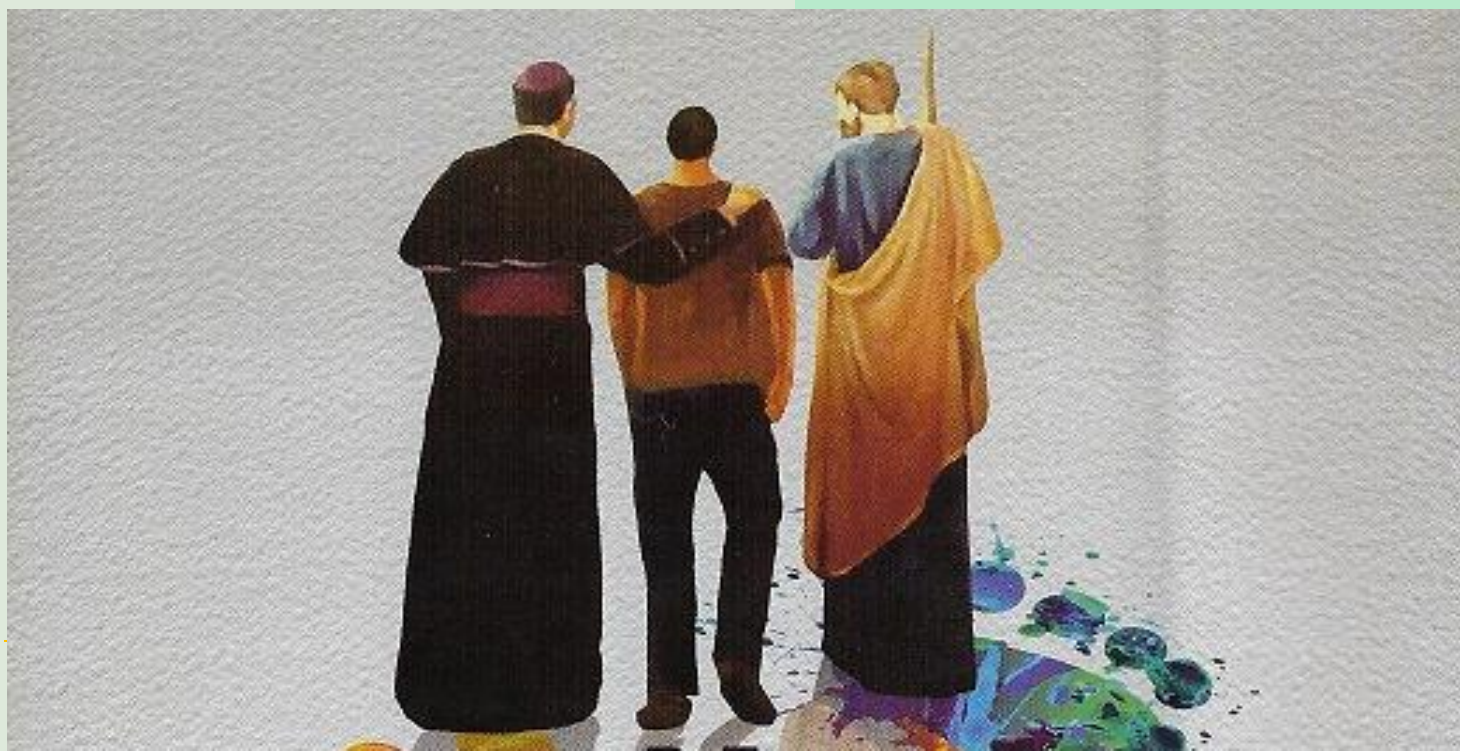
Fr. Severino Dalmaso, OSJ



## 1. The precious inheritance of the Marellian spirituality

**T**wo facts are found at the beginning of our discussion on a possible Josephite spirituality for lay people who wish to know the profound motives for our living as religious dedicated to the apostolate.

The principle motive is the richness of the spiritual patrimony which our Founder, St. Joseph Marello left to us, a patrimony which must not remain reserved only for the Oblates of St. Joseph since it is a treasure for the whole Church and it is up to us Oblates to pass it on to each person who wishes “to serve the Lord in imitation of St. Joseph”.



St. Joseph Mareello said: "Each member draws his own inspiration from his exemplar St Joseph, who was the first on earth to look after the interests of Jesus; he guarded Him in His infancy, he protected Him in His boyhood, he acted as His father during the first thirty years of His life on earth " (L.76).

St. Joseph is a perfect example of an honest, pious, punctual and hardworking man – an example for all of us who live in a complex world in which the simple, everyday virtues are in danger of being left aside though they are the most valid and authentic ones.

And precisely in order to re-appropriate these simple, everyday virtues, many lay people look with renewed interest at the Marellian spirituality where they can find sure direction in the midst of the difficulties of today's world.

This is the second fact which can serve as a starting point for our meeting: the desire to know more profoundly St. Joseph Mareello and his work, to have in him a sure guide in our life's journey, which often finds itself having to face the uncertainties of a complex world where it is not easy to be guided by the teachings of the Gospel and the Church.

The Pope, in his sermon during the beatification of Joseph Mareello on September 26, 1993, described the situation in this way: "We are passing through an historical moment of great cultural changes. So many aspects of social life have become fragmented and violent, particular interests tend to prevail over the common good, arrogance and rivalry present themselves often as life customs". And he added: "In the soul of the people, still, there is the growing aspiration for a way of living which is more human and fraternal. But how can we build an existence founded on true solidarity if we move along the way of secularism and religious indifference, or even of an inauthentic religiosity? Life, in fact, opens to fraternal sentiment only when God is perceived, known and loved as Father, the Father of all".

Speaking the day before the beatification to the Oblates of St. Joseph, the Pope pointed to Blessed Joseph Mareello as a model and guide in this recovery of Christian values, saying: "His charismatic message lives with you and in your beneficent institutions". The message of our Founder, then, must penetrate our life and all of our institutions, spreading to those who are close to our heart and our works, whether they be youth or adults, men or women, as long as they are filled with the desire to walk the path of faith alongside us, in the school of St. Joseph Mareello.

This message speaks to us of God and points us to St. Joseph as "the pilgrim of faith, faithfully abandoned, though in the obscurity of such events which surrounded the birth of Jesus, at the ancient divine plan. His existence – the Pope continues – is marked by a profound sense of responsibility, brisk hard work, and constant unity. Are not virtues such as these the ones which ought to mark your lives as well Oblates of St. Joseph? Are they not at the foundation of your work among the youth?".

## **2. An ecclesial spirituality under the gaze of St. Joseph**

In summary, this was the spirituality which Mareello proposed to his spiritual children and which he lived himself.

It was a spirituality formed on the ashes of his experiences as a youth when he also dreamed of changing the world, entrusting himself to the ideologies of his time: the time of Garibaldi and Mazzini, the time of a growing liberalism based on the ideals of the French Revolution.

But later he understood that without the presence of God in the midst of men, nothing good can be built, and from that moment, when he was 19 years old, his life took on a completely new speed, sustained by great will and based always more on the great principles of Christian faith and charity. As a priest, he saw the problems of the world evermore connected with the problems of the Church: the persecuted Church of the times of Pius IX, but also the Church defended and supported by the “Italian Catholic Youth Society”, which had been founded in Bologna by Mario Fani and Giovanni Acquaderni in 1867, and which acquired national status in the Congress held in Venice in 1874.

The year after the taking of Rome, 1871, was one of great enthusiasm, when young Catholics at two occasions rallied around Pope Pius IX for the 25th Anniversary of his pontificate in June, and then, when his pontificate reached the years and days of that of the apostle St. Peter on August 23.

Fr. Marengo dreamed of mobilizing the Catholic laity in the city of Asti, and in November of 1872, he presented to the director of the Micheli Institute, Canon Giovanni Battista Cerruti, his project for a “Company of St. Joseph, promoter of the interests of Jesus”. He had absorbed a great love for the Church and the Pope during the First Vatican Council, living for eight months in Rome in contact with the great realities of the Church. He had exalted in the defining of papal infallibility and understood the place which St. Joseph had in the heart of the Church when the Pope accepted the petition of many of the faithful and proclaimed Joseph Patron of the Universal Church.

Upon these two pillars – Church and St. Joseph – Fr. J. Marengo built the edifice of his priestly spirituality, writing: “O glorious patriarch St Joseph, do not forget us as we continue to plod along with our weak flesh in this hard land of exile. Next to the Blessed Virgin you were the first one to enfold in your arms the Redeemer. Be our exemplar in our ministry, which, like your own, is a ministry of intimate relationship with the Divine Word” (L.35).

From these words, one can see that he conformed his priesthood to the example of St. Joseph, taking him as a model in his apostolate. St. Joseph was the Guardian and teacher of Jesus and the priest ought to form Jesus in souls. Therefore it is right to look to this Saint in order for us also to care for the interests of Jesus in the Church, working like Him in a hard working and loving silence, following the exhortation of St. Paul, which Marengo repeated often: “Your life is hidden with Christ in God”.

### **3. Promoting the interests of Jesus.**

This authentic life in imitation of St. Joseph was not only his program as a priest, but it also became that which he proposed to all of his friends, priests and laity, both in spiritual direction and in his relationships with all kinds of people.

Thus his anxiousness to do good grew more and more. He wrote to Fr. Stefano Delaude: “What are you doing with your twenty-four hours? How many of them do you employ in praying,



hearing confessions, preaching, gathering memories of the past and notes for the future? How much time do you need to take care of your social and material needs?”(L.23).

He himself then sought to be the first to do something, teaching the catechism during the Lent of 1869. He wrote: “Oh, poor young people, you are too abandoned and overlooked! You are a poor growing generation left too much to yourselves, and then slandered or at best harshly judged for your frivolity and misguided generosity, for your untapped need for activity, for wrongly directed affections that lead you astray through no fault of your own. Poor young people! Let us pray, and let us pray especially for you” (L. 29).

In the draft of the rule of life for the Company of St. Joseph of 1872, he wrote: “One who decides to participate in this Company must, however, promise in the presence of God to strive within his means to promote the interests of Jesus (...)There is neither time nor place in which some good cannot be done. Every word, every step, every wish, can be the raw material for the interests of Jesus. In a frightful variety of ways the kingdom of God is being brought to ruin. Let us strive in every place to do our work of restoring it with Heaven's help” (L. 76).

#### **4. Marelli the priest and the laity**

It would be too much to recall all of the thoughts and examples which he gave in this work of expanding the kingdom of God.

The Congregation of the Oblates of St. Joseph will be his most eloquent example of his anxiousness to do good, instituting a Religious Family which was to multiply his works of ministry and perpetuate them even after his death.



Here we limit our research to his contact with the laity with whom he worked for various reasons.

To his brother Victor he wrote on January 23, 1876: "Here then is the promise we ought to make to God: resist our evil desires and do in all things his holy will, faithfully carrying out the duties of our state in life, whether as a good layperson or as a good ecclesiastic" (L. 91b).

Victor grew up in the school of his brother priest and bishop, was mayor for more than 40 years in his hometown of San Martino Alfieri and did so much good as to be honored with a square in his name and with his picture hanging in the council hall of the City. A lay person of integrity which the political administrations of today could use as well.

But, this is not the only case. I feel it is opportune to remember the rapport which Mareello as a priest knew how to establish with engineer Carlo Rostagno, whom he had contact with when seeking to renovate the large house of Santa Chiara in Asti or to add on to it for the growing families in the Mother House of the Congregation. What at first were simply work relationships slowly became reasons for mutual trust, transforming Rostagno into a benefactor for the Congregation and making him a first-class lay person in the Church of Asti. At the death of Canon Cerruti, founder of the Michelerio, the name Rostagno is found among the two "lay associates" of the Michelerio Institute, along with the new director, Fr. Luigi Bo. When in Acqui, Bishop mareello was in need of some sort of assistance, he often said: "Ah, if I only had here professor Rostagno!" Another example, even more significant, is that of the lawyer Filippo Graglia, who was procurator for the tribunal of Asti. A man of little faith and a truly liberal layperson in his official public conduct, he had however raised his three daughters in a school in Turin run by Sisters. His daughters continued there religious conduct even after finishing their studies, placing themselves under the spiritual direction of Canon Mareello. The youngest, Greca, made such progress in the spiritual life, that, after a few years, she decided to become a nun in a cloistered monastery. Mareello directed her to the monastery of the Visitation Sisters in Pinerolo and was present for the beginning of her Novitiate and, in April of 1889, already a bishop, he presided over the ceremony of her First Religious Profession. Greca's father, was not moved and was upset with Mareello for having lost his daughter in this way. Bishop Mareello did not confront him in any way and was always kind with him; in this way he first won over the mother and then lawyer Filippo himself, who converted and went to Acqui with his daughter Bice, knelt down before him, and became such a good and fervent Christian that he recited the entire breviary every day like the priests.

In 1895, when the first Diocesan Committee of Catholic Action was formed in Asti, lawyer Filippo Graglia was its first President, and when he died he was heard to say that his greatest consolation was to have a daughter who was a nun and prayer for him. As we can see, St. Joseph Mareello knew the art of transforming people and making them saints.

On day a very qualified layman came through Asti, Blessed Bartolo Longo, founder of the shrine and works of Pompei, who was moved to write the following: "Today a holy priest from Asti, Canon Joseph Mareello, has saved from the hands of Belial the holy place of the Lord; and the theatre, which it was, has become a Church once again. We recalled at that point Pompei, and how the hand of the almighty God transformed into a place of salvation



that which was a place of perdition. And we placed our spirit at the feet of the Most High in cries of adoration and blessing” (July 1885). This was the praise of a saint by another saint, and in this we can see how the saints encounter each other under the pure eye of God.

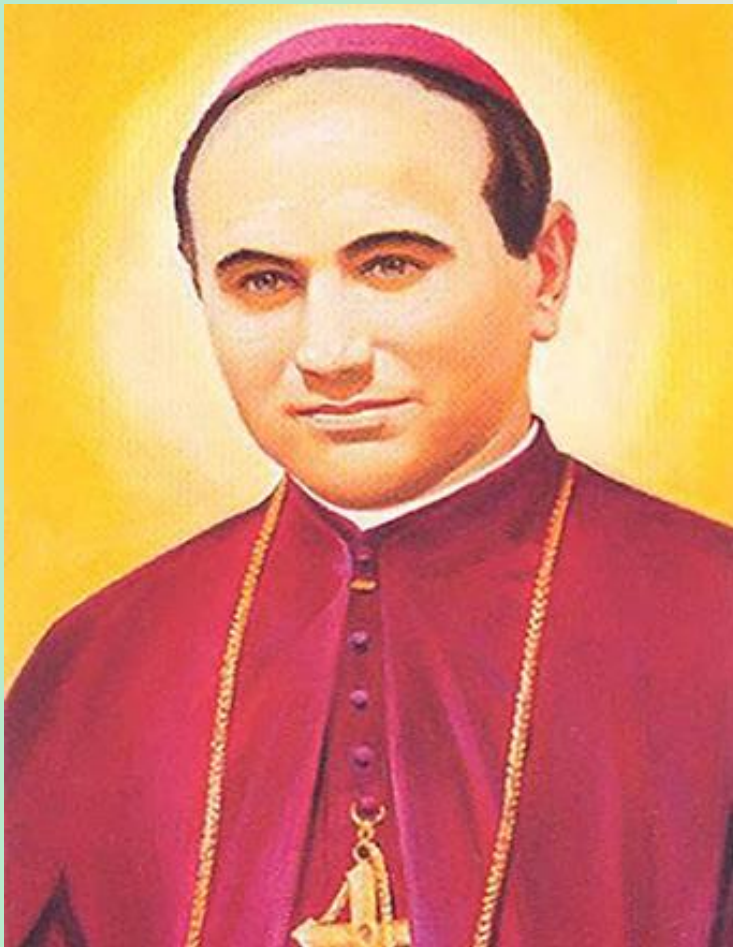
## **5. Marelo and the first Oblate lay collaborators.**

The list of laity who came into contact with the spirituality of St. Joseph Marelo could continue on with the number of pious women who frequented the Church called the “Gesù” and later the Church of Santa Chiara, when Marelo led Eucharistic Adorations on Thursdays and later held Sunday instructions for families in the large Mother House.

For those who could not regularly come for Adoration in the church, he had instituted the Association of perpetual adorers at home, distributing among them their hours, such that all the 24 hours of the day would be covered by adorations at home. These were the spiritual developments of the Company of St. Joseph, which he had thought of in 1872, and which will have consequences after his death.

Among the first of these women, we can recall the teacher Annunziata Ratti, who for a long time was the director of the Arri Nursery School in Asti and one of the most zealous collaborators in the Cathedral parish.

Later on we have the Graglia sisters of whom we spoke above. They continued their lives of devotion even after the death of Saint Marelo and while Greca became Mother Superior of the monastery of Pisa with the name Mother Giovanna Maria, her sisters Jole and Bice became promoters of apostolic works in the city of Asti under the guidance of Canon Giuseppe Gamba, who was also a spiritual child of Marelo and for a long time curate of the Cathedral, before being named bishop and cardinal.



And one could continue with Mrs. Giovanna Mensi-Frova, who, for the great esteem which she had for Marelo, left her farm and adjacent lands in the area of Casabianca d'Asti, and retired to live in the house of Santa Chiara.

About Mrs. Angela Bosco, Bishop Marelo wrote from Acqui in 1892: “We have lost a generous benefactor to S. Chiara and now we can no longer show that holy woman our recognition for her great beneficence except with our prayers. I have already celebrated the Holy Mass for her and in the days in which I am free I will continue to celebrate it for her. Also at S. Chiara you must continue to pray for her blessed soul” (L. 227).

As can be seen, there were many good women formed at the school of Marelo and who then



continued working for good, alongside the Congregation of the Oblates of St. Joseph. These are the first examples of Oblate lay collaborators even though not yet officially organized as such, as will happen after.

## **6. Bishop Marengo formator of the Catholic laity.**

When Bishop Marengo had to leave Asti and move to Acqui, it all started over again for him. If at Asti had not been able to organize a true association of Catholic Action, as he had thought of doing in 1872, he was, however, able to mould so many souls of good Christian laymen and women. In Acqui, on the other hand, everything had become more difficult for him for two types of obstacles that he found there upon his arrival as bishop.

The first obstacle which he found was in his Vicar General, Mons. Giuseppe Pagella, who was against the Work of the Congresses (or Catholic Action), to the point of having forbidden the existing associations in the diocese from participating with their banners in the entrance of the new Bishop into the diocese.

We have two letters from Pagella, the first one written to the Regional President of Piedmont, Count Cesare Balbo, the second to the President of Liguria, Comm. Dufour, in which he forbid them from presenting themselves at the ceremonies as Catholic organizations, suggesting ironically that they could do it later in private after the Bishop had been installed in his see.

This was a consequence of the division among the conciliarist Catholics and the intransigent Catholics, which had the Church hierarchy in Piedmont divided as well, the work of the Congresses being of an intransigent position, which was not pleasing to Cardinal Alimonda in Turin and, so, neither to Canon G. Pagella in Acqui.



A second obstacle for Bishop Marelli was the strong influence wielded in Acqui by Senator Giuseppe Saracco, who was both minister for public work in Rome and mayor of the city. Bishop Marelli did not become discouraged not even when facing the strong liberal presence and, in the administrative elections of 1889, there not being available any qualified laity, he placed in the list of names the priest Fr. Ivaldi, treasurer of the seminary, who was elected a city councilor. At Nizza Monferrato, instead, he called Count Cesare Balbo himself from Turin, who was elected to the rolls of that city.

He then worked silently, as was his style, and in 1893, on the occasion of the episcopal jubilee of Leo XIII, he led a pilgrimage to Rome and then to Pompei of more than 60 people belonging to the work of the Congresses which, in the meantime, had been approved also by the new archbishop of Turin, Bishop Davide Riccardi.

In this way, without aligning himself to either side, he looked only to the good of souls, forming Catholic laity faithful to the Church and zealous in spreading Christian values, before the proliferation of socialist worker societies, above all in the more industrial centers of the vast Diocese of Acqui.

He was so convinced of the importance of forming good Catholic laity that he had proposed, once he had finished with the pastoral visits to the parishes of the diocese, to make Catholic Action his next priority. He was not able to do this because of his premature death six years into his episcopacy, at the young age of 50 years and five months.

In 1892, he had also participated in the X National Congress of the work of the Congresses in Genoa, in the centenary of the discovery of America, and there he had met the greatest exponents of the Italian Catholic laity, from Count Medolaghi, exponent of the most intransigent wing, to Professor Toniolo, who was the precursor of the social action of Catholics in Italy and founder of the Catholic Social Weeks.

## **7 – Laity in the family of St. Joseph.**

This, in summary, was St. Joseph Marelli's work in the area of laity. A work of spreading seeds which brought forth fruits while he was living and continued to produce them even through the years of this century.

In Asti, in fact, the activities which had begun would continue, above all by the work of Canon G. Gamba, who was his spiritual child, and by the Graglia sisters, who kept alive as well the associations of the "Lady Auxiliaries", already foreseen by the draft of the Company of St. Joseph in 1872.

Here is a memory from a talk by Bishop Giuseppe Gamba, made in Asti in 1921, when he was bishop of Novara: "Our mind – he said – runs at this moment to those piles of clothes for the poor and laundry for the church, which each year by the hundreds piled up on the long table in the large hall of Santa Chiara".



Precisely in the year 1921, the first General Chapter of the Congregation sanctioned the work of laity with the Congregation, erecting the Pious Association of Oblate Cooperators. In the month of March of 1922, the Joseph newsletter, in its first year of existence, asked: "Who are the Oblate Cooperators?" And it explained: "In every well ordered army one part advances in combat and the other attends to the provisions. And so in this young Oblate army, while the Religious of the Congregation of St. Joseph making the whole world their country will not spare themselves from fatigue in working for the salvation of souls, the Oblate Cooperators encourage, prayer and assist even materially the efforts of the former".

This was a vision, one can say, very pre-conciliar, but it did much good in the past decades. Today, with the help of the Second Vatican Council, it is possible to take a step forward and consider the Oblate Lay Collaborators not any more as "troops for provisions", but as equally dedicated, each one in his proper role, in proclaiming the Gospel and, more in particular, in caring for and forming youth: in oratories, schools, associations, and in all the forms of apostolate proper to the Congregation.

The Council has emphasized the dignity and necessity of the lay apostolate in the Church, affirming that lay associations are "a sign of the communion and unity of the Church in Christ" (AA, 18). "On the other hand", explains the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, "in a secularized world, above all, the various group forms of the apostolate can represent for many a precious help for the Christian life in remaining faithful to the demands of the gospel and to the commitment to the Church's mission and the apostolate" (n.29).

As far as us as a Congregation, it was the grace of the beatification of Bishop Joseph Marella which has reopened an interest in knowing his spirituality and of participating more closely in the work of the Oblates in the world.





The grace of the beatification has already produced in various nations a reawakening of vocations to the Congregation and to other forms of expansion of the Oblate spirit, like the opening of our spirituality to women as well, with the institution, willed by the General Chapter in 1994, of the Oblate Sisters of St. Joseph, who today are present in Brazil, the Philippines, Peru, Nigeria and Rome.

In the same light it is nice to see also a re-flowering of lay associations around the Congregation, above all those who work alongside the Oblates in parishes and other works, so as to unite our forces in an attitude of collaboration and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the mission of the Church (VC 54), proper to the Congregation.

In fact, our Congregation is ever more aware that the charism which St. Joseph Marelllo has passed on to her can be shared with so many people who are close by and who desire to collaborate with us in building the Kingdom of God on earth.

We have before us a very vast field, in which our energies come together and produce new dynamisms: laity are introduced to the Marellian spirituality and the life of the Congregation, while we Oblates are encouraged by this new ecclesial and Oblate breath so as to continue together the work which Providence points out to us from day to day.

In this way, we come to form almost one family, the family of the Oblates of St. Joseph, composed of religious and laity, each one in his proper role, all dedicated to living together the Josephite-Marellian spirit and of working for our sanctification and for the coming of the Kingdom of God.



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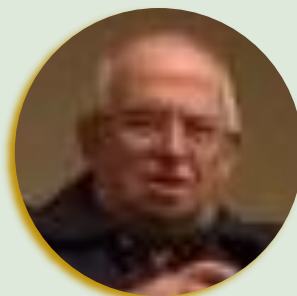


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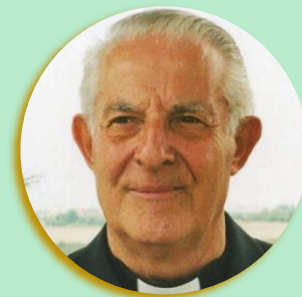


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*The Year of St. Joseph continues until December 8, 2020*

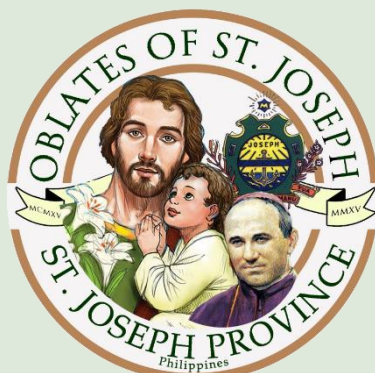
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# PRAYER OF ST. JOSEPH MARELLO TO ST. JOSEPH

*Let us say  
to our Great Patriarch:  
see us all for your  
and may you be all for us;  
you show us the way  
you sustain us  
in every step,  
you lead us  
where Divine Providence  
wants to take us.  
Whether the way  
be long or short  
smooth or rough  
whether we can  
or cannot see the goal  
by human sight,  
whether moving  
swiftly or slowly  
with you, we are sure  
that all will go well.*







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*St. Joseph Province*

*Philippines*

*Let us go to the  
glorious Joseph,  
guide and teacher  
of the spiritual life,  
model of the interior  
and hidden life*

*Giuseppe Merello*

