

First Wednesday in Honor of St. Joseph

My child, I desire a day to be set aside to honor my fatherhood.

The privilege of being chosen by God to be the Virgin-Father of His Son was mine alone, and no honor, excluding that bestowed upon my Holy Spouse, was ever, or will ever, be as sublime or as high as this.

The Holy Trinity desires thus to honor me that in my unique fatherhood all fatherhood might be blessed.

Dear child, I was king in the little home of Nazareth, for I sheltered within it the Prince of Peace and the Queen of Heaven. To me they looked for protection and sustenance, and I did not fail them.

I received from them the deepest love and reverence, for in me they saw Him Whose place I took over them.

So the head of the family must be loved, obeyed, and respected, and in return be a true father and protector to those under his care.

In honoring in a special way my fatherhood, you also honor Jesus and Mary. The Divine Trinity has placed into our keeping the peace of the world.

The imitation of the Holy Family, my child, of the virtues we practiced in our little home at Nazareth is the way for all souls to that peace which comes from God alone and which none other can give.

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pgs. 28-29)

Those words were spoken to Sister on the eve of St. Joseph's feast day, March 18, 1958, one and a half years after Our Lady's first appearance to Sister under the new image of Our Lady of America®. The next evening, Sister was favored with a unique and marvelous vision of the glorious St. Joseph.

He seemed suspended, as it were, a short distance above what had the appearance of a large globe with clouds moving about it. His head was slightly raised, the eyes gazing upward as if in ecstasy. The hands were in a position similar to that of the priest during the celebration of Holy Mass, only they extended upward somewhat more. The color of his hair as also of his rather small and slightly forked beard seemed a very dark brown. His eyes resembled in color the hair and beard. He was clothed in a white robe that reached to his ankles. Over this he wore a sort of cloak which did not come together at the throat, but covering the shoulders and draped gracefully over each arm, reached to the hem of the robe.

His appearance, though quite youthful, gave at the same time the impression of rare maturity combined with great strength. He seemed a bit taller than medium height. The lines of his face appeared strong and purposeful, softened somewhat by a gentle serenity. I also saw his most pure heart at this time. Moreover, I saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovering above his head.

Standing sideways, facing each other, were two angels, one on the right, the other on the left. Each carried what appeared to be a small pillow in a satin covering, the pillow on the right bearing a gold crown, the one on the left, a gold scepter. The angels were all white, even their faces and hair. It was a beautiful whiteness that reminded me of the stainlessness of heaven. Then I heard these words: "Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor." [Before taking leave, St. Joseph stated:]

"The Holy Father need have no fear, for I have been appointed his special protector. As God chose me to be the special guardian of His Son, so has He chosen me as the special guardian of him who in Christ's Name is head of the Mystical Body of that same Son on earth.

My special protection of the Holy Father and the Church should be made known to him. God wishes to make this known to him that he may receive thereby renewed consolation and encouragement. During the war, [WW II] little daughter, it was I who saved him from death at the hands of his enemies. [Pope Pius XII from the Nazis] Continually I watch over him and the Church, and I desire this to be acknowledged for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

Lovely child, precious to the heart of your spiritual father, I will come again on the last Sunday of this month. Jesus and Mary will come also in a special visit. Receive my blessing."

[As Sister knelt, she felt St. Joseph's hands upon her head.] "May Jesus and Mary through my hands bestow upon you eternal peace." (Diary, Pgs. 29-31.)

Less than two weeks later, St. Joseph appeared to Sister again to explain the First Wednesday devotion God wishes to establish in his honor. Sister states:

His requests were similar to those of Our Lady and the First Saturday. The Sacred Hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph have been chosen by the Most Holy Trinity to bring peace to the world; hence, their request for special love and honor, also, in particular, reparation and imitation. These are the words of St. Joseph as recorded on March 30, 1958:

"I am the protector of the Church and the home, as I was the protector of Christ and His Mother while I lived upon earth. Jesus and Mary desire that my pure heart, so long hidden and unknown, be now honored in a special way. Let my children honor my most pure heart in a special manner on the First Wednesday of the month by reciting the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary in memory of my life with Jesus and Mary and the love I bore them, the sorrow I suffered with

them. Let them receive Holy Communion in union with the love with which I received the Savior for the first time and each time I held Him in my arms.

Those who honor me in this way will be consoled by my presence at their death, and I myself will conduct them safely into the presence of Jesus and Mary.

I will come again, little child of my most pure heart. Until then, continue in patience and humility, which is so pleasing to God.” (Diary, Pgs. 31-32.)

Sister stated that Jesus and Mary also came with Joseph and that Jesus appeared as a boy 15 or 16 years of age. Jesus spoke about the sanctification of the family and other matters, and Mary and Joseph also spoke about the sanctification of the family and about the Divine Indwelling.

Why is St. Joseph so often referred to as the Forgotten Saint?

After the Ascension of Jesus and the First Pentecost the early Church saw a period of persecution and heresy attacking the full humanity and/or the full divinity of Jesus. The Church had to focus on refuting those errors and defining its primary doctrine on the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures in one Divine Person. Since Jesus is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, our understanding of the Most Holy Trinity as three distinct but consubstantial persons in one Godhead was an intricate and intimate part of that doctrinal development. Since Christ, in union with His Father, sent us their Holy Spirit to guide the newborn Church, it was equally important to comprehend the work of the Spirit in the Church, in the world and in each soul. Since Mary, as Mother of Jesus, is inseparably united with her Divine Son in the work of redemption and our sanctification, an understanding of Mary's unique role and her singular privileges naturally followed. The Council of Ephesus in 431 confirmed what the Church already believed, that Mary is indeed Theotokos, God-bearer, and that as Mother of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, she is mother of the person, not merely His human nature. Since Jesus is a divine person, she is thus truly Mother of God, the Son of God. The Incarnation of Jesus with His Messianic mission and the Most Holy Trinity are the central doctrines of our Faith from which everything else takes its meaning. From this Theology and Christology a flowering of Mariology quickly ensued in the 5th – the 15th centuries. Although the Church understood the intimate relationship of Joseph to Mary and to Jesus in the earthly trinity that mirrored the heavenly one, and understood Joseph's own unique role and privileges, formal recognition and veneration of his privileged position has been slower in coming to maturity within the Church. Josephology is a more modern phenomenon.

Our Blessed Lady spoke to Venerable Mary of Agreda in these words:

“My daughter, although thou hast described my spouse, Saint Joseph, as the most noble among the princes and saints of the heavenly Jerusalem; yet neither canst thou properly manifest his eminent sanctity, nor can any of the mortals know it fully before they arrive at the vision of Divinity. Then all of them

will be filled with wonder and praise as the Lord will make them capable of understanding this sacrament. On the last day, when all men shall be judged, the damned will bitterly bewail their sins, which prevented them from appreciating this powerful means of their salvation, and availing themselves, as they easily could have, of this intercessor to gain the friendship of the just Judge. The whole human race has much undervalued the privileges and prerogatives conceded to my blessed spouse and they know not what his intercession with God is able to do. I assure thee, my dearest, that he is one of the greatly favored personages in the divine presence and has immense power to stay the arms of divine vengeance. ... From now on, during the rest of thy mortal life, see that thou advance in devotion and in hearty love toward my spouse, and that thou bless the Lord for thus having favored him with such high privileges and for having rejoiced me so much in the knowledge of all his excellences. In all thy necessities thou must avail thyself of his intercession. ... That which my spouse asks of the Lord in heaven is granted upon the earth and on his intercession depend many and extraordinary favors for men, if they do not make themselves unworthy of receiving them.”

(Venerable Mary of Agreda, *THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD*, Vol. III, Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, IL, Pgs. 167-168.)

Although veneration of St. Joseph appeared to be neglected in the early Church, a Church that had undergone great persecution in its beginning and hence, focused more on veneration of the martyrs, the angels and the Baptist, public devotion to St. Joseph persisted. As early as the 800's Joseph was **revered as the educator and guardian of Jesus**. By the 15th century St. Joseph was **honored on March 19th** in certain countries and by 1621 that celebration was extended to the whole Church. **St. Joseph's name was added to the ancient Litany of the Saints. On December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX**, the same Pope who defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, **declared Joseph the universal patron and protector of the Church**. The Roman Missal and Breviary celebrated Joseph as Spouse of Mary and Patron of the Church on the **third Sunday after Easter**, a feast later moved to the preceding **Wednesday** and changed to **the solemnity of St. Joseph**. In 1955 Pope Pius XII, however, abolished that feast for the Church as a whole, though it is still celebrated in some countries, and established the **feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1st** to counteract the communists' May Day or Labor Day celebrations, in effect confirming St. Joseph not only as the **patron of workers but also as patron in the battle against communism**. **Pope Leo XIII's 1889 encyclical Quamquam Pluries on Devotion to St. Joseph consecrated the month of March to St. Joseph** and fostered an understanding of St. Joseph's holiness next in kind to Mary's. Pope John XXIII added Joseph's name to the Canon of the Mass. St. Joseph is truly a man wrapped in silence, as not one word he uttered is recorded in Scripture and little is said about him. While the Church has always recognized Mary's pre-eminence above the angels as Virgin-Mother of God, it has been slower to recognize Joseph's dignity above the angels as Virgin-Father of Jesus. In nature, angels, as pure spirits, are higher than human creatures of body **and** spirit, but Mary and Joseph's unique roles in the Messianic

work of Jesus places them both above the angels in the order of grace and dignity. In the writings of Blessed John Paul II, especially **Redemptoris Custos, *Guardian of the Redeemer***, celebrating the 100th anniversary of **Quamquam Pluries**, we see the splendor of Joseph's position next to Mary in the hypostatic order of grace more richly developed. Mary and Joseph were the two essential human beings needed to bring God into our world and into the human family. Jesus needed a mother **and a father** in His earthly sojourn **according to the decree of the Father for the family**. As Mary is spiritual mother of the Church, the Mystical Body of Jesus, so Joseph is spiritual father of the Church, all of us. The Church has come to recognize Joseph as the protector of the family as he protected the Holy Family; guardian of virgins as he guarded the two most sublime virgins earth has ever known, Jesus and Mary. He is patron of workers because he so ennobled labor on behalf of the Holy Family. He is patron of the dying because who could better aid us than he who died in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

“Some saints are privileged to extend to us their patronage with particular efficacy in certain needs, but not in others; but our holy patron, St. Joseph, has the power to assist us in all cases, in every necessity, in every undertaking.”
(St. Thomas Aquinas)

“Our Lord would have us to understand that as He was subject to St. Joseph on earth—for St. Joseph, bearing the title of father and being His guardian, could command Him—so now in Heaven Our Lord grants all his petitions.”
(St. Teresa of Avila)

In his beautiful book, **JOSEPH, SHADOW OF THE FATHER**, Father Andrew Doze describes Joseph's role as the shadow of the Father, the equivalent of the cloud in which God was present to His people even while remaining hidden. Joseph is the sign of the Father's Presence in that paradise on earth, the little home of Nazareth. He is the Face of the Father for Jesus and Mary to contemplate, the one through whom, with headship in the Holy Family as the Father has headship in the Holy Trinity, the Will of the Father on Jesus' behalf would be carried out. Father Doze references the 7-branched candelabra to indicate the work of the Spirit. It rests on a base that is an extension of the 4th branch in the center around which those on either side are counterpoised. Seven, of course, is the number symbolizing fullness and perfection. In the creation story, on the 4th day, the middle of the week, God made the sun and the moon and the stars, those great luminaries so essential for human existence that nations often worshipped them. Joseph is the one the Father chose to make responsible for the success of Jesus' coming, that splendid Light into our vast darkness, that point in time where the eternal meets the temporal and the temporal the eternal, that point of sacred time and meeting from which all else takes meaning, anticipating it or flowing from it. Joseph is the one who clouds and hides and conceals the great mysteries surrounding Jesus and His Virgin-Mother until the appointed time to reveal them. Joseph is in the middle of God's saving action as surely as Wednesday is in the middle of the week.

St. Joseph was prefigured in the Patriarch Joseph who was sold by his brothers into a dark, hidden life in Egypt until the point in time when he would become the one who would bring salvation to his people. The Patriarch's dreams of his brothers' sheaves of grain bowing to his and the dream of the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowing to him prefigure the glory that would be given to Joseph, who stands in the place of the heavenly Father over Jesus on this earth. Jesus, the Sun, and Mary, the Moon who receives all her radiant light from the Son, both submit to Joseph in the authority the Father has given him over them as head of the Holy Family. The sheaves, the grain of the earth, and the luminaries of the sky, when applied to St. Joseph, indicate that both earth and heaven will honor St. Joseph as God has ordained. His role in the plan of salvation as co-redeemer with Jesus and Mary is significant! His role as Virgin-Spouse of Mary, Mother of God, and Virgin-Father of Jesus, Son of God, is equally significant and not yet fully understood in the Church. There are three hearts we must honor on earth and in heaven in coming to know our salvation—Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

Is it any wonder then, that St. Joseph should tell Sister Mildred that God and Our Lady wish that he, so long hidden, should now be exalted? Are we to understand that God wants that **First Wednesday devotion in the middle of the week, between the Sunday celebration honoring Christ and the Saturday devotion honoring Mary, a part of public devotion in the past, to be formalized so it can flourish within the Church?** Are we to understand that, in order to increase our knowledge in mind and heart as regards the heavenly Trinity, we must come to know the holiness and purity the earthly trinity mirrors for us of the heavenly one, and calls us to imitate? Must we now, at this time in the Church, give Joseph his due and complete the trilogy of devotions to the three persons of the Holy Family, the trinity on earth, by putting the First Wednesday devotion alongside the First Friday and First Saturday devotions? It certainly seems to be the will of God, as stated in this and other messages from heaven!

“Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor.”

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