

The Cultus of St. Joseph in Our Catholic Tradition



The Lord, in order to honor his name, decided to make St. Joseph the leader and the patron saint of the militant church. Before the day of judgment all the peoples will know and revere the name of the Lord, and the magnificent gifts that God has given St. Joseph, gifts he has wanted to keep almost hidden for a long period of time. It is then that the name of Joseph will abound with all the goods of the earth. Churches will be built in his honor. Peoples will celebrate his feasts and will make solemn promises to him. For the Lord will open the ears of their intelligence and great men will scrutinize the inner

gifts of God hidden in St. Joseph and will discover a precious treasure such as we do not find its like in any of the fathers of the Old Testament. This will happen especially through the enlightenments given by the holy angels. St. Joseph will give graces from heaven on high to people who will invoke him, and he himself, constantly surrounded with the majesty of his glory, will borrow nothing from any mortal. The name of St. Joseph will be honorably placed on the calendar of the saints and he will no longer be the last; for a main feast will be set to venerate him. The Vicar of Christ on earth, prompted by the Holy Spirit, will rule that the feast of the foster-father of Christ and of the husband of the Queen of the world, be celebrated throughout the Church. (Andrew Doze, JOSEPH, SHADOW OF THE FATHER, New York: Alba House, 1992, Pgs. 27-28.)

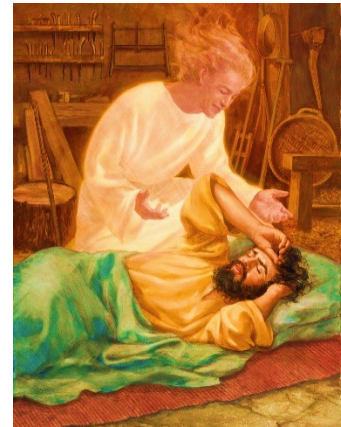
On December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX issued his decree, **Quemadmodum Deus**, establishing the solemnity of the feast of St. Joseph on March 19 and declaring him Patron of the Universal Church and, therefore, of the domestic church, the home, as well. Sixteen years earlier, on December 8, 1854, the same Pope issued the encyclical letter **Ineffabilis Deus** defining the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, the singular privilege whereby she was preserved from all stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception in her mother's womb, a privilege flowing from the even greater singular privilege of her Divine Maternity. These actions support the intimate and inseparable connection of Joseph as Guardian of the Redeemer to Mary as Mother of the Redeemer in the Hypostatic Order of Grace in God's plan for our salvation. Jesus, Mary and Joseph constitute that order of grace essential for the Incarnation of the Son of God as the only Savior of the world: Jesus needed a body to take on our nature, and thus a Mother; He needed an earthly father to restore the human family built upon the marriage of a man and a woman, and thus an earthly father. Mary and Joseph became co-redeemers in the work of the Redeemer, not in a sense of "equal to," but in a sense of "co-operation with" in a hierarchy of co-operation and unprecedented grace: Mary by maternal mediation and Joseph by paternal, compassionate mediation.

The picture above shows Mary at the side of Joseph in respect for his headship in the family. Joseph is tallest for that reason and holds a blooming lily as a sign of his purity and, like Aaron's blooming rod, a sign of his predilection by God to be Virgin-Father of Jesus and Virgin-Spouse of Mary, Protector of the Holy Family and of God's family, the Church, being presented to him by the angel. Jesus, at the center of the picture, is King of kings and Lord of lords, for He holds the world in His hands and rules over it. These honors are bestowed on Joseph alone and no honor will ever be more sublime save those

bestowed upon Our Lady. At Joseph's right is the Archangel Gabriel, the Angel of Purity, who conveyed God's Will to St. Joseph in dreams. How fitting that Pope Francis declared **A Year of St. Joseph from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021** with his apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, honoring the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph's patronage of the Church and of the home and as the Terror of Demons in these turbulent times of diabolical attacks from all sides upon Christ's Church and God's idea of the family.

... **"Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor." ... "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."** (Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA*, Fostoria, OH, Pgs. 28-31.

Sacred Scripture records no words of St. Joseph but only his obedient faith in action. His hidden life merits him the title of Patron of Contemplatives. The Annunciation account states that Mary was betrothed to a man from Nazareth named Joseph; therefore, she was married, not an unwed mother, for betrothal in those days meant marriage. After the Visitation, it became obvious to St. Joseph that Mary was pregnant and he became quite anxious, unable to explain it. The question of divorcing Mary is increasingly viewed, not as St. Joseph doubting her virtue, but as his feelings of unworthiness in his inability to grasp the mysterious workings of grace he was convinced were taking place within her. St. Joseph was more inclined to remove himself lest He interfere with God's incomprehensible design. Although he and Mary were well-schooled in the Scriptures concerning the coming of the Messiah and sensed the time was near, neither ever suspected, though of the House of David, that they might be chosen to parent the Redeemer.



In Joseph's own Annunciation the angel assured him he need not fear to take Mary into his home, for her Child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and would save His people from their sins. Joseph was commanded to give Mary's Child the name Jesus, one Who saves. Surely he must have begun to understand his Spouse was the Virgin who would bear a son spoken of by Isaiah, Mother of the Messiah. What peace overwhelmed Joseph to know God willed to trust Heaven's two most precious treasures into his keeping, while protecting Mary's honor from a false judgement by the keepers of the law who could not possibly understand the ways of God. Shortly after, Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem to be registered in the census. Due to the crowds gathered there, they were forced to seek shelter in a cave (or stable.) Scripture records how lowly shepherds and well-to-do Wise Men found the newborn King amidst such poverty, yet was surrounded in glory! When Herod sought to destroy the newborn King, the angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with the Child and His Mother, a rugged and dangerous trip indeed. Scripture is silent about Joseph until the angel appears a third time to tell him it was safe to return to his home in Nazareth. We hear no more of Joseph until Jesus is accidentally left behind and is found in the temple. Mary confirms Joseph's fatherhood over Jesus-- **"Your father and I have sought you sorrowing!"** –

while Jesus confronts Joseph with the paternity of His heavenly Father whose business He must be about—hinting clearly at the cruel business of redemption that lies ahead.

It is fitting that we review some common ideas about Joseph in light of our Catholic Tradition. **One, Joseph's age.** Growing studies in Josephology conclude that Joseph would have been in the prime of his life, not an old man, in order to meet the demanding duties of his vocation as provider and protector of Jesus and Mary, particularly to, during and from their exile in Egypt to escape Herod's rage. **Two, his virginity.** In eastern cultures it is common for older men to marry young girls; hence, the image of Joseph as a widower with children from a previous marriage. Artists depicted Joseph as an old man to protect the virginity of Mary, presuming old men are dead to the passions of the flesh. Recent study aligns itself to revelations about St. Joseph in the messages of Our Lady of America, that St. Joseph was cleansed from original sin the moment after his conception and was given a fullness of grace similar to Mary's and vowed his virginity to God from his youth, as did Mary. The terms brothers and sisters in the Gospels refer to members of the extended family, for the Jewish language had no word for cousins. Mary and Joseph had no child but Jesus; the dogma of Mary's Perpetual Virginity confirms that and the messages of Our Lady of America constantly refer to St. Joseph as the Virgin-Father of Jesus and the Virgin-Spouse of Mary. **Three, a foster parent.** Given our understanding of foster parents, those paid to care for other people's children, the title contradicts the angel's command to claim Jesus as His own by giving Him His name. It is a Jewish concept that when you name it, you own it. When Joseph gave Jesus His name at His circumcision, Jesus became legally and truly Joseph's child with rights of inheritance, name and dignity. Jesus was truly the son of the carpenter from Nazareth as Scripture affirms. (Reference: *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, Francis Healy Thompson, M.A.)

As almighty God appointed Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, over all the land of Egypt to save grain for the people, so when the fullness of time had come and He was about to send to earth His only-begotten Son, the Savior of the world, He chose another Joseph, of whom the first had been the type, and He made him the lord and chief of His household and possessions, the guardian of His choicest treasures. Indeed, he had as his spouse the Immaculate Virgin Mary, of whom was born by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord, who deigned to be reputed in the sight of men as the son of Joseph, and was subject to him.



Him whom countless kings and prophets had desired to see, Joseph not only saw but conversed with, and embraced in paternal affection, and kissed. He most diligently reared Him whom the faithful were to receive as the bread that came down from heaven whereby they might obtain eternal life. Because of this sublime dignity which God conferred on his most faithful servant, the Church has always most highly honored and praised blessed Joseph next to his spouse, the Virgin Mother of God, and has besought his intercession in times of trouble. (Quemadmodum Deus, Pope Pius IX, December 8, 1870.)

The Catholic Church has an abundance of mystics, modeled after Mary and Joseph, who experience states of the soul which cannot be produced by human effort, even with the ordinary aid of grace. They teach us about higher forms of prayer, contemplation and union of the soul with God, as in divine espousals. Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil was such a soul and Jesus called her **spouse of My Heart**. Another is Mother

Maria Cecelia Baij who wrote *The Life of St. Joseph* which gives us so much insight into the flesh and blood realities of the trials Joseph would endure as Guardian of the Redeemer. These mystics put flesh on the bone of our intellectual faith and pave the way for the **wisdom of the heart** that engages the soul deeply and personally in all things divine. Was St. Joseph co-redemptor with Jesus and Mary? When we acknowledge that God's plan for our Redemption began the moment Mary said "fiat" and the Son of God took flesh in her womb, sharing in Jesus' Passion cannot be limited to presence at the foot of the cross but must be seen in terms of presence with Jesus and Mary through nearly thirty years of life spent in conversation, prayer, ecstasy and illuminations unfolding that Passion all along the way to Calvary. No wonder St. Joseph tells Sister Mildred:

The most painful of my sorrows was that I knew beforehand of their passion, yet would not be there to console them. Their future suffering was ever present to me and became my daily cross. I became, in union with my holy spouse, co-redemptor of the human race. Through compassion for the sufferings of Jesus and Mary I co-operated, as no other, in the salvation of the world. (Sister's Diary, Pg. 13.)

Maria Cecelia Baij tells how people in Egypt ridiculed St. Joseph for having the Child Jesus work in his carpentry shop, but Jesus had insisted and Joseph took delight in His company. Can we imagine St. Joseph's pain and compassion for the future sufferings of Jesus when the first thing Jesus made was a cross which He hung on the wall of his bed chamber? Maria describes Joseph's entrance into that chamber, taking the cross and kissing it while weeping bitterly for the agony his Jesus would have to endure, weeping bitterly over how many would reject that unfathomable love. At another time Joseph entered that chamber and found young Jesus lying on the ground upon the cross He had made. Surely we do not doubt that Joseph was given many illuminations beforehand into the sufferings of Jesus and Mary and the Will of God that grieved him more in that he could not be there to comfort them. Simeon's prophecy to Mary about a sword piercing her heart, which weighed upon her every day, must have pierced Joseph's heart, too, as he saw its trace each time he gazed upon her face in surrendering prayer. What ecstasies must have been granted this trinity of victim souls to prepare them, each in their unique roles, for all our redemption would ask of them.

In *The Mystical City of God* Venerable Mary of Agreda recounts Our Lady's



*St. Joseph's Altar to honor him on his feast,
March 19*

words: **"The whole human race has much under-valued 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. ... 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."** (Pages 167-168.)

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