

The Death of St. Joseph, Patron of a Happy Death

Ambassador of the Trinity to the Detained Holy Souls

Holy Scripture exhorts us to pray for our beloved dead and holy Mother Church, in her wisdom, has dedicated this month of November especially to prayer for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The word purgatory comes from the Latin *purgare* which means **to cleanse, to purify**. Knowing that not even the slightest sin or impurity can enter into the Presence of God, the Church has been led by the Spirit to proclaim this doctrine contained in Scripture by inference. The doctrine was defined at the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent. It states that **purgatory is that place or condition where those who die in grace are completely purified from any remaining stain of venial sin and where any temporal punishment still due one's sins is fully satisfied**. The Church has always taught that the offering of prayer and penance by the faithful, particularly fasting and almsgiving, and most especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, are most beneficial in aiding the Holy Souls in a quick release from these purifying fires. It is expedient that we make atonement for our sins, as far as possible, in this life by accepting all the suffering life sends us, offering it to God in atonement for the temporal punishment due to our sins and to the sins of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It behooves us to embrace our crosses, uniting our sufferings with the Passion of Jesus, the Eternal High Priest and Perfect Sacrifice, the Great Atoner for all mankind's sins. As we reflect on the sufferings of St. Joseph and his blessed death in the arms of Jesus as presented by Venerable Mary of Agreda, let us beg St. Joseph to be at our side with Jesus and Mary when it is our time to die.

The Lord did not suffer only in order to excite our admiration, but in order that we imitate his example, and he did not let even his Divinity stand in the way of labor and suffering, but allowed sorrow and suffering to overwhelm Him in proportion to his innocence and sinlessness.

Along this royal highway of the Cross the Lord led the spouse of his blessed Mother, saint Joseph, whom He loved above all the sons of men. In order to increase his merits and crown before the time of his meriting should come to an end, He visited him in the last years of his life with certain sicknesses, such as fever, violent headaches and very painful rheumatisms, which greatly afflicted and weakened him. In the midst of these infirmities, he was suffering from another source, more sweet, but extremely painful, namely, from the fire of his ardent love which was so vehement, that the flights and ecstasies of his most pure soul would often have burst the bounds of his body if the Lord, who vouchsafed them, had not strengthened and comforted him against these agonies of love. In these sweet excesses the Lord allowed him to

suffer until his death and on account of the natural weakness of his extenuated body, this exercise was the source of ineffable merits for the fortunate saint, not only because of the sufferings occasioned, but because of the love by which these sufferings were brought about.

Our great Queen, his Spouse, was a witness to all these mysteries.... She beheld and comprehended the sincerity and purity of his soul; his burning love; his exalted and heavenly thoughts; his dove-like patience and meekness in his grievous ailments and exquisite sufferings. She knew that he never complained either of these nor of any of the other trials, nor ever asked for any relief in his wants and necessities; for he bore all with incomparable equanimity and greatness of soul. As his most prudent Spouse contemplated and weighed all these heroic virtues of saint Joseph, She grew to look upon him with such a veneration as cannot ever be properly estimated by any one.

(Venerable Mary of Agreda, THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD, Vol. III, Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, IL, Pgs. 141-143.)

In these pages Venerable Mary of Agreda conveys the idea that Our Lady reached bodily perfection at age 33, and by an extraordinary favor of God, never experienced the decline of aging, as the rest of us do, from that point onward as she advanced in years until her death. Jesus, too, reached that peak of bodily perfection at age 33. It was this Perfect Self He offered to the Father on Calvary precisely to redeem us from the decay of sin and restore us to the original grace God had fashioned for us from all eternity. Mary of Agreda tells how St. Joseph, believed to be Our Lady's senior by twenty or more years, was not given this special privilege to grow old without bodily decline and suffered the infirmity of his years of hard labor providing for and protecting Jesus and Mary through all the vicissitudes of life. Venerable Mary addresses that role reversal of our Blessed Lady who, with assistance from Jesus, took over Joseph's role of providing for them with her own long hours of spinning and weaving without ever allowing the anxiety of Martha to interfere with the contemplation of Mary. Can we not picture Jesus and Mary frequenting Joseph's bedside as they nursed and comforted him in his sufferings? On occasion, Our Lady, moved by Joseph's sufferings, asked her Divine Son for some relief for Joseph and it would be granted for a bit. At times Our Lady bid the holy angels, who are always at her command, to come and comfort him. Gladly the angels acquiesced, coming in human form to discourse with him, exciting him to ecstasy with their revel about divine things. On those occasions when Mary's labors were not sufficient to provide for them, Jesus would multiply the fruits of her labors or simply provide, but Mary, knowing the work of one's hands held great dignity in the eyes of God, for even the Son of God embraced it, insisted on performing it as the fulfillment of the duties of her life as Spouse of Joseph and Mother of Jesus, being in truth the perfect woman, the noble wife of which Solomon spoke in the Book of Proverbs.

Venerable Mary of Agreda speaks of Joseph's sufferings for over eight years and describes his death as it drew near. As his suffering increased, so did the solicitude of Mary and Jesus at his side. As the day of Joseph's parting drew near, Mary interceded with Her Divine Son on Joseph's behalf. Jesus answered her:

“My Mother, thy request is pleasing to me, and the merits of Joseph are acceptable in my eyes. I will now assist him and will assign him a place among the princes of my people, so high that he will be the admiration of the angels and will cause them and all men to break forth in highest praise. With none of the human born shall I do as with thy spouse.” [For 9 days Mary and Jesus never left Joseph's side.] By command of the Lord the holy angels, three times on each of the nine days, furnished celestial music, mixing their hymns of praise with the benedictions of the sick man. Moreover, their humble but most precious dwelling was filled with the sweetest fragrance and odors so wonderful that they comforted not only saint Joseph, but invigorated all the numerous persons who happened to come near the house.

One day before he died, being wholly inflamed with divine love on account of these blessings, he was wrapped in an ecstasy which lasted twenty-four hours. The Lord himself supplied strength for this miraculous intercourse. In this ecstasy he saw clearly the divine Essence, and, manifested therein, all that he had believed by faith: the incomprehensible Divinity, the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, the militant Church with all its Sacraments and mysteries. The Blessed Trinity commissioned and assigned him as the messenger of our Savior to the holy Patriarchs and Prophets of limbo; and commanded him to prepare them for their issuing forth from this bosom of Abraham to eternal rest and happiness. All this most Holy Mary saw reflected in the soul of her divine Son together with all the other mysteries, just as they had been made known to her beloved spouse, and She offered her sincerest thanks for all this to her Lord.

When saint Joseph issued from this ecstasy his face shone with wonderful splendor [As Moses' face had after his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai.] and his soul was entirely transformed by his vision of the essence of God. He asked his blessed Spouse to give him her benediction; but She requested her divine Son to bless him in her stead, which He did. Then the great Queen of humility, falling on her knees, besought saint Joseph to bless Her, as being her husband and head. Not without divine impulse the man of God fulfilled this request for the consolation of his most prudent Spouse. She kissed the hand with which he blessed Her and asked him to salute the just ones of limbo in her name. The most humble Joseph, sealing his life with an act of self-abasement, asked pardon of his heavenly Spouse for all his deficiencies in her service and love and begged Her to grant him her assistance and

intercession in this hour of passing away. The holy man also rendered humblest thanks to her Son for all the blessings of his life and especially for those received during this sickness.

The last words Joseph spoke to his Spouse were: “Blessed art Thou among all women and elect of all the creatures. Let angels and men praise Thee; let all the generations know, praise and exalt thy dignity; and may in Thee be known, adored and exalted the name of the Most High through all the coming ages; may He be eternally praised for having created Thee so pleasing in his eyes and in the sight of all the blessed spirits. I hope to enjoy thy sight in the heavenly fatherland.”

Then this man of God, turning toward Christ our Lord, in profoundest reverence, wished to kneel before Him. But the sweetest Jesus, coming near, received him in his arms, where, reclining his head upon them, Joseph said: “My highest Lord and God, Son of the eternal Father, Creator and Redeemer of the World, give thy blessing to thy servant and the work of thy hand; pardon, O most merciful King, the faults which I have committed in thy service and intercourse. I extol and magnify Thee and render eternal and heartfelt thanks to Thee for having, in thy ineffable condescension, chosen me to be the spouse of thy true Mother; let thy greatness and glory be my thanksgiving for all eternity.”
The Redeemer of the world gave him his benediction, saying: “My father, rest in peace and in the grace of my eternal Father and mine; and to the Prophets and Saints, who await thee in limbo, bring the joyful news of the approach of their redemption.” **At these words of Jesus, and reclining in his arms, the most fortunate saint Joseph expired and the Lord himself closed his eyes.** (Mystical City of God, Pgs. 151-153.)

Oh to die as St. Joseph did, in the arms of Jesus, expiring from the ardor of love! The point is well made that it was not Joseph’s physical sufferings that brought on his death, but that “holy violence” and fire of his ardent love that broke the bonds that held body and soul together and set his soul free. His mission on earth was completed and he must now go as Ambassador of the Trinity to those souls detained in limbo. The heavenly Father would henceforth direct the life of His beloved Son. The simple facts of Joseph’s life alone would proclaim him the model and patron of every person’s passing from this life to the next, hopefully, with some degree of the splendor in which he died. This little prayer ought always to be on our lips: **“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you.”**

Having heard this description of Saint Joseph’s last years and his death from Venerable Mary of Agreda, we can appreciate even more the words of Saint Joseph himself to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil in the apparitions of Our Lady of America®. This silent saint not only comes to Sister Mildred in his own right but is silent

no more; he speaks of his passion and the revelation that was given to him of the mysteries of God while he lived on earth in such sweet intimacy with Mary and Jesus. He speaks to Sister of the glory God wishes to bestow upon him as Virgin-Spouse of Mary and Virgin-Father of Jesus and he reveals to her the Secret of Secrets of the Divine Indwelling in one's soul. **While the visions of Mary of Agreda and of Sister Mildred Neuzil are *private revelations* and are *not part of the deposit of Faith* that is binding on our belief, they hold no contradiction to revealed truth and become a wondrous source of contemplation of the unfathomable grace that dwelt in that little home of Nazareth, God's paradise on earth, where the earthly trinity lived in deepest union with the Heavenly Trinity and modeled for us unprecedented purity, humility and holiness of life.** Scripture records no words spoken by Joseph, so the words of St. Joseph to Sister Mildred in this apparition of Our Lady of America® are so rare and precious and of the utmost importance to the care of our souls. Let us ponder these words of St. Joseph spoken to Sister again and again and feed on their power to invigorate our lives.

“Kneel down, my daughter, for what you will hear and what you will write will bring countless souls to a new way of life. Through you, small one, the Trinity desires to make known to souls Its desire to be adored, honored, and loved within the kingdom, the interior kingdom of their hearts.

I bring to souls the purity of my life and the obedience that crowned it. All fatherhood is blest in me whom the Eternal Father chose as His representative on earth, the Virgin-Father of His own Divine Son. Through me the Heavenly Father has blessed all fatherhood, and through me He continues and will continue to do so till the end of time. My spiritual fatherhood extends to all God's children, and together with my Virgin-Spouse I watch over them with great love and solicitude.

Fathers must come to me, small one, to learn obedience to authority: to the Church always, as the mouthpiece of God, to the laws of the country in which they live, insofar as these do not go against God and their neighbor. Mine was perfect obedience to the Divine Will, as it was shown and made known to me by the Jewish law and religion. To be careless in this is most displeasing to God and will be severely punished in the next world. Let fathers also imitate my great purity of life and the deep respect I held for my Immaculate Spouse. Let them be an example to their children and fellowmen, never willfully doing anything that would cause scandal among God's people

Fatherhood is from God, and it must take once again its rightful place among men.”

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pg. 27. Words spoken on the eve of his feast, March 18, 1958.)

St. Joseph showed Sister Mildred his most pure heart lying on a brown cross—a heart topped with flames, in the midst of which was a pure white lily. He said:

“Behold this pure heart so pleasing to Him Who made it. The cross, my little one, upon which my heart rests is the cross of the passion, which was ever present before me, causing me intense suffering. I desire souls to come to my heart that they may learn true union with the Divine Will.” (Diary, Pg. 28,)

This revelation of Joseph’s heart in 1958 echoes a locution with Sister in early October of 1956, about a week after Our Lady’s first appearance as Our Lady of America® in which St. Joseph spoke to Sister thus:

“It is true, my daughter, that *immediately* after my conception, I was, through the future merits of Jesus and because of my exceptional role of future Virgin-Father, cleansed from the stain of original sin. I was from that moment confirmed in grace and never had the slightest stain on my soul. This is my unique privilege among men.

My pure heart also was from the first moment of existence inflamed with love for God. *Immediately*, at the moment my soul was cleansed from original sin, grace was infused into it in such abundance that, excluding my holy spouse, I surpassed the holiness of the highest angel in the angelic choir.

My heart suffered with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mine was a silent suffering, for it was my special vocation to hide and shield, as long as God willed, the Virgin Mother and Son from the malice and hatred of men. 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. (Diary, Pg. 13.)

It was on his feast day, March 19, 1958 that St. Joseph spoke further of the great honor the Holy Trinity wishes to bestow upon him.

“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.”

(Diary, Pgs. 28-29.)

That March 19, 1958, Sister was also given that marvelous vision of the **glorious St. Joseph** which she describes as follows:

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. The cloak at times had, or seemed to have, the appearance of a brown, sometimes a purple, hue, or perhaps a slight blending of the two. The belt about his waist was of a gold color, as were his sandals.

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.”** (Diary, Pgs. 29-30.)

Before departing, Saint Joseph spoke to Sister about his special protection of the Pope and of the Church and stated that he had saved the Pope from the hands of his

enemies during the war. [Pope Pius XII during WWII.] He promised to come again, and did, on March 30, 1958, at which time he asked for the First Wednesday devotion in his honor and said the peace of the world had been placed in the hands of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Jesus and Mary also appeared and the three spoke of the sanctification of the family and of the Divine Indwelling. Joseph's words at this time follow:

“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.”

(Diary, Pg. 31.)

The month dedicated to the Holy Souls in purgatory leads naturally into the liturgical season of Advent, a time focused on deepening purification and conversion, a more complete dying to sin and self-will that enlarges the heart for a greater receptivity to the redeeming grace our Savior has won for us. If St. Joseph was delegated by the Trinity as their ambassador to the **souls detained in limbo** to announce to them that the completion of their redemption in Jesus was at hand, then surely he is also commissioned by the Trinity to announce to the **souls detained in purgatory** when the completion of **their** redemption in Jesus is at hand. Let us heed St. Joseph's call to honor him every First Wednesday of the month so we dare bind him to his word to conduct us safely into the presence of Jesus and Mary when we die. Should we need to be confined to purgatory for a time, may his intercession on our behalf hasten the time of our release and may he escort us, with Jesus and Mary, into the arms of the Heavenly Three. Could ever an angel escort us so well?

“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.”

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