SAINT JOSEPH
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By
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Preface

St. Joseph is still not properly known and understood. Devotion to him is widespread and enthusiastic, and there is a very large number of books that seek to minister to this devotion. But too often these writings are lacking in the spirit of critical scholarship or in theological competence, and one result of this is that others among the faithful are "put off" this devotion, dear to the Church though it be. The aim of this book is to put St. Joseph's place in the economy of salvation before both classes of the faithful.

In his fine work on religious art after the Council of Trent, published in French in 1932, Émile Mâle devotes a whole chapter to the iconography of St. Joseph. In this volume, as in its predecessors about other centuries, it is possible to follow through the history of religious art the gradual development of devotion to the foster father of Jesus (though M. Mâle does not expressly advert to this aspect of his subject). The history of this development and the pertinent theology does not seem yet to have been seriously set forth. In the following pages the author endeavors to give a first sketch of the subject, in the hope that it will be taken up by other writers, more learned and better provided with books.
and sources than himself. In any case, the present outline may help toward more critical and profitable reading of the many works about St. Joseph.

The first part of the book first appeared as an article in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* in 1953; it is reproduced with a few small changes. The second part consists of a number of extracts from writings and sermons about St. Joseph. In this edition of the work in English, some of the texts that figured in the French original have been omitted, and others substituted: these are indicated by an asterisk in the table of contents.

H. R.
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I

SAINT JOSEPH

by Henri Rondet, s.j.
St. Joseph

The Gospels

The place occupied by St. Joseph in the canonical gospels is only a small one; but it would be a mistake to infer that their relative silence is the measure of his part in God's designs and the economy of salvation. There are, in the gospels, events and sayings which were for a long time almost unheeded, until Christian piety, theological reflection and decisions of the Church's teaching authority uncovered the depths of their significance. The definitions of the dogma of Mary's conception free from original sin and, still more, of her bodily taking up into Heaven are there to bear witness to this. If then we do not begin by showing the theological richness of what St. Luke and St. Matthew tell us about St. Joseph, it is not in order to belittle him—very much the contrary—but through concern for using a right method. Holy Scripture has various depths; and we have always to come back to the Bible at the conclusion of a process of development, to see there more clearly what formerly had escaped our notice.

St. Matthew begins his gospel by giving the human
genealogy of the Son of God. This genealogy does not exactly agree with that given by St. Luke, and exegetes and theologians often try to reconcile the two. But the fact remains that both evangelists connect Jesus with the history of Israel through Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mother. Joseph is of kingly family, his town is David’s Bethlehem, though he lives at Nazareth (Luke 2:4). He is betrothed to Mary; and they have not yet come together when she conceives, through the power of the Holy Spirit: here Luke and Matthew are in agreement (Matt. 1:18,25; Luke 1:26-38). Accordingly, the human genealogy does not mean to suggest that Joseph was father of Jesus according to the flesh; but this linking of the Redeemer with His remote ancestors through a man who was simply His foster father and guardian is a fact of considerable weight. The time was to come when it would be taken into account in the assessment of St. Joseph’s significance.

The evangelists are reticent about Christ’s childhood: Luke tells us most. It is he, too, who records the circumstances of the birth of John the Baptist, through the direct intervention of Almighty God, and Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Some painters show St. Joseph accompanying Our Lady on this occasion; whether he did so or not we have no means of knowing. The journey to Bethlehem, in consequence of the imperial census

1 Jewish betrothal was a true marriage. Cf. M. J. Lagrange, L’évangile selon S. Matthieu (1923), p. 8.
decree, coincided with the time for Mary’s delivery. Again the evangelists give no details of the journey, except one fact that is emphasized: the travelers found there was no room for them in the inn. The God-man was therefore born in an animals’ stable. But the poverty of this entrance on to the scene of history was more than made up for by the appearing of angels and the consequent coming of shepherds to worship at the manger.

St. Luke passes on at once to the Child’s circumcision and His presentation in the Temple. Joseph is expressly mentioned in connection with the second of these events (Luke 2:33), but he is in the background: the Child and the Mother hold the center of the picture. Luke then summarizes Christ’s childhood and youth in a few words, dwelling only on a single major episode: the loss of the Boy and the finding of Him in the Temple (Luke 2:39-52). But here Mary and Joseph are more definitely associated, and Luke, “Mary’s evangelist,” records words from her lips that are of great importance for the theology of St. Joseph: “Behold, thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing.” “Thy father and I”—the words seem commonplace; but, notwithstanding Jesus’ reply referring to His Father in Heaven, they are seen to be of exceptional significance as regards Joseph. Luke says almost nothing of the years that followed, until the beginning of Christ’s public life; but once more he associates Joseph and Mary in
the statement that Jesus "went down with them and
came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." The plu-
ral, "them," is full of meaning.

These passages of St. Luke do not enable us to get
any psychological picture of Joseph, still less to learn
anything of his personal appearance or manner. St. Mat-
thew, despite his consistence, says more. Like Luke, he
emphasizes Christ's virginal conception and birth: Jo-
seph is not His father. But Joseph appears clearly as the
head of the Holy Family. He is a just man, a God-fear-
ing man; he has, too, a sensitive love for her who is his
bride: he is afraid of bringing shame on her, and con-
siders putting her away in private (Matt. 1:19). When
an angel reassures him and asks him to co-operate with
God's purpose, he enters resolutely on that difficult path.
Matthew is the only evangelist to record the adoration
of the Wise Men at Bethlehem, but he does not men-
tion Joseph in connection with it: he simply says that
"they found the Child, with Mary His mother . . ."
(Matt. 2:11). St. Joseph nevertheless figures as the per-
son who in the first place is responsible for Jesus' safety.
It is to him that the warning angel appears; he com-
mands and is obeyed (Matt. 2:13-4). There are no par-
ticulars of this journey into Egypt, only a rough indi-
cation of the length of time that was spent there. The
return is like the flight: the same spirit of obedience to
God on Joseph's part, the same exercise of authority
over his family. He shows no hesitation; but if his obe-
dience is supernatural it is also rational: he weighs up the danger of settling in Judea (Matt. 2:22), and makes his decision.

Such is the picture of St. Joseph that we find in the Bible. It is indicated with extreme moderation, but the person who emerges is very real; there is nothing fanciful or contrived. Joseph is a familiar figure, a well-known workman. He does not appear again in the gospel narratives, but he is referred to: it is said of Jesus: “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (Luke 4:22); “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matt. 13:54; cf. Mark 6:3); “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” (John 6:42; cf. 1:45).

The form of this last question can be understood as implying that Joseph was still alive when Jesus began His apostolic ministry; but the evangelists are silent on the point, and one is not bound to draw this conclusion. The opinion that favors Joseph’s death before the beginning of Christ’s public life is not out of accord with what the gospels say. They simply do not tell us when or how he died.

We indeed would give much to know more about Joseph, to find some agraphon, some words of this silent man, preserved in a reliable tradition. However, we have to be satisfied with these few indications, from which later teaching and devotion were to develop.

* [For St. Joseph’s trade, see below, pp. 236-9. St. Justin (d.c.165) is an early witness to the tradition that translates tekton as carpenter. Trans.]
Apocryphal Writings

During the first Christian centuries St. Joseph was lost sight of in the shining radiance of Christ the Redeemer. There is nothing surprising about that. Public veneration of the Mother of God herself began relatively late; only from the fourth century did she begin to take precedence in the Church’s crown of Apostles and martyrs. But the people’s piety consorted ill with the silence of the gospels about Christ’s childhood; and so sooner or later there appeared, as footnotes to the gospels, so to speak, other writings, which the Church properly rejects as fictitious.

The basis of one of these apocryphal documents, the so-called Protevangelium of James, goes back to the second century, and St. Joseph has a considerable part in it. The author, who was remarkably ignorant of Jewish customs, professes to give an account of Mary’s life up to the massacre of the Innocents. He says her parents were called Joachim and Anne, he tells us of her birth by divine promise after her parents had long been childless, he alleges that her childhood was spent in the Temple, and he describes her betrothal there to Joseph. According to this story, Joseph was chosen in consequence of a miracle. The widowers among the people, each carrying a rod or staff, are assembled before the high priest, and out of Joseph’s rod there flies a dove; and so he is selected. But
he at once protests, saying, "I am an old man, and I have children already." From this tale arose the belief that Joseph was a widower, and his supposed children were invoked to explain the gospel references to Jesus' brethren. Some Fathers of the Church accepted this explanation, but St. Jerome vigorously opposed it and it did not survive. But the idea that Joseph was an old man when he married Our Lady was for long accepted among the people and even by the learned, whom we shall see reacting against this view in the sixteenth century.

The *Protevangelium of James* embroiders the themes of the Annunciation and Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and expatiates on Joseph's agony of mind when he learns that Mary is with child. The high priest intervenes and tests them both with the "water of ordeal," through which they are vindicated. And so the story goes on: details are added to the journey from Nazareth and the birth in the cave at Bethlehem, and to add to the proof of Mary's virginity the notorious tale of the midwife is concocted. More than one of the details have found their way into iconography, for instance, the donkey on which Mary rode from Nazareth, Joseph leading it by the bridle. Throughout this romantic narrative Joseph is shown as an upright man, beloved of God, having as it were a fatherly relation to his wife; but this is all a commonplace, and wherever the authentic gospels are departed from, the result is not an improvement.
Later on we shall find other anonymous writers seeking to complete this fiction or rewriting it.

**Tradition**

In the writings of the Fathers mention of St. Joseph is practically confined to references when dealing with Christ's childhood. Various reasons were advanced for Mary having a husband at all. Attempts were made to conciliate the genealogies given respectively by St. Luke and St. Matthew, certain divergences being explained by the Jewish law of levirate, and it was endeavored to prove that Christ's descent from David was through His mother. But there was more important progress in the safeguarding and making explicit of traditional data; and, indirectly, Joseph's lifelong virginity was affirmed.

During the fourth century certain heretics, Helvidius, Bonosus, Jovinian, attacked Christian maidenhood in the greatest of its examples, Mary. According to them, she had other children after the birth of Jesus, her first born; His brethren, of whom the gospels speak, were, they said, sons of Mary and Joseph. The counterattack was not slow in coming. St. Ambrose, St. Jerome and St. Augustine were soon upholding the lifelong virginity of the Mother of God, and the Church herself intervened. This also gave an added luster to Joseph's chastity in wedlock. Furthermore, the attack by innovators provided an occasion

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* [The law by which in certain circumstances a man had to marry his brother's widow. Cf. Deut. 25:5-10; Matt. 22:23-5. Trans.]
for putting right the statement about Joseph's first marriage made by the *Protevangelium* of James, which had been rashly accepted by Origen, St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Epiphanius. There is no foundation in Holy Scripture for the notion that St. Joseph had children by a previous marriage. He was a virgin, he married a virgin, and both of them always remained virgin.

This maiden marriage sets certain problems of exegesis and theology. Joseph is called the father of Jesus in the Bible. In what sense? Obviously there is no question of fatherhood according to the flesh. Commenting on St. Luke, St. Ambrose simply says that the evangelist is adapting himself to human language, which judges by appearances. But Chrysostom, anticipating Bossuet, points out penetratingly that, save bodily generation, everything that makes a father a father pertains to Joseph, fosterer, guardian and teacher of the Son of God.\footnote{See below, p. 56.} St. Augustine makes of the virginal union a main point in his theology of marriage. This marriage, that was at the same time both virginal and fruitful, is as it were the superhuman ideal toward which God leads the human family. Joseph was all the more father in that his fatherhood was grounded in charity.

There is there a seedplot of future developments. What St. Augustine says about the relations between Mary and the Church, each maiden and each mother,
contains the germ of the idea that Joseph, guardian of Mary and of Jesus, needs must be the guardian of the Church and of her children, the brethren of Jesus. But of this, St. Augustine himself did not dream; for him, as for all his contemporaries, Joseph was still only a lesser figure, lost in the radiance of Jesus and of His mother. What is more, there were many holy persons to take precedence of him—John the Baptist, forerunner of Christ, Peter and Paul, foundations of the Church, Stephen the first martyr, whose bones had then recently been found, and all the martyrs who were revered in so many churches. When preachers and teachers spoke of the first Joseph, steward of Pharaoh’s household and savior of his people, he was considered simply as a type foreshadowing Jesus Christ; nobody thought of associating him with his namesake, the second Joseph.

**Popular Legends**

Popular piety was not able to remain content with the reticence of the gospels; people wanted to hear all about Christ’s childhood and His mother’s life, and imagination ran riot. The apocryphal stories that so vexed St. Jerome were very acceptable to credulous minds. The *Protevangelium of James* was worked over, and combined with other narratives. The *Gospel of the Infancy* amplifies the account of the miraculous betrothal, and goes on where “James” left off, with an account of the flight
Popular Legends

into Egypt. Here the donkey appears again, and the refugees meet with miracles at every step, such as that of the palm tree that bends down to enable Mary to gather dates. It is the same when they return to Nazareth, when, for instance, the divine Child gives life to birds modeled in clay. We are a long way from the simplicity and dignity of the true gospels. Joseph tries to teach his trade to the prodigious Child, who knows more about it than he does and teaches him instead. But Joseph is not at the center of these stories: they are chiefly concerned with the youthful Jesus and with Mary.

Toward the end of the patristic age, there was a spate of legendary tales about Our Lady’s death and bodily taking up into Heaven (these are not, of course, the origin of belief in the Assumption, but they have a place in the development of the history of the dogma); it is perhaps with this Marian cycle that there was associated a romance about St. Joseph, called the History of Joseph the Carpenter. This was put forward as being related by Jesus himself. It states that Joseph married at the age of forty, that his first wife died, that he married Mary when he was eighty-nine, and that death took him at one hundred and eleven. We are shown Jesus and Mary present at his last hours, together with his sons by his first marriage, and we see his soul carried to Heaven by angels. The history of such a document is difficult to trace, but it seems to have been very popular and influential in the East. During the sixteenth century it reappeared in the
West, in a Latin translation, and was the source of more than one picture representing St. Joseph’s death.

The *Nativity of Mary* is later still, appearing in the Carolingian age. It makes some attempt to rid previous writings of their more offensive or puerile elements; for example, the episode of the midwife is retained from “James,” but in a more discreet form. But Joseph still remains a shadowy figure.

### Medieval Art

*These popular tales are an expression of a devotion that they nourished and by which they were inspired, but in spite of it public veneration of St. Joseph was late, even in the East. The Byzantines had, and have, on the Sunday before Christmas, a commemoration of all the righteous fathers of the Old Covenant, from Adam to St. Joseph, and on the Sunday after Christmas one of King David, St. Joseph and St. James, “the brother of the Lord.” In the West, the oldest known explicit mention of St. Joseph in a martyrology is not till the eighth century.*

In Byzantine frescoes the figure of Joseph was sometimes associated with that of Mary; but whereas in catacomb paintings he was shown as a beardless young man, he was now represented as a venerable ancient. Here we

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6 [Egypt seems to have been the home of the earliest cult of St. Joseph. For the first references to him in Western martyrologies, references that do not imply a liturgical feast, see Father P. Grosjean, “Notes d’hagiographie celtique,” *Analecta Bollandiana* (1954), Vol. LXXII, No. 26. *Trans.*]
see an effect of popular legends. In the earlier examples of romanesque art, which was dominated by Eastern influence, he figures in representations of the Nativity. He is generally sitting beside Mary, who has just given birth, his head resting on his hand, lost in thought. The midwives of legend are there too. Joseph does not always appear in the adoration of the Magi. On the porch of the church at Moissac in France, and again at Charité-sur-Loire, he is shown leading the donkey that is carrying Mary and the Child into Egypt; he is a bald, bearded old man. Gradually Eastern iconography gave way before new influences: the midwives disappear from the Nativity, for instance, but St. Joseph still remains a secondary personage. The same holds good in the Christmas mystery plays of this period: the emphasis is on Mary and the Child, the shepherds from the fields and the wise men from afar. Painters and carvers knew well enough that Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus, and so they showed his descent, not by means of the genealogies, but by the Jesse tree, which ends with Jesus as the son of the Virgin. The storied doors of many great churches include plenty of biblical figures, but St. Joseph has no special place among them; the Joseph of the book of Genesis is not forgotten however: he is one of the types of Christ.

At this time the lives of the saints played a big part in everyday affairs. Feast days marked the recurring seasons of the year, and the protection of holy men and women
was invoked on man’s various trades, professions and occupations. Soon the *Golden Legend* would be written and published to familiarize people with their lives and traditions. But of which saints was there question? For the most part, the Apostles, cornerstones of the worldwide Church, and local saints who were the heroes of particular churches. St. Joseph seems to have had no place in this mighty procession. For that matter, what place should have been given him? The question was to be put later on, and the answer was not easily to be found.

Meanwhile, Joseph continued to remain in the background, overshadowed by the Holy Child and Mary in those few scenes in which he figured. The old legend of the betrothal came to life again in the stained-glass windows of Paris, of Chartres, of Le Mans—Joseph’s rod and the dove are there to prove it. Such representations as the adoration of the Magi carved round the choir of the cathedral of Notre Dame, in Paris, continued to make Joseph a placid old man; he leans on his staff, unexcitedly watching the wonderful spectacle. But, in the same series of carvings, the flight into Egypt shows him as head of the family: he is fairly old, but he steps out resolutely, leading Mary’s donkey. The impression of movement given by this carved stone can be taken as a symbol of the change that would come about at the end of the Middle Ages. But, for the present, age-long tradition still
obscures the truth about St. Joseph; the *Protevangelium of James* still exercises its influence.

*Religious Writers*

*Traditions live* in the consciousness of artists as they do in the consciousness of other men; but the good artist is concerned for sound doctrine. What then do the learned think? St. John Damascene (d.c. 749) praised Joseph, but it was only in passing in the course of a sermon on the birth of Mary.⁶ We have to come down to the twelfth century to find any significant texts in the West.⁷

St. Bernard began to draw religious attention to St. Joseph in his homilies on the Annunciation. Joseph is the good and faithful servant who takes care of what is entrusted to him; his very name (Joseph — increase) is a symbol of his ever-growing holiness: *Joseph, filius accrescens*; the faithfulness and chastity of the first Joseph were a figure of the virtues of the Virgin’s husband. But we must not be misled by such words: St. Bernard was not inviting the faithful to venerate Joseph or to pray to him. It is not even certain that what he said had any influence on the work of medieval artists.

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⁶ According to the Roman Breviary. The present writer has not been able to verify the authenticity of the homily.

Still, devotion to the mysteries of Christ’s childhood naturally leads to Joseph. St. Gertrude, who loved to meditate on Our Lord’s manhood, relates in the book of her revelations how one day in choir she saw the angels and the blessed honoring the Annunciation and praising the Mother of God: “Every time that St. Joseph, husband of the Holy Virgin, was named, the blessed bowed low in honor, and testified by the peace and happiness of their expression that they rejoiced with him in his excellence and dignity.” But too much must not be made of this text, since it stands alone in St. Gertrude’s writings.

While he had, of course, a sensitive devotion to the Christmas mystery, St. Francis of Assisi was above all the singer of the Passion; he does not seem to have given much thought to St. Joseph. But he had an indirect influence on the Pseudo-Bonaventure, who wrote Meditations on the Life of Christ. This distant successor of the writers of the apocrypha lavishly embroidered the gospel themes, but with effective detail, inspired by sincere religious enthusiasm. Putting aside wonders in favor of likelihood, he shows Joseph the carpenter anxiously trying to make the lodging of the Son of God at Bethlehem more habitable; he puts up a partition, and is grieved that he cannot do all that ought to be done. He goes to the Temple with Mary and the Child, pays the five shekels required for the redeeming of the first-born, and hands Mary the two
pigeons for her purification offering. Pseudo-Bonaventure explains why Joseph rather than Mary was warned in sleep concerning the divine purposes, and remarks that he was very great in God’s eyes. The annotations are directed more toward personal psychology than toward giving a picture of times and places. The flight into Egypt provides an occasion for recalling Joseph’s great age, and this is mentioned at least twice. The account of the journey is sober; all apocryphal legends are cut out, except the overturning of the idols, which is referred to a prophecy of Isaias (Isa. 19:1). During the stay in Egypt attention is concentrated on Jesus and Mary, the hardness of their condition and their trust in Providence; little is said of Joseph here, but his trade is again recalled, and the reader is invited to kneel and receive the blessing of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This last detail, important for the history of devotion to St. Joseph, occurs again: reverence is made to him in the course of a meditation on the return from Egypt.

Pseudo-Bonaventure uses all his skill in retelling St. Luke’s passage on the youth of Jesus. The Boy disappears; Mary questions her husband, and they set off in search of Him, Mary in front, Joseph following her at a little distance. The ensuing years are made the occasion of discreet comment, such as “The aged Joseph earned what he could by his trade of carpenter.” He is represented as being still alive when Jesus took leave of His mother be-
before beginning His public ministry; and after the forty
days in the wilderness Jesus revisits His parents. That
is the last mention of St. Joseph in the book.8

These meditations, written during the thirteenth cen-
tury and touched up from time to time afterward, were
the beginnings of a whole religious literature, of which
Ludolf the Carthusian (d. 1378) was one of the chief
exponents. Like the Pseudo-Bonaventure, Ludolf in his
Life of Christ supplemented the gospels by drawing on
apocryphal sources as well as on his own imagination, but
in doing so he used tact and Christian understanding.
He did more than anybody else to prepare the way for
a flowering of devotion to St. Joseph.

These spiritual writers exercised an influence on the
artists of the fifteenth century. The mystery and miracle
plays of that age gave Joseph an active part: he was a
white-bearded old man, bustling about here and there,
gathering wood, heating water. Painters and sculptors
took over such lively details with both hands. Writers of
meditations concentrated on the psychology of the sacred
characters, and the artists gave them flesh and blood:
Joseph came to life. Still presented as an aged man, yes;
but at the same time he was a family man, with a son to
bring up, earning his livelihood by carpentering. The

8 [These Meditationes Vitae Christi were freely translated into English
about 1415 by Nicholas Love, and given the title The Mirour of the
Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ. For excerpts, see below, pp. 65-6. Nicholas Love
was prior of the charterhouse of Mountgrece in Yorkshire, the monastery
to which the famous Book of Margery Kempe, rediscovered in 1934, once
belonged. Trans.]
artist saw him as a contemporary, almost like a traveling workman who took his family around with him. Everything would seem to point to St. Joseph as a likely patron saint for a trade guild or brotherhood.

But the time was not yet. At this close of the Middle Ages, when the saints ceased to be hieratic and became patterns for a trade or a corporation, when mothers of children were venerating St. Anne, Joseph still remained in the background, still overshadowed. Few echoes of St. Bernard are to be found in the writings of the great thirteenth-century teachers. St. Albert the Great indeed devoted a eulogy to Joseph; but St. Thomas Aquinas, for whom the measure of a person’s holiness depends on the part given him by God in the economy of salvation, did not draw any conclusions from this principle where Joseph was concerned. St. Thomas gave precedence, after the Blessed Virgin, to the Apostles. We cannot, of course, deduce any certainty about the inner mind of Aquinas from his omission of Mary’s husband, but it has to be recorded as evidence for an epoch. St. Joseph was hardly thought of except in relation to Mary’s marriage and Christ’s virginal conception. St. Thomas shows the fittingness of this last, and follows St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Jerome in giving reasons for the Blessed Virgin having a husband; in setting out how this maiden marriage was a true marriage he follows St. Augustine. With Chrysostom, and with yet more thoroughness, he points out that, though Joseph was not Jesus’ physical
father, nevertheless he was responsible for His human up-
bringing. That, St. Thomas declares, is enough to consti-
tute the *bonum prolis* which must be present in every
marriage.

But early in the fifteenth century several choice spirits
suddenly drew attention to Joseph, and opened the way
for his appearance in the history of devotion and liturgy.

**Fifteenth-Century Theological Piety**

In Italy, that enthusiastic preacher of the Name of
Jesus, the Franciscan, St. Bernardino of Siena, was also
a spokesman for St. Joseph. Today it is hardly possible to
recapture the flavor of this preaching: the sermon, or
series of sermons, that survives gives only an outline,
schematized in scholastic fashion; but throughout the
pages we find a deep and loving piety. At last St. Bernard
had found a worthy successor. Bernardino examines the
special privileges of this man Joseph, grace-filled on ac-
count of his close association with the Mother of the
Redeemer and his fatherly relations with her Son. He
begins by recalling the principle laid down by St.
Thomas: God gives grace and privilege to holy people in
proportion to the earthly mission that He entrusts to
them. Like Mary, Joseph was of kingly stock; he was
really her husband, and in a certain sense he was Jesus’
father: with both he lived on terms of closest intimacy.
What the Church owes to the Blessed Virgin is incalculable; after her, it is Joseph who has the biggest claims on our gratitude. He is the key of the Old Testament, prefigured therein by the first Joseph, who gave food to the starving people as the second Joseph gives them the bread of life. His glory is awe-inspiring, and in St. Bernardino’s opinion it may be believed that he, like Mary, was taken up into Heaven in body as well as soul. In passing, the preacher explains why the Church’s discovery of St. Joseph’s greatness was so long delayed.

This sermon was an important event. On the feast of the Solemnity of St. Joseph the Church uses passages from it (not in their original order) among the lessons at Matins; but doubtless the living words of St. Bernardino were even more influential with his Italian hearers.

In Spain another great preacher, St. Vincent Ferrer, was also deeply devoted to St. Joseph. But, if the devotion was to make real headway, it was needful that professional theologians should uphold it with their learning. Here two great names must be mentioned: Cardinal Pierre d’Ailly, archbishop of Cambrai, and Jean Gerson, chancellor of Notre Dame and of the university at Paris. In 1409 the first of these wrote a whole treatise on the honor due to St. Joseph, De duodecim honoribus sancti Joseph. In this work, loving piety gave place to reasoned and rather dry theology. But piety and theology sometimes go together, and Gerson combined them. He was

*See below, pp. 70-4.*
the great introducer and supporter of devotion to St. Joseph. Like Bernardino of Siena he strongly maintained Joseph’s pre-eminence, even going so far as to allow that he was sanctified in his mother’s womb, an idea that was to be passionately debated. But Gerson went further than simply sounding the saint’s praises: he asked most earnestly that a feast should be established in his honor.

With this in view, Gerson appealed to the canons of Chartres cathedral. One of them had asked in his will that every year a solemn commemoration of St. Joseph should be made on the anniversary of his (the canon’s) death. Gerson proposed that the feast should be of the betrothall of Mary with Joseph, and he composed an office for it. In 1413 he wrote to the Duc de Berry asking him to work for such a feast:

When I meditate on the grandeur and dignity of St. Joseph, son of David, true virginal bridegroom of that most pure maiden, Our Lady St. Mary, according to the witness of the gospels; and when I ask myself when and how this holy marriage could be commemorated, honored and celebrated by means of a feast, I often think, most noble and religious prince . . . that your influence might further such a religious project. . . . I ask it of you, shall I say in the name of Joseph, virgin husband and faithful protector of the Virgin of virgins, guardian of the divine Child, whom he so often caressed. . . .

In 1416 Gerson gave a famous address at the general Council of Constance.¹⁰ The conciliar fathers listened

¹⁰ See below, pp. 67-9.
respectfully to his appeal for the institution of a special solemnity to honor St. Joseph. The Church was torn by schism; and it seemed to him that only by such spiritual means could peace and unity be restored: through Joseph’s advocacy Christians would return to the obedience of a single chief bishop and true pope. Sixty-five years were to go by before Gerson’s appeal was acted on; but he had done great service to St. Joseph’s cause.

**Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

Theological treatises and works of devotion on St. Joseph multiplied during the sixteenth century. The Franciscan Christopher de Cheffontaines in 1578 wrote in defense of his virginity against new questioners of it. In his *Life of St. Joseph*, published in Italian in 1577, Giovanni Battista de Lectis d’Orlonia struck a new note. Joseph, he tells us, was even more blessed than Holy Simeon (Luke 2:28), for he held the Child Jesus in his arms not once but many times. He was so noble and exalted that he seems to Giovanni de Lectis greater than Abraham, Isaac and David. Did not he who saved the divine Child from Herod’s wrath deserve the civic crown? 11 Such ideas were taken up by artists and used in their pictures.

But there is one writer at this time who must be very

11 [In ancient Rome, the garland bestowed on one who saved the life of a citizen in war. *Trans.*]
specially mentioned, and that is the Milanese Dominican named Isidore Isolani, one of the first opponents of Luther. He wrote the first great treatise devoted to St. Joseph. It was published in 1522 and was dedicated to Pope Adrian VI, whom the author implored to institute a feast of St. Joseph for the whole Church. In this *Summa de donis sancti Joseph*²² several of Gerson’s ideas appear again, notably that of Joseph’s sanctification in his mother’s womb; and he is presented as being man’s most powerful intercessor after the Blessed Virgin. The eulogy is sometimes excessive. To attribute very great holiness to Joseph was a step in the right direction; but was it necessary to make him a being so exalted in his earthly life that he ceases to be the small-town carpenter we find in the gospels? Admittedly with a certain reserve, Isidore Isolani attributes extraordinary learning to him. The Dominican mixed some less convincing things with his piety and theological reflections; he had had the good—or rather, the ill—fortune to come across a Latin translation of a Hebrew version of the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*; we have seen what that document is worth. Nevertheless, Father Isidore had done a fine work, and the time would come when a prophetic vision in his book would be carried out by Pope Pius IX almost to the letter.

The devotion was making headway in various religious

²² The treatise was republished in Rome in 1887, and, with a French translation, at Avignon in 1861.
orders. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius refers to St. Joseph with sobriety, in the manner of Pseudo-Bonaventure or Ludolf the Carthusian. Early in the seventeenth century Father Peter Coton dedicated a church in the saint’s honor at Lyons, and later in the century other Jesuits celebrated his renown. Such, for example, were Father Stephen Binet in *Tableau des divines faveurs accordées à S. Joseph* (*A Picture of the Divine Favors to St. Joseph*), and Father Paul de Barry, in *La dévotion à S. Joseph; le plus aymé et le plus aymable de tous les Saincts, après Jésus et Marie* (*Devotion to St. Joseph, the Kindest and Most Beloved of Holy People after Jesus and Mary*). That title shows what was happening; St. John the Baptist and the Apostles were being given a lower place. A better-known book was Father Jean Jacquinot’s *La gloire de S. Joseph représentée dans ses principales grandeurs* (*St. Joseph’s Glory Shown in His Chief Dignities*), published in 1644. These writers all depend more or less on the great theological work of Father Morales, *In cap. I Matthaei . . . libri quinque* (Lyons, 1614), in the course of which opinions on a number of points touching Joseph are examined. Henceforward, devotion to St. Joseph in the Society of Jesus was associated with Marian devotion.

Among the Carmelites, who have done so much in this connection, one name dominates all the rest, that of St. Teresa of Avila. At the age of twenty-six she was cured of

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13 See below, p. 145.
a serious illness after praying to St. Joseph, and she became an enthusiastic advocate of devotion to him; she declared that those who invoke his aid receive not only temporal good things but, better still, the gift of prayer. Teresa dedicated her first convent at Avila in Joseph’s name, and two thirds of her other foundations had the same dedication. The whole Carmelite order had a like enthusiasm, and special mention must be made of the book on St. Joseph written by Father Jerome Gracián, a Spanish friar and St. Teresa’s director. It was soon translated into French and Italian, and it became an inspiration to artists in the Latin countries; several familiar details of the divine Child’s relations with His foster father were drawn from it. Another of Teresa’s friends, this time a Franciscan, St. Peter of Alcantara, also did much to spread the devotion: in 1561 he put his reformed congregation of Friars Minor under St. Joseph’s protection.

With St. Teresa must be joined a name equally important in the history of devotion to Joseph, that of St. Francis de Sales. Teresa was not a theologian, but she based her devotion neither on apocryphal details nor on abstract reasoning; Francis de Sales, on the other hand, was an accredited teacher, but he was equally plain and positive. He had a very strong personal veneration for St. Joseph; his was the only picture in his breviary; he always fasted on bread and water on the eve of March 19, and preached on the feast day. He was always ready to talk

14 See below, pp. 75-7.
about Joseph, and the nineteenth of his spiritual conferences is expressly concerned with him;\textsuperscript{15} the famous *Treatise on the Love of God* is dedicated to Mary and Joseph.

The teaching that underlies the bishop’s piety is clear and solid. The significance of a person, he says, depends on the mission that God entrusts to him, and the Holy Family was a sort of trinity on earth. But the correlative of unusual gifts is unusual humbleness, and Joseph’s humility and submission to God’s will were greater than in any other creature, except Mary. His death, like hers, was a dying of love; and Francis de Sales, like Bernardino of Siena, Gerson and Vincent Ferrer before him, believed that Joseph had like her the privilege of going up bodily to Heaven. It is unnecessary to add that St. Jeanne de Chantal and her spiritual daughters shared the veneration of St. Francis de Sales for him who was bridegroom of Our Lady of the Visitation.

Other religious orders moved in the same direction. Among the Friars Preachers, the work of Isidore Isolani has been mentioned above; Thomas Cajetan, who became master general in 1509, added St. Joseph’s feast to the calendar of the order. Among the Oratorians, Father William Gibieuf declared that one ought not to be in a hurry to prefer any other saint before the glorious St. Joseph. The French School agreed with him. Monsieur Olier put his seminary of Saint-Sulpice under Joseph’s

\textsuperscript{15} See below, pp. 78-94.
protection, and St. Vincent de Paul did the same for his Congregation of the Mission.

All this provides the setting for Bishop Bossuet’s famous panegyrics. The two sermons that he devoted to Joseph are among the finest things ever written in his praise. Bossuet dilates on the saint’s virtues in detail, his humility, his purity, his faith that surpassed the faith of Abraham; like “the incomparable St. Augustine” and the medieval teachers, he stresses the virginal character of the marriage with Mary; like Chrysostom, he examines Joseph’s spiritual fatherhood with respect to the Son of God. Bossuet compares Joseph with the Apostles, but without trying to give him pre-eminence over them. Their vocations were different: the Apostles were chosen to reveal the Son of God, but Joseph was called to hide Him. Joseph’s true greatness lay in his own hidden life. These sermons are a work of love, but a reasonable and moderate work as well: there is no extravagance, no use is made of apocryphal matter. With St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales, Bossuet was one of those who was most successful in making known what manner of man Christ’s foster father really was.

Study of contemporary iconography gives further significance to these sermons. The critical spirit had appeared on the scene with the Renaissance, and there were bishops and theologians at the Council of Trent who

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18 See below, pp. 95-126, 127-140. The third sermon, of 1659, is the same as that of 1656, with a new beginning and end.
were not wanting in it. Many distinguished humanists were on their guard against unreliable legends, and Protestant attacks had encouraged a desire to rid religious art of conventions that were difficult to defend. So our old friend the donkey disappeared from pictures of the flight into Egypt. But there were more important improvements than that to be made. One of them was the question of Joseph’s age, which was taken up by scholars and artists alike. Traditionally he was a hoary-headed old man—we have seen where that notion originated. It was now called in question. St. Peter Canisius thought that the long-standing beliefs of the faithful ought not to be upset; but theologians less actively engaged in pastoral work wanted to get at the truth. Salmeron, Cardinal Toledo (Toletus) and Suarez himself were in favor of a drastic change of mind. Morales, who collected and discussed the various views, records that the way of representing St. Joseph had been altered. He was no longer shown as an octogenarian charged with the safeguarding of the Virgin Mother’s purity, but as a relatively young man. In her book of revelations, *La mistica ciudad de Dios* (*The Mystic City of God*), Mary of Agreda popularized the idea that he was thirty years old when he married Mary.

This iconographical change was more important than appears at first sight. At the same time as Christian piety was discovering and exalting St. Joseph, it was coming back to the text of the gospels: it was the Carpenter of
Nazareth who was being found again. In their pictures of the betrothal of the Blessed Virgin, Raphael and Perugino continued in the apocryphal tradition; but this was set aside by what was in effect a new *Golden Legend*, the Jesuit Ribadeneyra’s *Flos sanctorum* (Madrid, 1599-1601), a Lives of the Saints that became popular in many countries: and Murillo, the great painter of St. Joseph, brought back the simplicity of the workshop. Henceforth Joseph was studied for his own sake, as a man like ourselves, who nevertheless always lived in closest intercourse with God. This humanization and glorification of the saint has perhaps never been more clearly expressed than in the recently discovered picture by a French painter of the *grand siècle*, George de La Tour.

But art always depends on spiritual writers and theologians. We have referred to St. Joseph’s place in devotional books; it was for a time considerable in theological works too. One name must suffice here, that of Francis Suarez. Following his master St. Thomas, Suarez did not stop at a few brief indications when he was dealing with the mysteries of Christ’s life. He integrated the teaching of Gerson and his fellows with theological knowledge, but not uncritically. Taking his stand on the principle that a holy man’s greatness depends on his mission, he reached the conclusion that St. Joseph surpassed the Apostles, but he did not condemn the contrary opinion. He did not think that Joseph had been sanctified in his mother’s womb; on the other hand, Suarez main-
tained his bodily assumption into Heaven, a matter that was much discussed among theologians at that time.

**St. Joseph’s Feast**

Devotion and theology, however, can settle nothing independently of the Church’s teaching authority. Gerson had asked for a feast of St. Joseph. He was only half listened to; but the initiative was taken locally in a number of places, and in 1481 Pope Sixtus IV granted the feast. It was allocated to March 19 and was of simple rank; Innocent VIII raised it to a double, and in 1621 Gregory XV made it a holyday of obligation. Three years later Urban VIII reissued the decree, which had not been everywhere acted on. Clement X raised the rank of the feast to a double of the second class in 1670, and in 1714 Clement XI issued a new office, the one in the Roman Breviary today. Observing the mind of the Church and the trend of popular sentiment, kings and princes put their dominions under St. Joseph’s protection. France was thus consecrated by King Louis XIV at the instance of Anne of Austria. This took place on March 19, 1661, and it was on that occasion that Bossuet preached the second of his panegyrics on the saint; he ends it by recalling that the initiative had come from the queen, who was present at the sermon.

St. Joseph, who had been so long neglected, was at last celebrated throughout the Church. But this tardy admis-
sion to the liturgy brought some perplexing and delicate problems in its train. Ought Joseph to be named in the canon of the Mass, or in the litany of the Saints? And if so, where was the right place for him? Before the Apostles, or after? Before John the Baptist, or after? In the eighteenth century there was lively controversy about these matters, which was the occasion of the writing of a wise and learned dissertation on the historical and theological considerations involved. This was in the fourth book of the famous work on beatification and canonization by Prosper Lambertini, later to be Pope Benedict XIV. In this work Cardinal Lambertini refused to recognize any sanctification in utero matris to St. Joseph, but at the same time he showed that, in view of his outstanding place in God’s purposes, Joseph cannot be reckoned simply as the head of the confessors: he comes before the Apostles and the martyrs. Accordingly Pope Benedict XIII “split the difference,” and in 1726 added St. Joseph’s name to the litany of the Saints immediately after St. John the Baptist. This authoritative decision can be interpreted in different ways, accordingly as one looks at it as a refusal to put Joseph before the Forerunner or as an immense step forward in the recognition of St. Joseph’s greatness. 17

The eighteenth century saw the appearance of many writings, learned or popular, on the cult of St. Joseph.

We may mention a collective work by members of the order of the Servants of Mary, *Dissertatio historico-scriptoristica de S. Joseph* (1750); dissertations (1758) by Sedlmayer; and another by Dom Calmet (*Opera*, vol. vii, 1774). Among the outstanding devotees of the saint were St. Leonard of Port Maurice (d. 1751) and St. Alphonsus Liguori (d. 1787).

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**Modern Developments**

The revolutionary storm at the end of the eighteenth century slowed up developments in the veneration of St. Joseph, but they began again during the nineteenth. Some people, indeed, went too far, and in 1868 a certain prayer to St. Joseph had to be condemned and forbidden because it was too close an imitation of the Hail Mary. The Holy See, whose office is to safeguard true religion, was vigilant both in the repressing of exaggeration and the encouraging of sound devotion. It followed up the tendency which had led rulers to put their countries under Joseph’s protection, and a second feast, the Solemnity of St. Joseph as protector, was granted to many dioceses and religious orders. In 1847 Pope Pius IX extended this feast to the whole Western church, appointing it for the third Sunday after Easter (later the third Wednesday). In a letter to Father Huguet, an enthusiastic worker on behalf of devotion to Joseph, the

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²⁸ See below, pp. 151-60.
pope expressed his satisfaction at the great strides it was making.

In some countries local ecclesiastical councils laid stress on Joseph's precedence over other saints, even to the extent of putting him before the archangels and angels. Such councils do not commit the Church at large, but their declarations were significant of contemporary feeling. Some of the bishops at the Vatican Council wished for a solemn act from the assembly declaring that St. Joseph comes immediately next after the Mother of God; they drew up a petition to this end, which within a few days was signed by 256 bishops and 38 cardinals. But external events brought the council to an untimely close, and the petition remained in the archives.

However, this was not the end of the matter. Amid the miseries brought about by the Franco-German war, with the Papal States invaded and Rome itself occupied, Pius IX was convinced it was his duty to give further recognition to St. Joseph. Faced with thronging calamities, he turned to Mary's husband, the man whom the first Joseph had prefigured and whom God had set in authority over His earthly household. On December 8, 1870, sixteen years to a day after the definition of the Immaculate Conception, the Congregation of Sacred Rites, at the pope's direction and in accordance with the expressed wish of many bishops and their flocks, solemnly proclaimed St. Joseph protector of the Universal Church. At the same time the feast of March 19 was given rank
as a double of the first class. Six months later the pope enumerated the various acts of the Church's authority in St. Joseph's behalf, and directed certain modifications to be made in the Missal and the Breviary. Joseph's name was inserted in the suffrage of the saints at Lauds and Vespers, between Our Lady and Sts. Peter and Paul.

Subsequent popes were not behind Pius IX in their devotion. In his encyclical letter "Quanquam pluries" of 1889, Leo XIII completed his teaching on the rosary by considering the surpassing holiness of him who was husband of the Blessed Virgin and, in men's eyes, father of her Son. No other saint, Leo declared, so nearly approaches that place of dignity which in the Mother of God is far above all created natures. He was head of the household at Nazareth, and his guardianship extends to the whole Church, for Mary is also the mother of all Christians. What the first Joseph did in Egypt, the second Joseph does in the Church. He is a model for everybody, but especially for fathers of families and those who earn their bread by manual work. The prayer to St. Joseph which the pope added to this letter is still in well-established use; and in the following year he addressed a long letter to Cardinal Bausa in which he again took up the theme of St. Joseph.

Pope St. Pius X, whose baptismal name was Joseph, manifested his regard for his patron saint when, in 1909, he authorized a litany of St. Joseph; and he also raised

the Solemnity feast in paschal time to the rank of a double of the first class, with an octave. In 1919 Benedict XV issued a proper preface for Mass on the feasts of St. Joseph. Then, in the following year, alarmed by the ravages of the first world war and by the progress of the communist revolution, the same pope decided to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Pius IX’s action in 1870: he therefore on his own initiative (motu proprio) appealed to everybody, and most especially to the workers of the world, to put themselves under Joseph’s care. Seventeen years later, in 1937, Pius XI ended his encyclical letter on atheistic communism (Divini Redemptoris) by recommending Joseph to all Christians as “the living pattern of that social justice that ought to reign throughout the world.” Finally, in 1955, Pope Pius XII instituted a new feast, of St. Joseph the Workman, to be observed on May 1.

Religious writers and episcopal pronouncements both paved the way for and seconded these papal deeds and utterances. We need recall the names only of Cardinal Pie of Poitiers, of Msgr. Charles Gay, of Father F. W. Faber and of Father C. Macabiau. The ideas of the last named on St. Joseph’s primacy were judged to be occasionally exaggerated, but he did good work for the cause he had at heart. Here and there the Church’s cen-

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20 [This liturgical festival has now been superseded. *Trans.*]
21 See below, pp. 205-7.
22 See below, pp. 222-6.
The Theology of St. Joseph

sure has had to fall upon an ill-considered writing that attributed too much to Joseph’s part as “father of the Son of God,” such as a Spanish book in 1907 and an article in Italian in 1928. But age-long piety is more and more trying to express itself with exactness, even if works are still published in which one can sometimes feel the influence of the apocryphal writings of long ago. There goes with the contemporary Marian movement a cautious exploration of the theological aspects of St. Joseph’s role in the economy of salvation.

The Theology of St. Joseph

People are becoming more and more conscious of the truth that, through the Incarnation, God Himself entered on the stage of earthly history, and with Him all those whom He has predestined to be of His retinue. The fashion—though it is more than a mere fashion—goes with the philosophy of history. When the philosopher has laid his foundation of exact science—the biological sciences, sociology—he then begins to make human history the most rewarding matter of his thought. But the true finality of human history can be found only in religious history, and religious history itself revolves around one tremendous happening: that one day God entered into time in order that He might fulfill His creative purpose and carry out His redemptive work. The history of Christ and the history of the Church that is His Body
St. Joseph
give their deepest significance to all other events, they
govern the destiny of peoples and civilizations (Cf. Eph.
1: 3-12; Col. 1: 15-20).
This is the setting of that Marian awakening on which
we so properly congratulate ourselves. Mary is the term
of the longings of human antiquity, she is the first light
of the dawn that floods over reborn mankind. She is the
mother of Jesus and she is our mother; she is as it were
the Church in miniature, giving us Christ but at the
same time herself, like a new Eve, brought forth from
the side of Christ. The New Adam is her Son, but He is
also her Lord. On the day of the Annunciation she went
to her encounter with the angel as one who in desire
summed up the supplications and laments of all man-
kind, mankind seeking fulfilment and sick with sin. On
the hill of Calvary she uttered the co-redemptive fiat;
it was brought about by the Saviour’s grace, but it ex-
pressed mankind’s acceptance of the divine work of re-
demption. On the blessed day when her earthly life was
over, she went up body and soul into Heaven, victorious
over death and sin, the Church’s first fruit at last reunited
with her bridegroom. Pascal said that the whole of
religion can be summarized in two words: “Adam;
Christ.” We may add, “Eve; Mary”; or, what comes to
the same thing, “Eve; the Church.”
But what is Joseph’s place in all this? What is he but
an obscure working man, whom God mysteriously chose
to hide the virginal birth of His Son from the eyes of
men? John the Baptist, the forerunner, was directly associated with the work of the Redeemer; God entrusted the Apostles with the duty of giving the tidings of great joy to the world: have not these an incomparably more important place in the divine purpose than has Joseph? If we cling to the letter of the gospel narratives and look only at the material place that Joseph holds in them, we shall be inclined to answer yes.

But to do so would be to get our perspective wrong, and we should have to relegate the Blessed Virgin to the background as well. Protestants say that it is enough that Jesus took His flesh from Mary; once her physical motherhood is accomplished she has to withdraw from the center of the picture, and her personal holiness is no different matter from that of any other Christian. But we know what a terrible impiety that is. The Catholic faith puts Our Lady above the Apostles, above the doctors of the Church, above all the saints. The same line of argument that is applied to her leads to an understanding of St. Joseph’s greatness. He is the husband of Mary, and she is the mother of Jesus; he is, in a sense we shall have to explain, authentically father of the Son of God; he is guardian and protector of the Holy Family, which is an image and epitome of the world-wide Church. These are the truths that have got to be investigated in depth if

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23 At a time when a man like Karl Barth can declare without beating about the bush that Mariology is an excrescence that ought to be got rid of from Christian teaching, it is encouraging to find some of our separated brethren coming back to devotion to Mary.
Joseph is to be given his proper place in the economy of salvation.

Joseph is husband of the Mother of God. Theologians ask how this marriage, a virginal marriage, can have had those characteristics that are necessary to every union of man and wife. Theological tradition and the pronouncements of the Church’s teaching authority recognize three “goods” in the sacrament of marriage; there is no difficulty about finding these in the union of Joseph and Mary. But it has to be looked at in the concrete. This marriage was not simply a virginal union: it was at the same time both virginal and fruitful. That seems to be a contradiction. Jesus was not the fruit of the marriage between Joseph and Mary; He was Mary’s son according to the flesh, but not Joseph’s. The presence of Joseph appears to be extrinsic, only required in order that the mystery of the miraculous birth might be hidden from human eyes.

But theologians who have given attention to the subject are rejecting this conclusion more and more, and setting themselves to show that Joseph was in very truth a father. Nor are they wrong. To be father or mother in physical fact does not exhaust the relations between parent and child; to go no further is to confine one’s consideration of marriage to its animal and biological aspect. Bodily fruitfulness is good and willed by God, so long as His law is observed in its regard. But where the human
family is concerned, generation is only a beginning, the starting point of a shared activity whose goal is the human upbringing of a child. Man and woman look forward through bodily union to the spiritual begetting which gives the child its place in the history of mankind. Here, too, the father is as necessary as the mother: as each gives the child some part of his or her own flesh, so each gives something of their soul; they impart character and disposition to the child, they bring its individual personality to life.

This upbringing involves material conditions, and if they are lacking the child can say with the Psalmist “My father and my mother have forsaken me” (Psalm 26:10). For nine months mother nourishes child through the food that builds up her own body; afterward, for another nine months, her own substance feeds it through her milk. But the father also is concerned. He has to work, for he is responsible for providing what his family needs for health and comfort: if he does not thus provide, mother and child will die of starvation. Then, as the child grows, the mother gives it another milk, what Shakespeare calls “the milk of human kindness.” She strives to convey the tenderness of her own heart to the heart that beat beside hers for so long. Whatever we may have of sensitiveness and sympathy generally comes to us through our mother’s kindness: she gives life to us twice over.

But when it is a question of sons, a mother who is altogether alone can never bring them up entirely satis-
factorily. They have got to be taught how to be men, the business of manhood, and other "business" in the most ordinary sense of the word as well. Joseph the carpenter earned his living and supported his family by working with his hands; and he also educated Jesus. Among the Galileans round about, Jesus came to be known as the carpenter, the son of the carpenter, *faber fabri filius*. Here again we must get beyond the letter and consider the spirit. At the same time as He was learning a skilled trade, Jesus was learning the traditions of His people and their ancestral customs. We need not then be surprised to find the evangelists associating Him with the house of David, the family of Abraham, the posterity of Adam, through the medium of St. Joseph. It was Joseph who introduced Jesus into the actual lived history of the men He was to save; with Mary, but in a different sense from her, Joseph made known the people’s captivity to Him who was come to set mankind free. Even today—though unhappily less commonly than in the past—fathers tell their sons, gathered round the evening fire, about things that happened to their ancestors in far-off days. At Nazareth much time must have been given to worship and prayer; but we may well believe that, as well as lessons in practical matters, there were lessons in history that instructed the Incarnate Son of God in the traditions of the sons of Adam.

It must not be said that the Son of God had nothing to learn from men, for that is not true. Christ’s experi-
mental knowledge was real experimental knowledge. Here the mystery lies in the association of a divine person and a divine nature with a human nature to which absolutely nothing is wanting. Christ’s manhood accords with a real body and a real soul. The body’s habits, reflexes and behavior depend on the growth of a soul which, like ours, has a multiple purpose: it is the principle of life, the “form” of the body; but it is also understanding and will, which, in their own way, are involved in time and gradually build up the character and temperament of this Man in whom there is but one single person, that of the Word, the Son of God. It must be firmly held that from the first moment Jesus had the beatific vision, that He had infused knowledge, that He did not have to become conscious of His mission. But when it is a question of the human modalities of that mission, it must be recognized that progress in its true sense took place in Him. He learned to walk, to speak, to work in wood and iron, and He had to learn the business of being a man. Father J. M. Lagrange (in *L’évangile de Jésus-Christ*, pp. 50-1) and others have tried to show what Jesus, Son of Mary, was able to learn from His mother; but there must also be remembered what the Son of God owed to the man who was not His father by generation, especially in that sphere of upbringing where a boy is led into man’s estate.

But there Joseph’s part ended. Even more than John the Baptist, he had to say within himself, “He must in-

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crease, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). This willing self-effacement is the rock-like foundation of a holiness which we may well think surpasses that of other saints. One does not live for twenty-five or thirty years in the presence of God without being affected thereby. The eyes of Jesus were on Mary and Joseph, but their eyes were on Him; they were both teachers and taught, receiving immeasurably more than they gave, heeding lessons that were at first full of mystery, lived rather than spoken, then becoming clearer and clearer. It is not out of place to believe that, before He began the preparation of His Apostles, Jesus had opened the eyes of His mother and of Joseph: “The Son of man must suffer many things . . . and be put to death, and on the third day rise again . . . Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into His glory?” (Luke 9:22; 24:26). Joseph and Mary could help Jesus to become familiar with the sacred books wherein Israel’s religious traditions were written down; but it was Jesus who laid bare to them the deeper meaning of those writings. No doubt it would be a mistake here to put Joseph on the same level with Mary; but it would also be a mistake to put him aside as knowing nothing, as quite ignorant of mysteries, past, present and future, and of God’s purposes with regard to Jesus.

Almighty God chose Joseph to be the bridegroom and helpmate of the Virgin Mother. When we consider the
magnitude of her graces and privileges, we begin to wonder how the Father of Heaven was able to find a man on earth who was good enough, faithful enough, humble and generous enough to carry out the responsibilities and duties of such a calling. It was this thought that gave birth to the legend of an aged Joseph, an ancient, eighty years old, gone beyond the passions, weaknesses and temptations of this earthly life. The reality is something far finer. God did not give Joseph the signal privilege of freedom from original sin at his conception, or even necessarily of any sanctification before his birth; but He did give him a wonderful purity, without which he would not have been worthy of Mary.

In marriage, bodily union is necessary if children are to be born, and it is certainly not inconsistent with spiritual union. Rejecting a jansenistic theology, our age emphasizes that the physical act of love, willed by God, is as it were an efficacious sign of that oneness of spirit which ought to exist between husband and wife. But we must be careful not to look on it as the sacrament itself; the sacrament of marriage resides above all in the mutual agreement between the parties. If one can speak of a permanent sacrament, of a persisting of the efficacious sign, it is not to be looked for in the first place in the marriage act.\textsuperscript{25} That bodily intercourse is good, it is an expression of and a means towards unity of spirit, but it has to be experienced and used in an atmosphere

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Pius XI in \textit{Casti connubii}, quoting St. Robert Bellarmine.
of sacrifice and mutual renunciation. Husband and wife, each of them, must not primarily seek his or her own pleasure, but must try to call forth in the other that deep happiness that God has associated with this union. Moreover, it must not be laid down as a principle that, the more frequent and complete the fusion of bodies, the more perfect will be the union of souls: without any going back to "augustinian" pessimism, it has to be recognized that spiritual heights can ordinarily only be attained by a willing partial (and in some circumstances total) renunciation of these temporarily necessary but imperfect delights. When the needs of a growing family make bigger claims on the care and attention of the parents, their inner oneness is built up around spiritual generation, an undertaking incomparably more absorbing and more sanctifying than physical generation.

Providence so disposed that Mary and Joseph were in this state from the first. They were not tempted to come down from the mountain into the valley, which indeed shines with God’s light, but which falls short of the ideal of which the Gospel speaks: “At the resurrection they will neither marry nor be given in marriage . . .” (Matt. 22: 30). Mary and Joseph attained oneness of soul at the outset, without going through the joys and perils of oneness in the flesh. There is no need to picture them as living simply in a state of a sort of bloodless amity, untouched by warm affection and human love. Not at all. But, by God’s grace and their own free efforts, they were
able wholly to spiritualize their intense love; their eyes were fixed on the Child sent from on high, whose very presence helped them to grow in grace and holiness. No theologian questions that this marriage, virginal and yet fruitful as it was, was a true marriage. But the abstract reasons that they put forward take on an invincible force when, so far as it is possible to do it, they are brought into relation with the actual living of a life that was at the same time both "God-like" and fully human.

The Holy Family is an image of the Church. It is the Church begun. It is the highest point of the ideal that mankind saw dimly before the coming of Christ. It is, as it were, a new creation, for it is the beginning of the redemption of the first creation. Here we must be on our guard against hasty comparisons. The new Eve is Mary, type and epitome of the Church; but the new Adam is not Joseph—it is Jesus Christ. Mary, the new Eve, owes everything to Jesus in the supernatural order; she is brought forth from the side of the new Adam dying on the cross: she is the first fruit of reborn mankind, not snatched from sinfulness but kept safe from sinfulness, "redeemed in a more exalted way." All the graces flowing from Christ's life, passion and death come to us through Mary. But we cannot say without more ado that Joseph comes immediately after Mary. It is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who on Calvary represents the family of God's children. Mary is his mother, he is her son. The
Church's foundation is Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone; she is personified on Calvary by the Blessed Virgin, and she, the Church, is built up upon the Apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).

But as Joseph is the born protector of the Holy Family, so he is of the Church; he who watched over Jesus and Mary watches over the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. As in the days of Herod, so now, Joseph rescues the God-man, in the person of His brethren, from those who seek to destroy Him; and he brings Him back out of the land of exile. As at Nazareth, so now he watches over the growth and development of the Son of God, living in the multitude of His members. We must admit that this aspect of St. Joseph is not easy to talk about and explain. His office as Protector of the Church is still full of mystery, and some people are tempted to think that increasing devotion has unduly magnified St. Joseph's part in the economy of salvation. This temptation must be resisted; we must try to make Joseph known, understood and loved. Very many religious communities have taken him as their patron saint and as a sort of temporal father; nor have they had any reason to change their minds. As time goes on devotion to St. Joseph will gain in depth, and Marian theology, so flourishing today, will acquire a new chapter.

When one considers the history of the development of veneration of, and devotion to, St. Joseph, it comes
as a surprise to discover that he was neglected for so long. It was not till the dawn of modern times that he came out of the obscurity where his humbleness had hidden him. Even today far too many Christians ignore him and never think of praying to him. But it looks as if his hour is at hand.

In the modern world, product of revolutions and wars, a huge element in society is in process of becoming conscious of its vocation; what are called “the workers,” who for so long were kept on one side and even despised, have made their way on to the stage of history. Manual work, once looked down on, is now esteemed like a title of honor. The workers are enjoying a collective promotion. Some people are very alarmed by this, others welcome it. But if the workers are to fulfil their destiny and work effectively in the cause of a better civilization, a rediscovery of St. Joseph would not come amiss. Many of the best of them are looking toward Nazareth, seeking Jesus the carpenter there. What they forget is that Jesus went away from Nazareth: He left His bench to go into the world, to preach, to heal, to suffer and to die. It was Joseph who lived, worked and died in the seclusion of his workshop. He lived for a time side by side with Jesus, very humbly and modestly, but with that perseverance, patience and love of work well done which is the ideal of all good workmen and all who respect their trade.

It was from a simple workshop that there came one
day Jesus, *faber fabri filius*. Perhaps the result of a newly-founded devotion to St. Joseph will be a great harvest of vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life, growing from the floors of factories, garages, yards and workshops. And, since little things sometimes have big results, it is to be hoped that the statues and pictures of St. Joseph in our churches will at last lose the stiff pose that legend gave to them; and show instead the holy workman engaged in his human job, the faithful husband who rejoiced in his wife’s love, the father who brought up and trained the Incarnate Son of God.
The Angel’s Message

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
[c. 347-407]

The angel sought out Joseph when he was very troubled in mind. ... Notice this holy man’s forbearance. It is not simply that he does nothing to chastise his wife; why, he does not even tell her the grave suspicions that have been aroused in his mind: he keeps all these things to himself, hiding his anxiety and suffering even from Mary. ... Joseph did not confide his fears to anybody; he kept them locked up in his heart, and yet he heard an angel speaking to him about them. Surely this is unquestionable proof that the angel was sent from God, for God alone can read the depths of the heart. ... So wise was Joseph’s behavior that it shows how good and virtuous a man he was. ... ”Keep the wife whom you are thinking of putting away,” the angel said to him, “for she is given to you, not by her parents, but by God himself. He does not give her that there may be bodily union between you, but that you may dwell together in fellowship; and He joins you

¹ Homily 4 on St. Matthew’s Gospel.
with her through the ministry of my words.” Just as Christ himself later entrusted her to the care of His disciple John, so now the angel gives her to her husband that she may have joy in his company. . . .

That Joseph might be fully reassured, the angel spoke of the future as well as of the past: “She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus.” [“Thou,” singular, not “you,” plural, as though God would say,] “You must not think that, because this Child is conceived of the Holy Spirit, He is nothing to do with you: you have to look after Him and care for Him in every way. Although you have no part in His begetting and Mary is forever maiden, nevertheless you stand in a father’s place toward this Child in all that does not touch the Virgin’s dignity, and it is for you to name Him. You shall be the first to call Him by His name; and though He is not your son you will not fail always to show Him a father’s love and care. Therefore I would have you name Him yourself, that He and you may be more closely united.”
The Betrothed of Mary¹

ST. BERNARD
[1090-1153]

"The angel Gabriel was sent from God ... to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph." Why was she betrothed? Was it a matter of chance? No; there was no chance about this betrothal. Good sense recommended it, it may even be said that necessity imposed it, and it was fully in harmony with God's purpose. That is what I think; or rather, that is what the Fathers have thought before me. God willed Mary to be betrothed for the same reason that He allowed Thomas to doubt. It was the custom among the Jews to put young women in charge of the men to whom they were engaged, during the time that elapsed between betrothal and wedding; the young men wanted good faithful wives, and they were thus enabled the better to watch over their safety and good behavior. And so, just as Thomas, having doubted and been allowed to touch the Lord's body, became the most steadfast witness to His having really risen from the dead, in the same way Joseph was a sure

¹ Homily 2 on the Annunciation: Missus est.
witness to Mary’s purity, having watched lovingly over her life while they were engaged. . . .

It was needful that Mary be affianced to Joseph, since the vigilance of her betrothed would thus safeguard both her chastity and her public repute. What could more befit the wisdom and dignity of God’s providence? By this providential arrangement there was someone to be entrusted with Heaven’s secrets, the Enemy was kept at bay, and the good name of the Virgin Mother was protected from slander. It is written, “Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wishing to expose her to reproach, was minded to put her away privately.” Being a just man he was rightly unwilling to expose her to reproach; he would not have been just had he connived at known guilt, much less had he condemned proven innocence. So, refusing to expose her to reproach, since he was a just man, he was minded to put her away privately.

But why did he want to put her away? Here again I ask you to listen, not to my opinion, but to the voice of the Fathers. Joseph wanted to put Mary away for the same reason that made Peter seek to put away the Lord, when he said: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8); so, too, the centurion: “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof” (Matt. 8:8). In like manner Joseph, feeling himself to be sinful and unworthy, thought to himself that he could no longer live in familiar companionship with one whose
holiness and marvelous destiny filled him with awe. He saw and trembled at the unmistakable signs of the divine presence in Mary; and since he was not able to fathom the mystery, he was minded to put her away. . . . Can you wonder that Joseph felt himself unworthy to be the companion of this virgin who was with child? Elizabeth, too, was filled with reverence and fear in her holy presence, so that she exclaimed, “How have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

That, then, was why Joseph was minded to put her away. But why privately and not publicly? Lest the cause of this separation should be looked into too closely. What could a just man say in reply to censorious people, people who were unbelieving and argumentative? If he were to say what he thought and assure them that Mary was innocent of offense, the incredulous and cruel Jews would have laughed at him and stoned her. How could they believe in the Truth lying silent in her womb, when later on they scorned His voice in the Temple? What would they have done to Him before He was seen of men, when later on they raised impious hands against Him in spite of the miracles He wrought for all to see? This just man, then, was right to think of putting her away privately, lest he should be forced either to tell lies or to slander an innocent woman.

There are other people, however, who think differently, and maintain that Joseph had the same suspicion that any other man would have had in his place; they
say that he was resolved to put Mary away privately in order to reconcile his self-respect, which would not allow him to live with her after such a suspicion, with his kindness, which would not have her exposed to reproach. To which I simply reply that Joseph’s doubt was necessary even in that case, for the mystery on this occasion was confirmed by a word from God, as it is written: “While he thought on these things [of putting her away privately], behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.’”

Those are the reasons why Mary was betrothed to Joseph, or rather, as the evangelist Luke puts it, “to a man named Joseph.” He is called a man [vir], not because he was her husband, but because he was a person of fine quality [virtus]. Another evangelist, Matthew, calls him not simply “a man” but “her man,” and that designation was properly accorded to him, for that was what people were to suppose him to be. Similarly, he was not father of the Saviour, but for the same reason, that men might think him so, it was fitting that he should be called His father, as the evangelist Luke himself writes: “Jesus . . . was about thirty years of age, being—as was supposed—the son of Joseph.” He was, then, neither husband of the mother nor father of the Son, although Providence disposed that for a time he
should be called both, and be reputed among his neighbors really so to be.

From the fact that God allowed him to be called and thought of as father of the divine Child, you may judge how great a man Joseph was. His very name suggests it, for Joseph means *increase*. And remember, too, the great patriarch, who once upon a time was sold into Egypt (Gen. 37:28); you must know that the later Joseph inherited his chastity, his innocence and his grace, as well as his name. The first Joseph, sold through his brothers' jealousy, foreshadowed the selling of Christ by treachery; the second Joseph, seeking refuge from the jealousy of Herod, took Christ away into Egypt. The first, keeping faith with his master, refused to lie with his master's lady (Gen. 39:12); the second, respecting the maidenhood of his Lady, the mother of his Lord, was faithful to his own chastity. The first had the gift of interpreting dreams (Gen. 40,41); it was given to the second to know and share in heavenly mysteries. The first laid in stores of wheat, for himself and for all the people of the land of Egypt (Gen. 41:47-57); to the second was entrusted the care of the living Bread from Heaven, for himself and for the whole world. There can be no doubt that the Joseph to whom the mother of the Saviour was betrothed was a good and faithful man; he was a "faithful and prudent servant" (Matt. 24:45), whom God raised up to be His mother's helpmate,
St. Joseph
guardian of His own flesh, the sole and very faithful helper on earth in the great work of His incarnation.

Add to this that he was of the family of David. Indeed was he a true son of that kingly house, noble in his descent, yet more noble in his mind. A true son of David; no degenerate offspring of his ancestor but truly a son, not simply according to the flesh but in faith, holiness and devotion. In Joseph, as though he were another David, the Lord found a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22), to whom He could safely entrust the most holy and hidden secrets. To him, as to David, God showed the hidden things of His wisdom (Ps. 50:8), and gave him knowledge of a mystery that was hidden from the great ones of the earth. Lastly, it was given to Joseph not simply to see and hear Him whom many kings and prophets had desired to see, and saw not, desired to hear, and heard not (Matt. 13:17); but as well to carry, lead, embrace, kiss, nurture and protect Him. We must suppose that Mary, too, was descended from the house of David, for otherwise she would not have been betrothed to a man of that house. Both, then, were of the house of David; but it was only in Mary that the promise which the Lord had sworn to David was fulfilled: Joseph was but the witness to the fulfilment of the promise.
The Mirror of Jesus Christ

AN ANONYMOUS FRANCISCAN¹
(Pseudo-Bonaventure)
[c. Thirteenth Century]

When the fortieth day was come for her purification according to the law, then went Our Lady out with her son Jesu and her husband, that holy old man Joseph, and took the way from Bethlehem into Jerusalem, that is about five or six miles, there to present the Child and offer Him to God. Now let us go with them in devout contemplation. . . .

In this manner then they bore and brought the Child Jesu into Jerusalem, and Him, the Lord of the Temple, into the Temple of God; at the entry thereof they bought two turtledoves or else two pigeons to offer for Him as the manner was for poor folk. . . . And hereupon that righteous man Simeon, led in spirit by the Holy Ghost, came into the Temple to see what he had a long time desired, Christ, God’s Son, according to the behest of the Holy Ghost. . . . Afterward they went in proces-

sion toward the altar . . . in this manner: first, the two worshipful old men, Joseph and Simeon, in front, joyfully holding each other by the hand and with great mirth singing and saying, "Lord God, we have received this day thy great mercy in the midst of thy Temple, and therefore according to thy great name mayest thou be loved and worshipped to the furthest end of the world." After them followeth the blessed mother and maiden, Mary, bearing the King of Heaven, Jesu; and with her on the one side goeth the worshipful widow Anna, with great reverence and unspeakable joy loving and praising God. This is a solemn and worshipful procession of so few persons, but betokening and representing great things: for there be some of all states of mankind, that is to say, of men and women, old and young, maidens and widows. Furthermore, when they were come to the altar of the Temple, the mother, with reverence kneeling down, offereth her sweet Son to God, the Father of Heaven. . . . And thereat the priests of the Temple were brought, and the Child, Lord of all the world, was redeemed like a servant for five pennies, called shekels, according to the law. And when Joseph had paid that money for Him, the mother, Our Lady, took her blessed Son again with right good will. And after she took the aforesaid birds from Joseph, and kneeling down and lifting up her eyes devoutly unto Heaven, holding them in her hands, she offered them. . . . After this was done, and thus the law of God was fully kept in all that con-
cerned the Child from His birth to this time, Our Lady with her blessed Son and her spouse Joseph took the way from that city of Jerusalem homeward into Nazareth.

The second lesson we may learn [from the flight into Egypt] is touching the benefits and the special comforts of God, that he that feeleth them specially be not thereby elevated in his own sight as holding himself more worthy than another that hath them not. And also he that feeleth not such special gifts or comforts be not therefore cast down by sorrow or envy of him that hath them. For we see here the angels appearing and speaking of the Child to Joseph, and not to Our Lady, yet was he much less in merit and less worthy than she. Also we may learn here that he that feeleth such special gifts of God, if he have them not always in the way he would and according to his desire, must not therefore grumble or be heavy with unkindness against God. For notwithstanding that Joseph was so nigh and acceptable to God, nevertheless, the appearings of the angel and the revelations were not done to him openly and in waking, but after the manner of dreams and in his sleeping.

But now to go again to our principal matter of the mirror of the blessed life of Our Lord Jesu. Behold we [at Nazareth] the manner of living of that blessed company in poverty and simplicity together; and how that
old man Joseph wrought as he might in his craft of carpentry; Our Lady also with distaff and needle, and doing other offices that pertained to the household, in divers manners as we may think. And how Our Lord Jesu meekly helped them both at their need, and also in laying the table, making the beds and such other chores,² ministering gladly and in lowliness: so fulfilling in deed what He saith of Himself in the gospel, that Man's Son cometh not to be served but to serve.

² Nicholas Love uses this word, but in its earlier form, charres.
The Fatherhood of St. Joseph

JEAN GERSON
[1363-1429]

Joseph was the physical father of Jesus in the eyes of men; he was father by his solicitude as fosterer; and he was father through generation: it is true that he did not himself beget Jesus, but his wife Mary did so by the operation of the Holy Spirit, who in a sense took the place of Joseph, not through a physical but through a mysterious spiritual generation. Joseph, therefore, can be called, not indeed the natural father of Jesus, but the legal father, to whom the Holy Spirit had given generative powers that were more efficacious than those that are natural. Jesus was born on the land or estate of Joseph, that earth of which Isaias says, “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just. Let the earth be opened and bud forth a saviour” (45:8); and in Psalm 84 we read at verse 12, “Truth is sprung out of the earth.” Does not then a kind of legal right in the blessed formation of the child Jesus belong

1 From the sermon on the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin, preached at the Council of Constance in 1416.
to Joseph above all other men, that Child who was born in and of that flesh over which the right of marriage had given dominion to Joseph? . . .

This forming of the child Jesus in you, Mary, was through the Holy Spirit, but it was with the implicit consent of your husband Joseph; for he was a godly and righteous man, and therefore desired that God’s will be done in everything. . . . Well may we exclaim at your wholly wonderful greatness, Joseph! What an unexampled distinction!—the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, the Mistress of the world, vouchsafed to call you her master. I do not know which excites the more wonder—Mary’s humility or Joseph’s exaltedness. But both are surpassed beyond compare by the child Jesus, who is blessed unto everlasting and yet it is written of Him that He was subject to them: He who created the sun and its uprising was subject to a carpenter; He to whom every knee must bend in Heaven, on earth and under the earth was subject to a woman working at her loom.

I wish I had the words to explain a mystery so deep and hidden from the world, this astonishing and worshipful trinity of Jesus and Joseph and Mary. I am able to wish but I have not the power to perform; my efforts fail. So, since grace and glory do not do away with nature but raise and perfect it, let us with religious devotion consider this: By the natural bond that unites a family, the son Jesus is beholden to His mother, the
mother to her husband, and both son and mother to the faithful, vigilant and unfailing guardian and provider, Joseph; and he was the head of Mary and so had a measure of authority over her just as she, by right of natural motherhood, had over her son Jesus. How great then must Joseph now be in his heavenly glory, since he was singled out for such greatness in this vale of tears here on earth! If Jesus spoke truly when He said, “Where I am there also shall my servant be” (John 12:26), surely he who, after Mary, was closest to Him on earth, who was so dutiful and faithful in his service of Him, must have a place nearest to Him in Heaven.
Sermon on St. Joseph¹

ST. BERNARDINO OF SIENA
[1380-1444]

Whenever special blessings are conferred on any rational creature, whenever anyone is divinely chosen for some particular grace or for some exalted position, that chosen person likewise receives all the gifts needful for that high position, and receives them in abundance. . . . This was true in a marked degree of St. Joseph, the supposed father of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the true husband of the Queen of the world and Mistress of the angels; he was chosen by the eternal Father to be the faithful teacher and guardian of His chiefest treasures, namely, of His own Son and of Joseph’s bride. And this trust he carried out with complete faithfulness, so that the Lord says, “Good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. . . .”

The marriage between Mary and Joseph was a real marriage, entered into under divine inspiration; and mar-

¹“Sermon on St. Joseph.” The Roman Breviary, with the original order restored. (A translation of the complete sermon by Eric May, o.f.m. Cap. was published by St. Anthony’s Guild, Paterson, N.J., 1947.)
riage involves so close a union of souls that bridegroom and bride are said to be one person, which may be called as it were the perfection of unity. . . . Can, then, any discerning person imagine that the Holy Spirit would join in that union the soul of such a maiden to a soul that was not closely like to her in the things of virtue? Therefore do I believe that this man, the holy Joseph, was graced with perfect virginity, with the deepest humbleness, with the most burning love and charity toward God, with the loftiest contemplation. . . . The Virgin knew that he was given her by the Holy Spirit to be her husband and the faithful protector of her virginity; she knew that he was given, moreover, to share in devoted love and tender care for God’s divine Son. Therefore do I believe that she loved St. Joseph fondly and with heartfelt affection. . . .

Joseph had a burning love for Christ. Who, I ask, would deny that Christ, whether as child or man, would arouse the most unutterable feelings of joy and happiness in one who lived in intimacy with Him and held Him in his arms, who experienced Jesus’ loving looks and embraces, who listened to His speech? How sweet must have been the kisses Joseph received from Him! How moving to hear the Child murmur the name of father, how delightful to feel His gently encircling arms! Or again, when the Child was growing bigger, but was wearied with much walking on the journeys that they took, think how Joseph was filled with compassion and
rested Him in his arms. For Joseph had for Jesus all the fullness of adoptive love, as for a darling son given him by the Holy Spirit in his maiden bride.

The wise Mother knew the depth of Joseph's affection, and so she says to her son Jesus when she found Him in the Temple, "Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing." To understand this aright, we must remember that Christ has two forces within Him, namely, sweetness and sorrow. . . . And since the most holy Joseph experienced these two forces in a wonderful way, the Blessed Virgin calls him Christ's father in a special sense.

This is the only place where we read that she called St. Joseph the father of Jesus: and she did so because his sorrow at the loss of the Child showed the fatherly love he had for Him. According to human law (which God approves) a man can adopt the child of another family as his own son: how much more truly then ought the Son of God to be called the son of Joseph, given to him in his most holy bride in the wondrous mystery of their virginal marriage; and it must indeed be believed that in Joseph there was a father's love and sorrow toward the beloved Jesus. . . .

Considering Joseph in relation to the whole Church of Christ, is he not the specially-chosen man under whom Christ was brought into the world in becoming fashion? The whole Church is beholden to the Virgin Mother,
because it was through Mary that she was made worthy to receive Christ; next to Mary, she owes special thanks and respect to Joseph. He is verily the key of the Old Testament, in him the worthiness of the patriarchs and prophets receives the promised harvest, for only he had in the flesh what the divine goodness had given them in promise. Rightly do we recognize a type of him in the person of the patriarch Joseph, who laid up a store of wheat for the people. But the second Joseph is far greater than the first: for he did not simply provide bread for the bodily food of Egyptians, but lavished his care on the heavenly Bread which feeds the soul unto life everlasting.

There can be no doubt that in Heaven Christ treats Joseph with the same close familiarity, respect and high honor which, as a son to his father, He gave him when He walked among men: or rather, that He fulfils and perfects this relationship. And so it may reasonably be believed that there was a special significance in those words that the Lord spoke: "Enter into the joy of thy Lord." Whence the joy of eternal happiness enters into man's heart; but the Lord preferred to say to Joseph "Enter thou into joy" that He might mystically signify to him joy which should not only be within him, but everywhere about him, absorbing his whole being and, as it were, swallowing him up in an infinite depth of joy.

Therefore remember us, blessed Joseph, and by the
voice of your prayers intercede with Him who was believed to be your son; and direct toward us the compassion of the most Blessed Virgin, your bride and the Mother of Him who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.
St. Joseph's Intercession

ST. TERESA OF AVILA
[1515-1582]

Finding myself so crippled while still so young, and earthly doctors having failed to cure me, I turned to heavenly physicians for help. . . .

I took the glorious St. Joseph for my advocate and protector, and commended myself earnestly to him; and it was clearly he who both healed me of this sickness and delivered me from great dangers that threatened my good name and the salvation of my soul. His aid has brought me more good than I could ever hope for from him. I do not remember once having asked anything of him that was not granted. I am full of wonder at the great graces God has bestowed on me, and the perils to body and soul from which he has freed me, at the intercession of this blessed saint. God seems to have given other saints power to help us in particular circumstances, but I know from experience that this glorious St. Joseph helps in each and every need. Our Lord would have us understand that, since on earth He was subject to this

1 From The Life of Mother Teresa of Jesus, written by herself, chap. VI.
man who was called His father, whom as His guardian He had to obey, so now in Heaven He still does all that Joseph asks. Others, who have turned to Joseph on my advice, have had the like experience; and today there are many people who honor him and keep on finding out the truth of what I say.

I made a point of having his feast kept with all possible solemnity; but it must be admitted this was more a matter of vanity than of religion, for I always wanted everything done well and impressively. No doubt my intentions were good; but it was a failing of mine that when the Lord gave me grace to do anything good I always mixed a lot of faults and imperfections with it: when it was a question of anything bad, anything self-pleasing or worthless, I took any amount of care and pains with it. May the Lord forgive me!

I wish I could persuade everybody to be devoted to this glorious saint, for long experience has taught me what blessings he can obtain from God for us. Of all the people I have known with a true devotion and particular veneration for St. Joseph, not one has failed to advance in virtue; he helps those who turn to him to make real progress. For several years now, I believe, I have always made some request to him on his feast day, and it has always been granted; and when my request is not quite what it ought to be, he puts it right for my greater benefit.

Were I a person writing on my own authority I would
readily set down at length and in detail all the favors that this holy man has granted me, and not only me but others as well. But if I am to keep to the limits laid down for me, I shall have to write about many things much more briefly than I should choose, and about others at much greater length than is necessary: in a word, I must act like one whose judgement is rather defective where good is concerned. All I ask, for the love of God, is that anyone who does not believe me will put what I say to the test, and he will then learn for himself how advantageous it is to commend oneself to this glorious patriarch Joseph and to have a special devotion for him. Prayerful persons, in particular, should love him like a father.

I do not know how anyone can think of the Queen of angels, at the time when she was undergoing so much with the Child Jesus, without giving thanks to St. Joseph for looking after them in the way he did. If anyone has not got a guide to teach him how to pray, let him take this glorious saint as his master and he will not go astray. Please God I have not myself gone astray in venturing to speak of him!—for, while I declare my loving devotion to him, my endeavors to praise and imitate him are very weak and insufficient. When, thanks to him, my paralysis was cured and I was able to get to my feet and walk, he showed me what sort of a man he is; and I, when I make bad use of such a blessing, show what sort of a woman I am.
The Nineteenth Conference¹

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES
[1567-1622]

The just, the righteous, man is like a palm tree (Psalm 91:13), as Holy Church sings on the feasts of confessors. Being the king of trees, both for its beauty and for its usefulness to man, the palm has various special qualities of its own; in the same way there are many different kinds of righteousness. All the just are righteous and equal in justness, but there are very wide differences between their particular good deeds: righteousness may be likened to Joseph’s coat of old (Gen. 37:3), which reached his feet but was of many colors.

Every just man is covered all over by the “robe of justice” (Isa. 61:10): that is, all the faculties and powers of his soul are robed in righteousness; and not simply the appearance of righteousness, for his acts and movements, both internal and external, are really righteous. At the same time, each robe is embroidered with a different pattern, and this variety does nothing to detract

¹ Les vrais Entretiens spirituels, No. 19. Œuvres, édition d’Annecy (1895), VI, 352-70.
from their beauty and value. The great St. Paul the Hermit was a just man of the highest virtue: but it cannot be supposed that he ever exercised so much charity toward the poor as did that St. James who is called The Almsgiver, or that he ever had an opportunity to exert the virtue of munificence; consequently he had these virtues in a lesser degree than many other holy men. He had all the virtues, but in differing degrees. Some saints excel in one virtue, some in another: they are all saved, but not all in the same way, for there are as many different kinds of holiness as there are holy people.

These things being so, I notice that among its numerous characteristics the palm tree has three in particular that are especially appropriate to the saint whose feast we are celebrating, who, as Holy Church tells us to sing, is like a palm tree. What a great saint the glorious Joseph is! He is not only a patriarch, but the leader of all the patriarchs; not simply a confessor but more than a confessor, for his witness includes the excellence of bishops, the self-sacrifice of martyrs, the qualities of all the other saints. Rightly then is he compared to the palm, the king of trees, whose property it is to be virgin, to be humble, to be steadfast and valiant, virtues in which St. Joseph greatly excelled: if we may venture on comparisons, there are those who would maintain that he surpasses all other saints in these three virtues.

There are male and female palm trees. The male does not bear fruit, but it is not infertile, for the female is
unable to bear fruit without the male. They have to grow close to one another, so that the female is looked upon by the male and then bears dates in great quantity; otherwise, it is barren. So the female tree produces virginally, for it is not touched by the male, which has simply to be adjacent: fruit is borne under the shadow and gaze of the male. It gives nothing of its substance to the production of dates: yet it cannot be said that it has not an important part in the female palm’s fruitfulness, because without it the female would bear nothing.

From all eternity God in His providence destined that a virgin should conceive and bear a Son who should be both God and man, yet He nevertheless willed that that virgin should be married. Why did He ordain the combination of two such different states? Most of the Fathers say that it was so that Our Lady should not be slandered by the Jews, who would not refrain from taking it on themselves to examine her behavior and to criticize her; the Fathers and Doctors tell us that it was needful for the protection of her spotless maidenhood that divine Providence should entrust her to the care and guardianship of a virgin man, and that she should conceive and bring forth the sweet-tasting fruit of life, Our Lord, under the shade of sacred marriage (Cf. Cant. of Cant. 2:3). St. Joseph, then, was like a palm tree, which

*This is according to the Natural History of Pliny the Elder, written in A.D. 77. [This illustration, drawn from an insufficient knowledge of the palm tree, is already used by St. Ephraem in the fourth century. Trans.]
bears no fruit but is yet not wholly unfruitful, having part and lot in the fruit of the female tree: what he brought to this holy and glorious harvest was nothing else than the shelter of marriage, which protected Our Lady and glorious Queen from the slanders and condemnation that her motherhood would otherwise have brought upon her.

Joseph contributed nothing of himself to the holy fruitfulness of his blessed Bride, but for all that he had a great part in it. For she was his companion, growing side by side with him like one glorious palm tree with another, without which proximity and shade, divine Providence decrees, the one cannot bear fruit: the shelter, that is, of the holy marriage into which they had entered. And it was by no means an ordinary marriage, whether from the point of view of the sharing of external goods or of inner union and harmony.

What a blessed oneness there was between Mary and Joseph! It meant that the Good of everlasting goods, our Lord Jesus Christ, pertained to Joseph as He did to Mary: not according to the human nature He had taken in the womb of our glorious Queen, a nature formed by the Holy Spirit from the pure blood of Our Lady; but according to grace, which enabled Joseph to share in all the goods of his beloved Bride, and wonderfully to increase in perfection. Our Lady had all virtues in a degree beyond the reach of any other creature; through his constant companionship with her, St. Joseph was
able the most nearly to approach her. A mirror exposed to the sun reflects its rays directly; if another mirror be put opposite the first, it receives the sun’s rays from its fellow, but so clearly that one could hardly tell which is reflecting the sun directly and which indirectly. So it was with Our Lady and St. Joseph. She was like a clear mirror set before the Sun of justice, whose rays carried the perfection of virtue into her soul; and from her those perfections and virtues were so clearly echoed in Joseph that he almost seemed to have them in the same exalted degree as our glorious Maiden Queen herself.

To return to our particular point, St. Joseph’s virginity, a virtue that makes us like to the angels in Heaven. The Blessed Virgin was not only a wholly pure and unsullied maiden, she was virginity itself (“I know not how to utter thy praises, thou holy and spotless Virginity,” as the Church sings at Matins); how perfect then had to be the purity of him whom the Eternal Father appointed to be its guardian, or rather, its companion, for it had no need to be protected by anything but itself. They had both vowed to remain virgin throughout life; and God willed that they should be joined in holy wedlock, not that they should gainsay or rue their oath, but in order that they should strengthen and confirm one another to persevere in their blessed undertaking. . . .

What was the glorious St. Joseph but a mighty rampart built around Our Lady, who as his wife was subject to him and in his care? So far from his being given to
her that she might repudiate her vow of maidenhood, it was as its partner, to the end that Mary’s purity might be the more strikingly maintained in its integrity under the veil and shelter of marriage and their holy association with one another. The most Holy Virgin is a gate, says the Eternal Father, and it shall not be opened, for it is an eastern gate and no man shall pass through it (Ezek. 44:1-2); it must be made double with wood that will not decay, and the fellow door is the great St. Joseph, whose purity must for this purpose excel that of all other saints, of the angels and cherubim themselves. And so his virginity makes him like a palm tree, as we have said.

Let us turn to the second quality of the palm in which I find a close likeness between the tree and St. Joseph’s virtues, namely, a holy humility. For all it is the king of trees, the palm is nevertheless the most modest, which is shown by the way that it hides its flowers in the spring, when all other trees are making a show of them, and lets them be seen only in the heat of summer. The palm enfolds its flowers within a sort of purse or sheath: and this is a very good picture of the difference between people who seek perfection and others who do not, between those who strive to be righteous and those who are worldly-minded. Whenever they have some virtuous thought or an idea that seems to them to be worthy of applause, people who live according to the world’s ways
cannot rest till they have publicized it and told it to everybody they meet. And by so doing they run the same risk as those trees, such as the almond, that put out their flowers directly spring comes—if there is a sudden frost the flowers are killed and there is no fruit. . . . But virtuous folk keep their blossoms concealed in the casket of holy humility, doing all they can to hide them until the warmth of God, the Sun of justice, shall come to quicken their hearts in life everlasting: on that day they will bear the beauteous fruit of happiness and immortality for ever. . . .

How faithful was our great St. Joseph in this! In spite of what he was, he did not speak from the height of his perfection, for see in what a lowly state he lived throughout his life, hiding his great privileges and virtues under a veil of poverty and obscurity. And, good heavens! think what those privileges were! Not only did he exercise authority over Our Lord: he was also His reputed father, he was husband of His most blessed Mother. Surely hosts of angels must have looked on in wonder at Joseph's humbleness when he looked after that dear Child in the little shop where he worked at his trade to support the Son and the Mother committed to his care.

It cannot be doubted that St. Joseph was more valiant than David, more wise than Solomon; but who could have realized that without the aid of heavenly enlightenment, seeing how he spent his time at his bench and hid the tremendous graces that God had bestowed upon
him? What must have been his wisdom, since the Eternal Father chose him to have responsibility for the training of His divine Son? If earthly kings take so much care in the important matter of choosing tutors for their children, if God was able to ensure that His Son's preceptor should be the man in all the world most fitted by his perfections of all kinds to have charge of the young Prince of Heaven and earth—are we to suppose He did not do so? Indeed it cannot be questioned that St. Joseph was endowed with every grace and every gift that was required for the duty that the Eternal Father entrusted to him, the duty, namely, of temporal and domestic charge of Our Lord and responsibility for the family of three—which can symbolize for us the mystery of the most blessed and worshipful Trinity. There is, of course, no comparison here: Our Lord is one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, Mary and Joseph are only creatures; but it is nevertheless permissible to speak of a triad on earth that in some way represents the most Holy Trinity. Mary, Jesus and Joseph; Joseph, Jesus and Mary: a threefold wonder ever to be honored.

You cannot then but appreciate the exaltedness of St. Joseph's dignity and the fullness of virtue with which he was endowed; at the same time you can see the inexpressible lowliness and humility in which he lived. . . .

St. Joseph's concern to shroud his virtues in humility is particularly marked with reference to his virginity; so that no one should know about it he consented to mar-
riage, thus hiding it under the veil of wedlock. This teaches virgins and all who want to live chastely that it is not enough simply to be maiden: they must be humble too, and hide their purity in the precious box of humility. Otherwise they will be like the foolish virgins who, because of their lack of humbleness and charity, were excluded from the bridegroom’s wedding feast (Matt. 25:1-12). They were thus obliged to go to the world’s feasts, where no attention is paid to the word of the heavenly Bridegroom, who says that we must be humble when we are invited to a wedding feast: “go and recline in the last place” (Luke 14:8-11). From this we see how necessary humility is for the maintenance of virginity; it is certain that no one who is without that virtue will be admitted to the wedding feast that God makes ready for virgins in their heavenly home. . . .

What more perfect humbleness can be imagined than that of St. Joseph? I leave Our Lady’s aside, for we have already seen that all Joseph’s virtues are greatly increased by, as it were, the echo produced in him by those of the Blessed Virgin. How fully he shared in that divine treasure that he had in his home, Our Lord and Master; yet he carries himself so humbly that he appears to have no part in Him at all, while all the time Jesus belongs to him more than to anybody after the Blessed Virgin, for He was of Joseph’s family and the
Son of Joseph’s wife. I often remark that if a dove (to use an illustration suitable to the purity of such holy people), if a dove drops a date from its beak into a garden, we say that the palm tree that grows from that date belongs to the owner of the garden. The Holy Spirit, like a heavenly dove, let fall a divine seed into the “garden enclosed” (Cant. of Cant. 4:12) of the Blessed Virgin, a sealed garden set about with the hedges of vowed maidenhood and unstained chastity, and a garden that pertained to Joseph as the wife pertains to her husband. Who then, I ask, can deny that the divine Palm Tree, which bears the fruit that nurtures life everlasting, fully belongs to this blessed Joseph? Yet he does not wax proud on that account, he is not puffed up; rather does he become more humble every day.

How good it is to see Joseph’s reverence and respect in his dealings with the Mother and with the Son! He indeed thought of leaving Mary, before he yet fully knew the grandeur of her destiny; but what was his deep wonder and self-effacement afterward, when he found himself so honored that Our Lord and His Mother made themselves obedient to his wishes and did nothing except at his word! This is something beyond our understanding; let us, then, go on to the palm tree’s third quality, which is steadfastness, courage and strength: these again are virtues which are found in St. Joseph in an eminent degree.
St. Joseph

As first among trees, the palm is distinguished for these properties above all others. Its steadfastness and strength are shown by the fact that, the more it is weighted with leaves and fruit, the higher and straighter it grows; this is contrary not only to other trees but to all other things, which the more they are weighted the more they are borne down toward the ground. The palm refuses ever to stoop, whatever weight may be put on it, for it is its nature to grow up and up, and consequently it does so without anything being able to stop it. As for its courage, this is seen from its leaves, which are shaped like swords and seem to be designed for battle as much as for foliage.

St. Joseph again well fits the comparison: he was always strong, he was always courageous and persevering. There is a deal of difference between steadfastness and perseverance, and between strength and courage. We call a man steadfast when he holds his ground and is ready to meet all hostile attacks; but perseverance is largely a matter of overcoming a certain inward weariness, an enemy as powerful as any that we meet, which overtakes us when our troubles are prolonged. Perseverance enables a man so to tackle this adversary that it is beaten down by a constant correspondence with, and submission to, God’s will. Through strength a man is able to put up good resistance to the onslaughts of his enemies; whereas courage is a virtue by which he is not only ready to fight and resist when occasion demands,
but whereby he himself falls on the enemy at the moment when an attack is least expected.

Now our glorious St. Joseph was endowed with all these virtues, and exerted them to the utmost. First of all, steadfastness. Look how he showed this when he saw Our Lady to be with child, and was plunged into distress, uncertainty and anguish of mind because he did not know how this thing could be. But for all that he uttered no word of lamentation, he was not harsh or discourteous or unkind to his betrothed; on the contrary, he was as loving and respectful toward her as was his wont. And what courage and strength he showed in overcoming the Devil and the world, those two great enemies of mankind. This, as we have said, he did by the careful exercise of a perfect humility throughout the whole of his life. The Devil is so bitterly opposed to humility because it was for lack of it that he fell from Heaven into the depths of Hell (as if humility was able but did not want to choose him as an inseparable companion); there is no dodge or scheme that he does not use to make people lose this virtue, especially as he knows it is one that makes a man infinitely pleasing to God. We may well recognize that he who, like St. Joseph, perseveres in it is courageous and strong, for he is wholly victor over the Devil and over that world which is filled with ambition, futility and pride.

Then, perseverance, opposed to that inner discouragement which comes over us at the continuance of un-
happy, humiliating, burdensome things, of bad luck, if we must call it so, of all the various mischances that happen to us. How Joseph was tried by God and man! An angel tells him to go away at once and take Mary and her dear Son into Egypt. Off he goes on the spur of the moment, without saying a word; he does not ask, “Where shall I go? Which road shall I take? How shall we eat? Who will take us in?” He sets out just as he is, with his tools on his back, so that he may earn a poor livelihood for himself and his family by the sweat of his brow. How depressed he must have been! Why, the angel had not even told him how long he was to be away, so that he could not settle down anywhere with an easy mind, since at any moment the angel might tell him to go back again.

St. Paul admired Abraham’s obedience when God commanded him to go forth out of his own country; the more so that God did not tell him which way to go, and Abraham did not say, “Lord, you tell me to go forth, but you do not say whether I am to leave by the south or by the north gate”: he simply set out, and went according as the Spirit of God directed him (Gen. 12:1; Heb. 11:8-9). The perfect obedience of St. Joseph was no less excellent: the angel did not tell him how long he was to sojourn in Egypt, and he did not inquire. Most people think that he was there for five years, without troubling about when he should go back, confident that He who had told him to go would in due course
tell him when to return; he simply awaited God’s word. The land he was in was not only foreign but hostile to Israelites, for the Egyptians still resented how the Israelites had left them and their being the cause of so many of their pursuers being drowned. You can imagine how anxious St. Joseph was to return home, and his continual fear of what the Egyptians might do. The continued uncertainty must have been a great strain and a grievous affliction to his sensitive heart; but he always maintained his self-possession, he was always quiet, gentle and persevering in his acceptance of God’s good pleasure, to which he completely abandoned himself. For he was “a just man,” and so his will was at all times attuned, conformed and united to the will of God.

That is what makes the just, the righteous, man: perfect harmony with God’s will in all circumstances, whether agreeable or adverse. It cannot be doubted that this was Joseph’s constant state. Look at the examples we have. The angel sends him this way and that: he tells him he must go into Egypt, and Joseph goes; that he must go back, and he goes back. God wills that he shall always be poor, which is one of the heaviest burdens that He can put on us; Joseph submits lovingly, and not for a time but for all his days. And what poverty!

The voluntary poverty undertaken by monks and nuns and other religious is easy enough, for it allows them to accept and use the necessaries of life. But the poverty of St. Joseph, of Our Lord and His Mother, was not like
that. It was indeed voluntary, in as much as they loved it dearly, but for all that it was a very real, extreme and trying poverty; Joseph was only a humble carpenter, and certainly he was not able to earn so much that his family had all they needed, even though he worked so hard and lovingly to provide for them. But in spite of that he went on humbly accepting God's will that his poverty and modest condition should continue, without letting himself be in any degree overcome by the inner weariness that doubtless often assailed him. Rather did he stand firm in his submission to God which, like all his other virtues, continued to increase and to become more perfect. So, too, Our Lady grew in virtue and perfection day by day, through her most blessed Son (who from the moment of His conception was what He will be to eternity), and thus He made the family into which He was born increase continually in all holiness. Mary owed her perfecting to His divine goodness, and Joseph, as I have said, received his through her.

What more is there left to say? Nothing except that we ought not to doubt that this glorious saint was so esteemed by Him who had so blessed him that He raised him to Heaven body and soul. That there is no relic of Joseph here on earth makes this more probable, and it seems to me that it is true. How could He who had obeyed Joseph throughout His life refuse him this grace? Surely, when Our Lord went down into Limbo, St.
Joseph addressed Him in this wise: "Be pleased to remember, Lord, that when you came down from Heaven to earth I received you into my house and family, that I took you into my arms from the moment you were born. Now you are going back to Heaven, take me with you. I received you into my family, receive me into yours; I took you in my arms, take me into yours; I looked after you and fed you and guided you during your life on earth, stretch forth your hand and lead me into life everlasting." We must believe that in virtue of the most Blessed Sacrament on which we feed that our bodies will be raised up at the Day of Judgement (John 6: 55); how can we question that Our Lord raised the glorious Joseph to Heaven in body and soul—the Joseph who was blessed and privileged so often to carry Him in his arms, the arms that Jesus loved so much? How often and how tenderly He must have kissed him in recognition of all his care!

St. Joseph then is in Heaven in body as in soul, and happy indeed are we if we deserve to share in his holy intercession; for neither Our Lady nor her glorious Son will refuse him anything. If we trust in St. Joseph, he will obtain for us increase in every virtue, and especially in those that we see he was specially endowed with: purity of mind and body, humility, steadfastness, courage and perseverance. These are the virtues that will enable us to triumph over our adversaries in this life, and to merit the grace of enjoying in the life to come the reward pre-
pared for those who follow the example St. Joseph gave them on earth. And what is that reward? Nothing less than everlasting happiness in the enjoyment of clear and open vision of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Blessed be God!
First Panegyric upon St. Joseph

JACQUES-BÉNIGNE BOSSUET
[1627-1704]

Depositum custodi: Keep safe what has been entrusted to thee” (I Tim. 6:20).

It is an accepted belief and a feeling common among all men that there is something holy about a trust, and that our obligation to take care of it for him who has entrusted it to us is a matter not only of faithfulness but also in a sense of religion. We learn from the second book De officiis of the great St. Ambrose that in his day it was the religious custom of the faithful to bring anything they wanted specially looked after to the bishops or their clergy, so that it could be deposited near the altar: they had a holy conviction that there could be no better place to put their treasures than where God keeps the treasures of His sacred Mysteries. The Church inherited this custom from the Synagogue of old; we read in sacred history that the venerable Temple at Jerusalem was the place of

1 Œuvres oratoires de Bossuet (édition Lebarq, 1891) II, 117-45. See above, p. 30, note 16.

*[In the sense of a thing entrusted to somebody's care. Trans.]
deposit for the Jews. And Herodian informs us that pagans honored their false gods by depositing goods in their temples and entrusting them to their priests: as if nature itself taught that there is something religious about the obligation of trust, and that there can be no better place of safety than where Divinity is revered and in the hands of those who are religiously dedicated.

But if there has ever been a trust that deserved to be called holy and to be looked after with a holy care, it is the one of which I have to speak, which the providence of the eternal Father committed to righteous Joseph. So much so that I see his house as a temple, for God chooses to dwell in it and to be Himself left there in trust; and Joseph had to be dedicated to take charge of this sacred treasure. And so, Christian brethren, he was: his body was consecrated by continence, and his soul by every gift grace can bestow. (You, Mary, saw the effects of that grace in him, and I need your help to enable me to make this gathering understand them. When can one hope for more powerful intercession by you than when one would speak of the virtuous bridegroom whom the Father chose for you, to be the guardian of that purity that is so precious to you? Therefore we turn to you, Mary, greeting you with the angel’s words, Ave, gratia plena!)

I do not propose to base my praises of St. Joseph on any dubious surmises, but on solid doctrine drawn from the divine Scriptures and from the Fathers, their faithful exponents. There can be nothing more appropriate to
this solemn day than for me to show you this great saint as a man whom God chose among all others to receive charge of His treasure and to be His trustee on this earth. My aim today is to show you that, as nothing could be more appropriate to St. Joseph, so nothing could be more honorable; and that the honorable name of trustee indicates God's purposes in his regard and makes plain the source of all his graces and the sure ground of all his praises.

And firstly, Christian brethren, you can easily see how this trust honors him. The name of trustee is a sign of esteem and an indication of a man's integrity. When we are going to entrust something to somebody, we choose one of our friends whose virtue is best recognized, whose fidelity is most reliable, whom we know intimately and trust thoroughly. What then must be St. Joseph's glory? God made him trustee, not simply of blessed Mary, whose angelic purity is so precious in His eyes, but also of His own Son, who is the special object of His love and our sole hope of salvation: as guardian of Jesus Christ, St. Joseph was made trustee of the treasure that is common to God and man. No eloquence can add anything to the grandeur and majesty of that.

To show what this meant for St. Joseph, I need the help of grace to enable me to penetrate so great a mystery; and when I search what the Scriptures say of him, all appears to be related to this great office of trusteeship. I find, in fact, in the gospels that divine Providence con-
fided three trusts to him; I find, too, that three among his virtues stand out from the others, and that these correspond to the three trusts. These must be expounded in order, and I ask you kindly to follow attentively.

The first of his trusts, in the order of time, was Mary’s holy virginity, of which Joseph had the keeping under the sacred cover of marriage, which he always guarded faithfully as a sacred thing that he was not allowed to touch. That was the first trust. The second, and yet more worshipful, was the person of Jesus Christ, whom the heavenly Father put into his hands that he might be as a father to the Holy Child who could have no earthly father. Those, then, are two wonderful trusts confided to St. Joseph; but there is a third, which you will see is wonderful too if I can make it clear to you. If we are to understand it, it must be borne in mind that a secret is like a trust. To betray a friend’s secret is a violation of the sacredness of trusteeship; and the law says that if you divulge a testamentary secret that I have confided to you, I can take action against you for breach of trust: *Depositio actione tecum agi posse*, as the lawyers say. The reason for this is obvious—a secret is a trust. So it is easy to see that Joseph is trustee of the eternal Father, because He has told him His secret. What secret, you ask? The wondrous taking by His Son of human flesh.

For you know, dear people (and I shall say more about this), that it was God’s will not to reveal Jesus Christ to the world until His hour had come; and St. Joseph was
chosen not only to look after Him, but also to hide Him. We read in the gospel (Luke 2:33) that Mary and Joseph marveled at the things spoken concerning the Saviour; but we do not read that Joseph talked about them, because the eternal Father in revealing the mystery to him revealed it wholly in secret and under obligation of silence. This secret is accordingly the third trust that the Father joined with the other two; as St. Bernard says, God willed to commit the most sacred and hidden secret of His heart to Joseph’s faithful custody. How dear are you in God’s sight, matchless Joseph—for to you were entrusted Mary’s maidenhood, the Word of God made flesh who was the only-begotten Son of the Father, and the hidden things of all His mystery!

But do not imagine, Christian brethren, that Joseph failed to recognize these graces. While God honored him with these three trusts, Joseph for his part offered to God the sacrifice of three virtues, as I find in the gospel. I do not doubt that his life was adorned with all the other virtues, but there are three in particular that God wishes us to learn from the Bible: namely, his purity, which appears in his married continence, his faithfulness, and his humility and love of a hidden life. All can see Joseph’s purity through that holy partnership in chastity and his wonderful harmony with Mary’s virginity in their spiritual weddedness. His faithfulness is shown in the untiring care he took of Jesus, amid the sufferings which overtook the divine Child from the beginning of His life. As for
his humility—by an unexampled grace from the eternal Father so great a treasure was in his keeping, yet, so far from boasting of his gifts or telling others about his privileges, he hid them from men’s eyes so much as he could, rejoicing quietly with God in the mystery revealed to him and in the immeasurable treasure for which he was made responsible. What great matters are here, and how much there is to learn from them! These trusts are full of meaning, these virtues full of example, and their unfolding will redound to Joseph’s glory and be beneficial to all the faithful. But in so important a matter nothing must be left out, so let us penetrate further into the depths of the mystery and appreciate to the full God’s dealings with this matchless man. We have seen what were the trusts and what were Joseph’s virtues; we will examine their relationship to one another and lay down the pattern of what I have to say.

For Joseph to safeguard Mary’s virginity under cover of marriage, it was needful that he should be pure as an angel, so that his virtue could in some sort correspond to the purity of his maiden bride. To protect the Saviour Jesus amid the dangers of His childhood, it was needful that Joseph should be immovably faithful, with a faithfulness that could not be shaken by the threat of any adversity. To cherish the secret entrusted to him, it was needful that Joseph should be specially humble, avoiding the public gaze, withholding himself from the world, loving to be hidden with Christ Jesus.
Depositum custodi: Safeguard what has been entrusted to you, Joseph! Safeguard Mary’s maidenhood, and to do this in marriage join your chastity to hers. Safeguard that precious life on which the salvation of mankind depends, surround it with your loving care, for dangers threaten on every hand. Safeguard the Father’s secret, for He would have His Son hidden from the world; cast a sacred veil over Him, and let your love of a hidden life cover you with Him in the same concealment.

With the help of God’s grace, such are the matters I propose to set before you.

Properly to understand how much God honored St. Joseph when He committed Mary’s virginity to his keeping, we have to understand before all else how dear this maidenhood is to Heaven and how beneficial to earth: thus, knowing the value of what was entrusted, we can estimate the worth of the trustee. We will bring this truth into the light of day, and show from the testimony of religious writings that virginity was necessary for the bringing of Jesus Christ into the world. You know, Christian brethren, that divine Providence decreed that, as God brought forth His Son from eternity by a virginal generation, so He should come forth from a virgin mother when He should be born in time. That is why the prophets foretold that a maiden should conceive and bear a son (Isa. 7:14): in this hope our fathers lived, and the Gospel tells us of its blessed fulfilment. If human kind
may be allowed to seek the causes of so great a mystery, it seems to me that I can discern an important one; and that, when I examine the teaching of the Fathers on the nature of holy virginity, I find therein a hidden virtue which in some sense obliges the Son of God to come into the world in that way.

If we inquire how the doctors of old define Christian virginity, we find them answering with one voice that it is an emulation of the life of the angels; that it raises men above the body by a rejection of its delights; and that it so exalts the flesh that in a way it equals, if we may venture to say so, the purity of spirit. I appeal to the great Augustine to tell us in a sentence what he thinks of virgins. And he replies thus: *Habent aliquid jam non carnis in carne*, “They already have in the flesh something that is not of the flesh,” something that appertains to angels rather than to men. You see, then, that according to this father of the Church virginity is like a mean between spirit and body, and brings us nearer to spiritual natures: hence it can easily be perceived how this virtue advances the mystery of the Incarnation. For what is that mystery? It is the closest union of God and man, of the godhead with human flesh. “The Word was made flesh,” says the evangelist St. John: there you have the union, and there you have the mystery.

But, brethren, does it not seem that there is too great a disproportion between the corruptibility of our bodies and the deathless beauty of that pure spirit, and that it
is impossible to unite such disparate natures? For this very reason holy virginity is put between the two, to bring them closer together through itself. When light falls on something opaque it can never penetrate, because of the opacity; in fact, the rays seem to be thrown back. But when it meets something transparent, light goes into and becomes one with it, because it finds a clarity and transparency resembling its own nature and holding something of itself. Just so, we may say, the godhead of the eternal Word, willing to take to Himself a mortal body, chose holy virginity as the blessed go-between: having something spiritual about it, it was able in a certain sense to prepare flesh to be united with pure spirit.

But lest you should think that I am simply giving voice to my own ideas, you shall hear this truth from a famous Eastern bishop, the great St. Gregory of Nyssa: I will give you his own words, taken directly from his text *De virginitate*. It is through virginity, he writes, that God does not refuse to come and live among men; it is virginity that gives men wings to carry them to Heaven; it is the sacred bond of man’s close intercourse with God, through its intermediary things so far apart in nature are brought into accord—*Quae adeo natura distant, ipsa intercedens sua virtute conciliat, adducitque in concordiam*.

Could there be any clearer confirmation of the truth I am preaching? And does not that truth show the exalted position of both Mary and her faithful husband Joseph?
St. Joseph

You see Mary's dignity in the fact that her blessed virginity was chosen from all eternity to give Jesus Christ to the world. You see Joseph's dignity in the fact that to his keeping was entrusted that maidenhood that has done so much for human kind; it was he who stood guard over this precious thing. Safeguard what has been entrusted to you, Joseph: *Depositum custodi!* Cherish this sacred trust, Mary's maidenhood. Since it pleases the eternal Father that this shall be done under the guise of marriage, it cannot be done without you; your purity is charged with the glorious duty of protecting Mary's, and so in some sort it becomes necessary to the world.

Now there must be set before your eyes something before which nature stands in amazement: I mean this heavenly marriage, intended by God for the safeguarding of virginity, and so to give Jesus Christ to the world. And who shall I take for guide in so difficult a task? Who but the incomparable Augustine who treats so excellently of this mystery? Listen to that learned bishop, follow his thought with care. He begins by pointing out that the marriage bond is threefold. There is first the sacred agreement, by which the couple give themselves fully and completely to one another. Secondly, there is their love, by which the heart of each is dedicated to the other, hearts which cannot be divided, which cannot be warmed at any other fire. Then there are the children, a third bond: for the parents' love, meeting as it were in the common fruit
of their marriage, is entwined and tied as by a stronger knot.

St. Augustine finds these three things in St. Joseph's marriage, and shows that they all are directed to the maintenance of virginity. There is first the agreement by which they give themselves to each other: and there we can but wonder at the triumph of chastity in this veritable marriage. Mary belongs to Joseph, and Joseph to holy Mary: their marriage is a true marriage because they have given themselves to one another. But in what way have they done so? Here, chastity, is your victory! Reciprocally they give their virginity, and over that virginity they yield a mutual right. And what is that right? It is to safeguard each other's maidenhood. Yes: Mary has the right to guard Joseph's virginity, and Joseph has the right to guard Mary's. Neither one nor the other can withdraw the right, and in this marriage faithfulness consists in the guardianship of maidenhood. Such are the promises that bring them together, such is the contract that binds them: two virginities come together to maintain one another forever by a holy sharing of chaste affection. I seem to see two stars that are in conjunction simply because they share the same light. Such is the binding force of this marriage; and it is all the more strong, says St. Augustine, because the promises exchanged are the more inviolable from the fact that they are so holy.

Who could put into words the love there must have
been between this blessed pair? The purity and disinterestedness of virgin fire is the measure of its strength; the flames of bodily desire can never equal the warmth of the spiritual commerce of those bound to one another by love of purity. I will not look about for arguments in proof of this, but I will illustrate its truth by a celebrated miracle related by St. Gregory of Tours in the first book of his history of the Franks. You will like the story, and it will allow you to relax a little. According to it, two people of the high nobility of Auvergne lived together in marriage in perfect continence; in due course they were called to the better life, and their bodies were buried at some distance from one another. And then a strange thing happened. To everybody’s astonishment, the two tombs were suddenly found together side by side, without anybody having laid a hand on them—they could not be kept separate any longer.

What does this miracle mean, my friends? Does it not look as if these chaste bodies were discontented at finding themselves so far apart? Does it not look as if they said (Allow me to give them life and voice, seeing that God gave them movement), does it not look as if they said, “Why have we been separated? We were together so long, and we were always as it were dead, seeing that we had killed all wish for earthly pleasures. We were used to living thus together for so many years that death ought not to disjoin us.” So God allowed them to come together again, so that we might learn from such a wonder
that ardors in which bodily desires have a part are not the best; those are much the stronger that result from two virginities united in a spiritual marriage: they—so it seems—can survive even beneath the ashes of death. Therefore does Gregory of Tours complete his tale by telling us that the folk of that district call those tombs the Tombs of the Two Lovers, as much as to say that they were truly lovers because they loved in spirit.

But where can this spiritual love ever be found as perfect as in St. Joseph’s marriage? There love was wholly heavenly, for all its ardors, all its desires, tended to the keeping of virginity; and it is not difficult to understand how this was so. For what did the most blessed Joseph love in Mary? It was, in truth, not mortal beauty, but that hidden, inward beauty whose chief adornment was maidenhood. Mary’s purity was the object of his chaste ardors; and the more he loved it the more was he determined to maintain it, firstly in her and secondly in himself, by a complete oneness of heart: his married love was turned from the ordinary course and wholly directed to safeguarding his wife’s virginity. A spiritual love, a divine love! You cannot but see how everything in this marriage worked together for the keeping of this sacred trust. Their mutual engagements were wholly chaste, their love was wholly virginal. And now we must turn our attention to something yet more excellent: the holy fruit of this marriage—the Saviour Jesus.

You appear to be surprised to hear me say so confi-
dently that Jesus is the fruit of this marriage. Perhaps you would say that you quite understand how St. Joseph was Christ's father in respect of his care for Him, but that you know he had nothing to do with bringing Him to birth. How can I say then that Jesus is the fruit of the marriage? The thing seems impossible. However, if you glance back over the important truths that we have, I think, solidly established, I hope you will not hesitate to agree with me that that blessed Child Jesus has, in some fashion, followed from the virginal union of this husband and wife. For, faithful Christians, have we not said that it was Mary's virginity that drew down Jesus Christ from Heaven? Is not Jesus the sacred flower that blossomed, the blessed fruit that grew, on the plant of her maidenhood?

Yes, certainly, says St. Fulgentius; "He is the fruit, He is the adornment, He is the reward and recompense of holy virginity": Sanctae virginitatis fructus, decus et munus. It was because of her purity that Mary was well pleasing to the eternal Father; it was because of her purity that the Holy Spirit came upon her and filled her with seed from Heaven. And therefore may it not be said that her purity made her fruitful? If this be so, I am not afraid to go further and affirm that Joseph had a part in this great miracle: for if an angelic purity is the good of holy Mary, it is the trust of righteous Joseph.

But I will go further yet. Allow me to leave my text and to add to my first thoughts by telling you that Mary's
purity is not only her husband’s trust, but also his good. It is his through marriage, it is his through the care with which he cherished it. Fruitful virginity, indeed: Mary’s good, and Joseph’s good too! Mary dedicated it, Joseph safeguarded it, and together they offered it to the eternal Father as a good looked after by their common efforts. And so, as Joseph has so big a part in his wife’s holy maidenhood, he also shares in the fruit that it bears: hence Jesus is his son, not indeed according to the flesh, but his son according to the spirit, in virtue of the virginal union of Joseph with His mother. St. Augustine has expressed it in one sentence: “Because of that faithful wedlock, they both are entitled to be called Christ’s parents.” What a mystery of purity! What a blessed fatherhood! What imperishable light shines through the whole of this marriage!

Christian brethren, we ought to meditate on these things and apply them to ourselves: they were all done for love of us, and we must learn from what was wrought for our salvation. See how chaste, how pure and candid, Christian teaching is. Shall we never understand what we are? Shall we never realize how shameful it is to be always defiling ourselves with all sorts of impurity, when we have been brought up amidst such holy mysteries? Shall we never appreciate the dignity our bodies have since the Son of God took one like to them?

“Before it was sought by its Master,” writes Tertullian, “the flesh was a plaything, or rather, it was a corrupt
thing; it neither deserved to be saved nor was fit for the work of holiness. It was still 'in Adam,' tyrannized over by its lusts, running after false attractions, never lifting its eyes from the earth. It was lewd and unclean, for it had not been washed in the waters of baptism." But since God, when making Himself man, did not will to come into this world otherwise than by way of a holy virginity; since, looking beyond the holiness of wedlock, He chose to have a virgin mother, and found Joseph worthy to be guardian of His life only if he prepared therefor by continence; since His blood has hallowed saving waters to cleanse our flesh and wash away all the filth of its first birth: why, since then, my friends, the flesh is quite different. It is no longer the flesh made from slime of the earth and engendered in sensuality; it is a flesh regenerated and renewed by water and the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, brethren, let us respect these bodies of ours, for they are the members of Jesus Christ; let us beware of prostituting our flesh to uncleanness, for baptism has made it holy. "For this is the will of God . . . that every one of you learn how to possess his vessel in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. . . . For God has not called us unto uncleanness but unto holiness" (I Thess. 4:4-8), in Christ Jesus our Lord. May our continence give honor to the holy maidenhood from which we received the Saviour, which made His Mother fruitful and enabled Joseph to share in that blessed fruitfulness,
so that in a sense he became the father of Jesus Christ. And now, having seen how this came about through his guardianship of Mary’s purity, let us study his fidelity in care for the Holy Child whom the Father in Heaven entrusted to him.

That Joseph should be the protector of Mary’s fruitful virginity was not enough: the eternal Father decreed a yet higher destiny and confided Jesus Christ Himself to his care. And if we search to the depths of this mystery, my brethren, we find something so wonderful for St. Joseph that we can never appreciate it enough.

Jesus, the divine Child over whom Joseph ceaselessly watched, the object of his holy anxiety, was born into this world an orphan—he had no earthly father. . . . Truly He had a Father in Heaven; but Jesus was to cry out on the cross, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” calling Him His God and not His Father. What He said when He was dying, Jesus could have said from His birth, for from that moment His Father allowed Him to be persecuted and abused. What the Father did do for His only-begotten Son, to show that He did not forget Him (that is, as it appears to mortal eyes), was to put Him in charge of a man who should avert the dangers of His childhood: Joseph was the one chosen for this ministry. Words cannot tell the joy with which Joseph accepted this trust and how he put all his heart and soul into being a father to the orphan. From then on he lived only for Jesus, all his
concern was for Him; he had a father’s heart for Him, and what he was not by nature he became by love.

If you are to be convinced that this was so, the truth of this great mystery must be shown from the Scriptures, so let me draw your attention to a fine passage of St. John Chrysostom. He points out that Joseph always appears in the gospels as a father. It is he who gives Jesus His name, as fathers did in those days; it is he who is warned by the angel about the dangers threatening Jesus, and he who is told to return from Egypt. Jesus respects and obeys him, and it is Joseph who guides Him as being first in authority. He is represented everywhere in the position of a father. Chrysostom tells us why this is so. It was God’s mind, he says, that blessed Joseph should stand in a father’s place towards the Child in everything that did not touch virginity.

I do not know if I properly grasp the fullness of Chrysostom’s thought; but if I am not mistaken, this is what he meant. Firstly, it may be taken as certain that it was on account of holy virginity that the Son of God, when He was made man, did not take a human father. When Jesus Christ came to this earth in human form He chose to have a mother as men do; and we might have thought that in like manner He would have a father, still further to strengthen His oneness with our nature. But virginity stood in the way, because the prophets had foretold that the Saviour would one day make maidenhood fruitful; and since Jesus had to be born of a virgin mother, He
could have no other father but God. Consequently it was virginity that prevented Joseph’s fatherhood. But did it prevent it to such a degree that Joseph could have no fatherly quality at all? By no means, says Chrysostom, for virginity is opposed only to those things that hurt it, and there are attributes of fatherhood which are not inconsistent with chastity, which chastity welcomes. All this care and attention, this loving-kindness, this affection—do they harm virginity?

You see, then, how the mind of God reconciled what was at variance between Joseph being father and his virginal integrity. God divided fatherhood, and He willed that fatherhood should make the apportionment. “Holy purity,” He said, “shall be maintained; there is something in the name of father with which virginity does not accord: that, Joseph, you shall not have. But I give you everything else that pertains to a father, what touches virginity, only, excepted.” Accordingly, Christian brethren, Mary did not conceive by Joseph, because that would have been to the detriment of maidenhood. But Joseph shared with her all the cares, the hard work, the anxieties amid which she brought up the Holy Child; and he had for Jesus all the natural love, all the affectionate feelings, all the tender solicitude that a father’s heart can know.

You may ask whence came this father’s heart, since it was not his by nature. Can natural affection be acquired at will? Can art imitate what nature writes in men’s hearts? If Joseph was not a father, how could he have a
father's love? Here God's almighty power was at work. If in the nature of things St. Joseph had not a father's heart, God Himself supplied the lack, for it is written of Him that He directs affection whither He pleases. To appreciate that, notice the Psalmist's teaching when he says that God fashions each man's heart: *Qui finxit singillatim corda eorum* (Psalm 32:15). Do not imagine, please, that David is looking at the heart simply as a bodily organ, which is made by God's power in just the same way as all the other parts of a man. David is here affirming something special: he is considering the heart as the principle of affection, and he sees it like clay in God's hand, obedient to the hand of the potter and given its shape by him. Just so, says David, God fashions each man's heart.

*Each* man's. In some He fashions a tender heart, softening it with charity. In others the heart is hardened, when God justly visits them on account of their sins, withdrawing His light and leaving them with a sense of reprobation. When He sends down the Spirit of His Son on them, God gives all the faithful a son's heart instead of the heart of a bondslave. The Apostles used to tremble at the slightest danger; but God renewed their hearts and they feared nothing. So long as he tended his father's beasts, doubtless Saul's thoughts and feelings were earthy and common; but when God brought him to the throne his heart was changed at his anointing, *Immutavit Dominus cor Saul* (I Kings 10:9), and forthwith he
realized that he was a king. Nevertheless the Israelites scorned the new monarch as a low fellow; but God’s hand touched their hearts (I Kings 10:26), their eyes were opened, and they were moved to give him that awed respect that is due to a king: God had made their hearts the hearts of subjects.

That same divine hand that fashions each man’s heart gave a father’s heart to Joseph and a son’s heart to Jesus, so that Jesus obeyed Joseph and Joseph did not fear to command Jesus. And how came he to be so bold as to command his Creator? It was because Christ’s true Father, the God who had begotten Him from all eternity, had chosen Joseph to act as father to His Son in this world; and in so doing God had, as it were, charged Joseph’s breast with some ray or spark of His own boundless love for His Son. It was this that changed Joseph’s heart, it was this that aroused a father’s love in him; so much so that, feeling a father’s heart burn within him at God’s word, Joseph felt also that God was telling him to use a father’s authority: therefore he did not fear to command Him whom he acknowledged as his Master.

After that, brethren, what need can there be for me to expatiate on St. Joseph’s faithfulness in the discharge of this sacred trust? Is it possible that he could be lacking in fidelity toward Him whom he looked on as his only son? In truth, no; and there would be no need to refer to the matter were it not for the important lessons that can be drawn from so great an example. Thus we learn, from the
endless troubles that beset Joseph from the time that Jesus Christ was committed to his care, that this trust is no easy matter, and that if we are to be faithful to Christ’s grace we must be ready to suffer. Wherever Jesus comes He brings His cross, He brings the thorns, and all whom He loves have to share them. Joseph and Mary were poor; but they had never been homeless, they had somewhere to go. But then when this Child comes into the world there is no room for them, and they have to find refuge in a stable. How did this come about if not because “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11), and “the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20)? He brought not only want, but persecution. They were living happily together at home, rising above their poverty by patience and hard work. But the coming of Jesus disturbed this peaceful existence and threw it into confusion: adversity came with Him. Herod could not abide that this babe should live, and His lowly birth was no defense against the tyrant’s jealousy. Heaven itself disclosed the secret, and pointed Jesus out by means of a star; and it looks as if the star guided worshippers from afar only to raise up a pitiless enemy in the Child’s own country.

What does St. Joseph do? Remember, brethren, he was only a poor artisan: he had no fortune but his hands, no investment but his workshop, no resources but his trade. Yet he is forced to go away into Egypt and to undergo a hard exile there. And why? Because he had
Jesus Christ with him. But do you suppose he complained about this trouble-bringing Child, who dragged him away from his native land and seemed to have been sent to plague him? Just the opposite. Joseph counted himself happy to suffer in Jesus’ company; he was disturbed in mind, but the whole reason for his alarm was the danger overhanging the divine Child, who was more dear to him than life itself. Did he perhaps hope that before long all his misfortunes would be at an end? No, he did not look forward to that, for troubles were foretold on every hand. Holy Simeon had spoken of strange contradictions that would overtake this Child; here was the beginning of them, and throughout his life Joseph was apprehensive of evils to come.

Was this the greatest test of Joseph’s faithfulness? It would be a mistake to think so. Consider this further ordeal, and a remarkable one. It was not enough that men should distress him, Jesus did so too: the Boy eluded his watchful eye, slipped away, and was lost for three days. What had faithful Joseph done? What had happened to the sacred trust that God had put into his hands? We can hardly imagine Joseph’s alarm and lamentations. If you do not yet understand his fatherhood, look upon his tears now, see his misery, and be convinced that he is a father. His grief made it abundantly clear, and Mary was right when she said to Jesus, “Thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing.” It was as if she said, “Son, I am not afraid to call him your father now, and by doing
so I throw no shadow on the virginal marvel of your birth. I call him your father because of his solicitude and disquiet—his concern on your behalf is truly fatherly. I and your father: I join him with myself in our common sorrowing."

You faithful Christians, see with what trials Jesus puts faithfulness to the test, see how He seeks the company of those who suffer. You soft and sensual ones, this Child does not seek your society; His poverty is ashamed at your luxury; His body, that will endure such suffering, cannot abide your fastidiousness. He looks for strong, courageous souls who do not shrink from carrying His cross, who do not blush to be fellows with Him in poverty and suffering. I leave you to think about these holy truths, for I cannot tell you all my own mind on the subject. I have now another task before me, and that is to consider the secret that the eternal Father confided to Joseph's humility: we must look upon the hidden Christ, and Joseph hidden with Him, that so we too may be moved to love of a hidden life.

What can I say about this man who was hidden with Christ? Where is the light that will dispel the uncertainties and obscurity that shroud Joseph's life? For that matter, what am I doing that I should want to make public something about which the Scriptures are silent? If it be a counsel of the eternal Father that His Son should be hidden from the world and Joseph with Him, it is for
us to respect the secrets of His providence, without trying to pry into them: Joseph’s hidden life should be an object of our reverence rather than material for sermons. Nevertheless I must say something about it, for I have promised to do so; and it is spiritually profitable to muse on such a subject for, if I have nothing else to say, I can at least repeat that Joseph had the privilege of being always with Jesus and that, with Mary, he partook so freely of His graces; and yet for all that Joseph remained hidden, so that his life, his deeds, his virtues were unknown. We may perhaps learn from this example that it is possible to be great without having publicity, to be highly favored without people talking about it, to attain true nobility without being well known, the sole witness being a good conscience: “For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience . . .” (II Cor. 1:12). This thought will encourage us to despise the world’s glory; and that is the mark I am aiming at.

Properly to understand the nobility and grandeur of St. Joseph’s hidden life we have to go back to the beginning, and notice first of all the endless variety of God’s dealings with respect to different vocations. Among them all, I remark two in the Scriptures that seem to be directly opposed to one another: the vocation of the Apostles, and that of St. Joseph. Jesus is revealed to the one and to the other, but in strongly contrasting conditions. He is revealed to the Apostles in order that they may preach Him throughout the world; He is revealed to Joseph in
order that he may hide Him and keep silent about Him. The Apostles are shining lights whereby men may see Jesus; Joseph is a veil to cover Him, a veil that hides Mary’s virginity and the greatness of the Saviour of mankind. Men said in their scorn of Him, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph . . .?” (John 6:42). For the Apostles, Jesus is a word to be preached: “Go, stand and speak in the Temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). For Joseph, He is a hidden word, a “saying hidden from them” (Luke 18:34), and he is not allowed to lay it bare. And see what happens. The blessed Apostles preach the Gospel with such effect that the noise thereof reaches Heaven: St. Paul goes so far as to say that the purposes of God’s wisdom are made known to the celestial powers “through the Church” and by the ministry of its preachers (Eph. 3:10). Joseph, on the other hand, hearing the marvels that are told of Christ, listens, wonders—and says nothing.

What are we to think of this contrast? Is God contradicting Himself in these different vocations? Do not suppose that, brethren. This diversity teaches God’s children the important truth that the whole of Christian perfection consists in being submissive. He who glorifies the Apostles in the renown of their preaching glorifies St. Joseph in the humility of his silence; and from that we have to learn that the glory of Christians lies, not in distinguished achievements and offices, but in doing what God wills. Not everyone can have the honor of preaching
Jesus Christ, but all can have the honor of obeying Him: that was Joseph’s glory, and that is the glory of Christianity.

So, good Christians, do not ask me what St. Joseph did in his hidden life. I cannot tell you; all I can do is to ask in turn, with the Psalmist, “What has the just man done?” The life of sinners generally makes more noise than the life of the righteous, for selfishness and insurgent passions create disturbance all over the world. The wicked, says David, have bent their bow, they have shot at upright men, they have ravaged and “destroyed the things which [the Lord] has made.” But, he goes on, “What has the just man done?” (Psalm 10: 3-4). David implies that he has done nothing—nothing, that is, in men’s eyes, for all that the just man has done is meant for the eyes of God. The righteous Joseph lived in precisely that way: he saw Jesus, and he said nothing; he delighted in Him, and he still said nothing; for him God was enough, without the esteem of men. He fulfilled his vocation: the Apostles were called to be ministers of the public Christ, Joseph was called to be minister and companion to the hidden Jesus.

But what need was there for Jesus to hide Himself, why was this eternal splendor from the face of the Father in Heaven voluntarily covered up for no less than thirty years? You who are so proud, do you not know? You men of the world, do you not know? The cause is to be found in your pride, your vanity, your limitless ambition, the
criminal self-satisfaction which makes you shamefully turn what should be used to please God to a pernicious endeavor to please men. That is why Jesus hides Himself. He sees the havoc and devastation for which this passion is responsible, how it corrupts our whole life from the cradle to the grave; He sees virtue smothered by this mean and shamefaced fear of seeming good and devout; He sees the iniquities it produces in us, a damnable willingness to conform to the ways of society or an unscrupulous pursuit of ambition at anybody’s and everybody’s expense. And that is not all, my brethren. He sees that this desire to appear great in men’s eyes ruins the finest virtues: it diverts them from their true end, it puts this world’s fame in place of the glory of Heaven, it makes us do for worldly reasons what we ought to do for love of God. Jesus Christ sees all the woes brought about by this eagerness to be important in men’s eyes, and He hides Himself that we may learn to reject the pomp and honors of the world. He does not think His cross is enough to subdue this raging passion; He chooses a yet more abject state, if that be possible, one in which He is brought in some sense even lower.

For I do not fear to tell my Saviour that I recognize Him more easily amidst the torments of the cross than in the lowliness of His unknown life. Though His flesh is torn, His face bloodstained, though He hardly looks like a human being, much less God, yet He is not altogether hidden: through it all I can perceive some spark of
His sublimity, in the unwavering steadfastness with which He overcomes the extremest anguish. Amidst His throes His dignity is such that it compels the worship of one of His fellow sufferers. But nothing but abasement appears in His state of hiddenness, so that a man of old, Tertullian, rightly said He was a reproach to Himself: *Adultus non gestit agnosti*, *sed contumeliosus insuper sibi est*. A reproach, because He does not seem to do anything and appears to have no purpose in the world. But He accepts this ignominy and is happy that this insult should be added to all His other sufferings if only, by withdrawing Himself with Joseph and Mary, He may teach us by His own example: teach us that, when one day He shows Himself to the world, it will be for the sake of our good and in obedience to His Father; teach us that all greatness consists in conforming oneself to God's good pleasure, in whatever way it may please Him to use us; teach us, lastly, that this inconspicuousness of which we are so afraid is in fact so good and so becoming that God Himself chose it.

That is what Jesus Christ teaches us during the years that He lives in obscurity with His humble family, with Mary and Joseph, whom He associates with His hidden life because they are so dear to Him. It is for us to associate ourselves with them and to be hidden with Jesus.

Christian brethren, know you not that He is still hidden? He suffers when His name is blasphemed day after day and His gospel scorned, because the hour of
His full glory has not yet come. He is hidden with His Father, and we are hidden with Him in God, as the Apostle says; and since we are hidden with Him it is not in this land of exile that we must look for renown. But when Christ shall show Himself in majesty, then will be the time of our appearing: “When Christ, your life, shall appear, then you too will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). What a day will that be, when Jesus speaks praise of us in face of all creation, before the blessed angels, before His Father in Heaven! Can we deserve that glory, however dark the night, however long our time of hiddenness? Let men ignore us forever, if only Jesus Christ will speak of us on that day. But we must stand in fear of that terrible sentence of His, “They have had their reward” (Matt. 6:2): “You wanted earthly glory: you have had it; you have been paid; there is nothing more to come.” It is a clever device of the Enemy, to direct men’s eyes upon us so that God’s are turned away; it is a perverse form of recognition to offer rewards for our virtue for fear God should not do so! Thou Evil One! I have no use for your glory: your empty gauds and pomps shall not be the wages of my labors. I look forward to a crown from the hand of One whom I love, I await recompense from a mightier arm than yours. When Jesus manifests Himself in glory, then, then do I wish to be known.

On that day, brethren, you will see the things I am unable to tell you now: the wonders of Joseph’s hidden
life will be open to your gaze; you will know what passed during all those years, and how glorious it is to be hidden with Christ. It is not the glory of those who receive their reward in this world; it will be seen then because it is not seen now; it will burst on the sight then because it is not yet unveiled. God will redress the obscurity of Joseph’s life, and his glory will be so much the greater in that it is withheld until the life that is to come.

We must love this hidden life of Jesus and Joseph. That we are not seen of men is no matter at all. Those for whom the eyes of God are not enough are crazy with ambition; not to be content with being seen by Him alone is a contempt of His majesty. If you hold important office, if your responsibilities and duties are such that you have to live in the public eye, at least bear seriously in mind that you will die in private and that your honors will not follow you. Do not let the fuss people make of you close your ears to the words of the Son of God. He does not say, “Blessed are you when men praise you”; He says, “Blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake” (Matt. 5:11). Tremble, therefore, amidst the honors that are done you, for you have not been found worthy of the obloquy the Gospel promises. But if the world rejects us, Christian brethren, let us take that rejection to our bosom; let us accuse ourselves before God for our ingratitude and our absurd vanities; let us look the shamefulness of our life in the
face; let us at least be small in our own eyes, through humble confession of our misdoings; let us share so far as we can in the abasement of Jesus that we may at the last share in His glory. Amen.
Second Panegyric upon St. Joseph

JACQUES-BÉNIGNE BOSSUET

Quaesivit sibi Dominus virum juxta cor suum: “The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart” (I Kings 13:14).

The man who is after God’s heart does not prove himself so outwardly, and God does not choose him by appearances or on the evidence of public opinion. David was the first to earn those words of praise, and when God sent Samuel to Jesse’s house to find this great man whom God had destined to receive the most illustrious of the world’s crowns, he was overlooked by his own family. All the elder sons were presented before the prophet; but God does not judge in man’s way, and he warned Samuel to pay no attention to their imposing stature and bold appearance. So the seven well-known sons were rejected, and Jesse sent for the eighth, who had been sent out to tend the sheep; and Samuel anointed David’s head with the oil of kingship, and his parents were astonished that they had given so little attention to this son whom God chose in so striking a way (I Kings 16:1-13).

1 Œuvres oratoires . . . , III, 592-615.
A similar disposition of divine Providence suggests that I should apply to Joseph, son of David, the words that were applied to David himself. The time came when God sought a man after His own heart to whose hands He could entrust the things most dear to Him: the person of His only-begotten Son, the integrity of the holy Mother, the salvation of the human race, His most sacred purpose, the treasure of Heaven and earth. He passed over Jerusalem and other famous cities, but stopped at Nazareth; and there, in that obscure township, He again chose an unknown man, a poor artisan, Joseph, for an office which the highest angels would feel honored to undertake. From this we learn that a man after God’s heart must be sought in the heart, not the looks, and that it is hidden virtue that makes him worthy of this praise. I am proposing to lay bare the heart and to consider the hidden virtues of righteous Joseph, so more than ever I need that He who is called the God of our hearts (Psalm 72: 26) should enlighten me with His Spirit. But we should do ill if, used as we are to asking holy Mary’s help in other matters, we should neglect to say “Ave . . .” with special devotion when we come to deal with her blessed husband.

It is a common human failing to concentrate on the outward and neglect the inward, to strive for surface show and ignore the real and solid, to judge things by appearances and not by what they really are. That is why
the most esteemed virtues are those which play a part in public affairs and enter into men’s relations with one another; the hidden, inner virtues, which are a matter between God and the individual man, without reference to the public, are not only not striven for, they are not even understood. Yet all the time the whole mystery of true virtue resides in this privacy. It is useless to train a good public man unless you first train a good man; it is useless to consider what place you can take in public life unless you first consider what manner of man you are in yourself. . . . Unless we begin there, other virtues, however striking, are only external ornaments, without substance and verity. They can gain us praise and make us personally agreeable; they can form us to the heart and liking of men: but it is only the inner virtues that have the power to form us to the heart and liking of God.

I want to set before you these inner virtues, this good man, this man after God’s heart and liking, in the person of righteous Joseph. I am putting aside the trusts and mysteries that heighten his praise. I am not going to tell you, Christian brethren, that he was the trustee of heavenly treasure, foster-father of Jesus Christ, guide of His childhood and savior of His life, husband and guardian of His holy mother. I shall say nothing of the things that strike the public eye. Rather am I going to sing the praises of a holy man whose chief greatness was to belong quietly to God. Joseph’s virtues of which
I shall speak are not those of society or of affairs; they are all concealed in the privacy of his conscience: simplicity, detachment, love of a hidden life.

You seem surprised to hear the praise of so great a saint, who was called to such exalted responsibilities, reduced to three ordinary virtues. But the character of the good man of whom I spoke resides in those three virtues, and there is no difficulty about showing that they constitute the character of righteous Joseph too. If a man is to be good after God's own heart, he must first seek God; then he must find Him; then he must have joy in Him. Whoever seeks God must seek in simplicity, for He cannot abide crooked paths. Whoever wishes to find God must be detached from all else, for He wants all our good to be in Him. Whoever wishes to be happy in God must withdraw and hide himself that he may have joy quietly and alone, for He does not impart Himself amid the noise and bustle of the world. That is what St. Joseph did: a simple man, he sought God; a detached man, he found God; a retiring man, he had joy in God.

. . . God ordained that Joseph should accept the Blessed Virgin as his faithful wife, while her pregnancy seemed to convict her; that he should treat as his own son a child with whom he was concerned only because He was in his house; that he should revere as his God one whom he had to protect and look after. In these matters, my brethren, it was needful to adopt an attitude delicate
Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet

beyond the means of nature, and only an extreme simplicity could make the heart sufficiently submissive and gentle. This is what Joseph did. With regard to his wife, never was surmise more moderate or doubt more respectful. But then he was so just that the intervention of Heaven was required to clear up the situation, and an angel from God told him that Mary had conceived of the Holy Spirit. If Joseph had been less right-minded, if he had belonged to God only by halves, he would not have been convinced without further ado; some faint suspicion would have still lingered in a corner of his mind, and his love for Mary would always have been faltering and uncertain. But his heart sought God in simplicity and was undivided toward Him; it was not difficult for him to believe that his holy wife’s incorruptible virtue was deserving of testimony from Heaven. The Bible commends Abraham to us as the pattern of perfect faith (Rom. 4:11), but Joseph’s faith was greater: Abraham is praised because he believed that a barren woman would bear a child (Gen. 15:6); Joseph believed the same of a virgin, and in simplicity accepted that inscrutable mystery of child-bearing maidenhood.

But here is something else bewildering. God willed that Joseph should accept the Child of Mary’s purity as his own son. Joseph did not share with her the honor of giving Him birth, because that would have impaired virginity; but he was to share the toil and anxiety amid which she brought Him up: he was to be as a father to the
St. Joseph

Child who had no earthly father; though he was not a father according to nature, he had to become such according to love. But how could such a thing be done? Whence would come a father's heart if not from nature? Can such things be acquired at will? And what about the danger of forced emotions and artificial affection? We need not be afraid, my brethren. A heart that seeks God in simplicity is a malleable clay that takes the form He wishes to give it: what God wills for it becomes its nature. Since it was the will of the Father in Heaven that Joseph should take His place on earth and be a father to His Son, it cannot be doubted that Joseph had a natural love for the divine Child, and experienced all the tender feelings and affectionate solicitude that belong to a father's heart.

So Joseph loved Jesus as his son; but could he then revere Him as his God? Surely nothing could have been more difficult, had not holy simplicity made him submissive to the movements of the divine will. Properly to appreciate the perfection of Joseph's faith we have to notice that Christ's weakness appears under two different conditions: namely, when it was supported by some effect of power, and when it existed alone, abandoned to itself. Joseph saw it at its most extreme, even more extreme, I do not hesitate to say, than in the ignominy of the Cross—for that was Christ's great hour, the hour for which He had come. The weakness
that Joseph beheld was so great that it seems almost unnatural.

For what did the heavenly Father do? He saved the Magi who had come to worship the Child, sending them home safely by another way. (I am not making this up, but simply following the sacred narrative.) He wanted to save the Child, but seems to have had trouble in doing so. An angel comes from Heaven, awakens Joseph with a start, so to say, and speaks to him as if unforeseen danger threatens: "Arise, and take the Child and His mother, and flee into Egypt!" Flee: what a word! Now if he had said only "Withdraw!" But flee—and in the middle of the night! The God of Israel is saved only under cover of darkness. And who says this? An angel who comes to Joseph suddenly like a frightened messenger: "In such a way," declares St. Peter Chrysologus, "as though all Heaven were alarmed and that fear had spread there before it reached earth." But see what followed. The Holy Family is safe in Egypt, and again the angel appears to Joseph: "Arise," he says, "and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the Child's life are dead." What! Would a God not be safe if they were living? Here indeed is the lowest depth of weakness.

That was the condition in which the divine Jesus was; and St. Joseph worshipped Him in that condition with the same submissiveness as if he had seen His greatest
miracles. He recognized the mystery of that extraordinary abjection, he knew that the strength of faith is to sustain hope when there is no ground for hope: to live “hoping against hope” (Rom. 4:18). He left himself wholly to God, and did as he was told without question. Obedience that inquires into the reasons for a command is too inquisitive; it ought to keep its eyes on its duty, and cherish the blindness that enables it to progress safely. St. Joseph was thus obedient because he believed with simplicity; he did not waver between faith and reason, but followed with a right intention the light sent to him from on high—his was such a faith as that of which the Saviour said He had not found the like in Israel (Luke 7:9).

What sort of faith is ours, my brethren? Who will enable us to look deeply within and see whether those acts of faith we make are really from the heart, or whether they are not just an external habit? If we cannot read our own hearts, we can consider our works, and learn how little faith we have. It is a mark of its weakness that we do not dare to build on it; we have no trust in it, to make it the foundation of our hope of happiness. When we falter hesitatingly between a Christian life and a worldly life, is there not a doubting voice within us asking, “Is this promised immortality certain? Does it not endanger our peace and happiness to leave what we can see in order to go after what we cannot see?” We are then not believing with simplicity, we are not sincere Christians.
“But,” you may say, “I would believe if I saw an angel as St. Joseph did.” Do not deceive yourselves! Jonah argued with God even though he had learned His will through a manifest vision; and Job was filled with faith even before he was strengthened by God’s words to him out of a whirlwind. It is not extraordinary happenings that discipline the heart, but holy simplicity and a pure intention born of true charity: it is these that make our spirit cleave to God, by detaching us from created things. And it is of detachment I now have to speak.

God has based His gospel on some mystifying paradoxes, and He gives Himself only to those who turn away from other goods, having enough in Him alone. Abraham had to leave his home and all earthly attachments before God could say to him, “I am thy God.” We have to give up all that is visible if we are to deserve what is invisible; no one can possess this great All unless he lives in the world “as having nothing” (II Cor. 6:10). If there was ever anyone to whom God gladly gave Himself it was surely righteous Joseph, who took Him into his arms and his household, and to whose heart He was even more present than to his eyes. In Joseph we behold a man who found God in a very special way; and he was made worthy of this by a complete detachment; from his passions, his interests, his own peace of mind. . . .

He was detached from his passions, since he was able effortlessly to rise above them, whether the most
enticing of those that are gentle or the most fierce of those that are violent, particularly love and jealousy. His wife was his sister. If I may put it so, he was concerned only with Mary’s maidenhood; but he loved it that it might be maintained in his chaste bride, and then that it might be reproduced in himself through an entire oneness of heart. In this marriage, faithfulness consisted in each guarding in the other that perfect integrity that they had promised. Such was the promise that brought them together, the treaty that bound them. . . . As St. Augustine says, the bond of this marriage was so much the stronger in that the inviolability of their mutual promises was increased by the special holiness of those promises.

But, Christian brethren, jealousy tried to break the sacred bond of this wedded friendship. All the while he was ignorant of the mysteries of which his beloved bride had been made worthy, Joseph could only think about her pregnancy. I leave it to painters and poets to depict for you the horrors of jealousy, the poison of this serpent, the hundred eyes of this monster; I need only say that it is a sort of combination of the most raging passions. Outraged love drives grief on to despair, and hatred becomes furious. Doubtless this is why the Holy Spirit says that “Jealousy is as hard as hell” (Cant. of Cant. 8:6), for it combines the two most grievous things in Hell, rage and despair.

But the ravening beast could do nothing against St.
Joseph, whose patience arouses our wonder. He felt most acutely that he was unable to protect his wife, and he did not want to condemn her outright. He thought about the matter quietly. According to the law he was bound to send her away from him; but at any rate he would not defame her; he kept within the bounds of justice; so far from asking for her punishment, he spared her any disgrace. That was a very moderate decision, and even so he was in no hurry to carry it to its end. He decided to await the night—that wise counselor in our troubles and moderator of our rash precipitancies. And so it happened: that night unveiled the mystery, an angel came to resolve his doubts. And I venture to think, brethren, that God owed this help to Joseph. For since human reason, upheld by grace, had reached its highest point, it was fitting that Heaven should do the rest; and that reason deserved to know the truth, for, without knowing it, it had nevertheless not failed to be just, as St. Peter Chrysologus remarks.

Some of you may think that, since St. Joseph was so detached from his passions, it is a waste of words to dwell on his detachment from his interests. But I do not think that that is so. For concern about our own interests is rather a vice than a passion. Passions run their course, and consist in a certain burning emotion, which is changed by circumstances, moderated by spiritual means, swept away by time, consumed in its own flames. Whereas attachment to one’s interests becomes more
and more rooted as time goes on, because, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, arising from weakness, it becomes stronger every day in the measure that everything else gets weaker and worn out.

But however this may be, there was nothing more disengaged from self-interest than the soul of the just Joseph. Imagine a poor artisan who has inherited nothing but his two hands, who has no investments but his workshop, no resources but his work; what he receives in one hand he has to pay out with the other, and he sees the bottom of his purse every night: yet he has to undertake long journeys, which make him lose all his customers (we have to talk in this way of the foster father of Jesus Christ), while the angel who sends him on these says never a word about where his livelihood is to come from. Joseph was not ashamed to suffer what we are ashamed to mention—bow your heads, you great ones of the earth! He goes, nevertheless, traveling hither and thither without disquiet simply because he is with Jesus Christ, only too happy to have Him at this price. He counts himself rich, and seeks daily to empty his heart that God may dwell therein and extend His sway; well off, because he has nothing; possessing all things, because he has none; happy, tranquil, secure, because he has neither respite nor dwelling place nor credit.

... To die with Jesus Christ we have to die that death of which St. Paul writes: “The world is crucified
to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Pope St. Gregory the Great gives a fine interpretation of those words. The world, he says, is dead to us when we leave it. But, he goes on, that is not enough. To reach perfection we must be dead to the world, so that it leaves us. That is, we must be such that the world rejects us, taking us for dead, and no longer counts us among its intrigues and pursuits, parties to its talk and plans. That is the perfection of Christianity, there life is to be found, for there one learns to have joy in God, who does not dwell in the tempest or in the hubbub of the world but in the quiet of solitude and withdrawal.

Such was the death that Joseph died, hidden with Jesus and Mary, rejoicing at a death whereby he lived with the Saviour. There was nothing he feared so much as that the life and noise of the world would break in on and disturb this hidden inward peace. It is a striking mystery: there in Joseph’s household was something that would draw the eyes of all the world, and the world did not know it. There was a God-man there, and Joseph did not utter a word about it; daily he beheld and savored a tremendous mystery, but he did not divulge it. The shepherds and the Magi came to worship Jesus Christ, Simeon and Anna announced His destiny; but no one could bring stronger witness to the mystery of Christ than he who fostered Him in trust, who knew the miracle of His birth, who learned from the lips of an angel who He was and why He was sent.
What father would not talk about such a son? And yet the enthusiasm of holy souls who poured forth praises of Jesus failed to open the mouth of him to whom God's secret had been entrusted: Joseph did not reveal it to them. "His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning him," says St. Luke (2:33). They appeared surprised, it seemed that they did not know anything; they listened to what others said, and were so scrupulously silent that thirty years later it was asked in the town, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?" In all those years the people had learned nothing of the mystery of His virginal conception. Mary and Joseph knew that, truly to be happy in God, it is necessary to seek solitude, to banish wandering thoughts and longings for this and that, to withdraw with God and to be content with the sight of Him. . . .

Joseph merited the highest honors because he never troubled about honors: the Church can show us nothing finer, because she has nothing more hidden. . . .
The First English Book on St. Joseph

AN ANONYMOUS ENGLISH WRITER
[c. Eighteenth Century]

Divers Methods of Honouring St. Joseph

As most persons place in their best Rooms Representations in Colours, of such as they tenderly love, as Testimonies of their Esteem and Affection; So the Devout Clients of St. Joseph will do well to set up his Picture in their private Oratories, or to carry it in little about them. St. Teresa practis’d this, and the little Picture is still preserv’d at Avilla. By our Lord’s Directions, she plac’d over the Gate of her first reform’d Monastery, the Statue of St. Joseph, with that of his Immaculate Spouse. When St. Francis Sales departed most happily at Lyons, there was but one loose Picture found in his Breviary, which was of St. Joseph. The aforesaid St. Teresa now enjoys the lasting Reward due to her Merits, and indefatigable Labour, in reforming an ancient Religious Order, erecting thirty-two Monasteries. We by

1 From Some Reflections upon the Prerogatives, Power and Protection of St. Joseph (Edition of 1722).
a personal Reformation of our Lives, must fit ourselves for one of those happy Mansions in the House of our Heavenly Father; (a) for a very short time, will fix us in the House of our Eternity. (b) We must not lose short Day-light, in carrying on the great Work, but humbly beg St. Joseph’s helping Hand, that as he, Fatherlike, assisted that poor Virgin in the Reformation, so likewise he will favour us his Petitioners, in taking secure Possession of our glorious and everlasting Mansions.

Hymn in Honour of St. Joseph

Hail Holy Joseph, whose pure Mind,
Rendred thee fit to be design’d,
The Husband of a most pure Bride,
To Royal David both ally’d.
Hail Guardian of God’s Son on Earth,
Fore-tol’d of his stupendious Birth.
And other Heavenly Secrets known,
But to thyself and Spouse alone.

How often did thy happy Arms,
Secure that sacred Babe from Harms;
When with him, and thy Virgin-Wife
Constrain’d to fly, to save his Life!
With what unspeakable delight,
Didst thou enjoy the precious Sight!
Of thy Redeemer whose bright Eyes,
Did far outshine the Sun’s uprise.

How many Times didst thou embrace
The tender Giver of all Grace,
And didst as often fix a Kiss,
To fill the Measure of thy Bliss?
To whom did God such Joys impart,
As to thine own and Spouses Heart
Which did strange Comforts entertain,
When Jesus lost, was found again.
Most happy was thy House to be,
The Paradise, in which the Tree
Of Life did prosper, when the ground,
Where that first grew, could not be found.
How sweetned was thy daily Pains
While Jesus lived on thy Gains!
Whereby the Food that ye did Eat,
Became all Sanctify’d Meat.

With thee he frequently did walk,
Calling thee Father in his talk;
and by his charming sweet Discourse,
Did Sorrows from thy Heart Divorce.
No Instruments, however Strung,
’Ere sounded like our Saviour’s Tongue;
Which thou heard’st hourly! happy then
Wert thou above the rest of Men.

And when, in Age, Resistless Death,
Gave summons to thy latest Breath,
Cou’d thou more Happiness devise,
Than to have Jesus close thine Eyes.

Great is thy Glory sure above,
Whom Christ did so intirely love,
As on thy Person to bestow
Such Priviledges here below.

Then let us all, with one Consent,
Beseech St. Joseph to present,
Our Wants to God; and for us Pray,
That serve our Lord we ever may.

Amen.
Meditations on St. Joseph's Life

. . . Consider: How Divine Providence order'd, that St. Joseph of Royal Extraction, should be train'd up in the humble Exercise of a Carpenter. 1. Not only for his Personal Maintenance, but that this contemptible Calling might balance the future Dignities that were to be conferr'd upon him, and to resemble the humble Life of the Messias. 2. That he might decline Idleness, so dangerous to his vow'd Chastity. 3. That he might be a Pattern to Men living in the World, how they might be much in God's Favour. 4. That by the Labour of his Hands he might be enabled to bestow the noblest Charity in supporting the Son of God and his Immaculate Mother. My Soul! upon all Occasions rejoice in divine Appointments, and take full Notice, that solid Perfection is not confin'd to the solitary Cells of Nitria. An unregarded Artesan has taken Place in Glory, of all the rigid Anchorets. Whoever serves his God more faithfully and loves him more fervorously than the silent Recluse will have a more resplendent Crown. Rejoice that your Creator encourages and entertains impartially all his Servants, according to their Merits, by Co-operation with his Grace. Congratulate with St. Joseph for being so great a Favourite of Heaven. Take a strict account of your self How time is employed from Morning to

* [The Nitrian desert in Egypt was the home of many of the earliest monks and solitaries. *Ed.*]
Evening, ponder what is amiss, and resolve upon Regulation, by the Intercession of St. Joseph.

[The book from which the above excerpts are taken is of special interest to people of English speech, for it appears to be the first recorded full-length book devoted to St. Joseph written in English. What little is known about it is as follows.

In the year 1640 there was published at Lyons a work entitled *La dévotion à S. Joseph, le plus aymé et le plus aymable de tous les Saintcs, après Jésus et Marie*, written by a distinguished French Jesuit, Paul de Barry. This book was in due course translated into English, and there is a copy of the second edition of this translation in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; it bears the title *Pious remarks upon the Life of S. Joseph*, and was “printed by T. F. in the Year M.DCC.” The place of printing and name of the translator are not given; nor do the place and date of publication of the first edition seem to be known. The book was probably of English provenance.

*Some Reflections upon the Prerogatives, Power and Protection of St. Joseph* is based upon Father de Barry’s work and its English version, but again the name of the author is not known. There are two copies of the book, dated 1710, in the Bodleian Library at Oxford: one of these formerly belonged to the convent of English Carmelite nuns at Antwerp (this community has been at
Lanherne in Cornwall since 1794), and the other bears the name of an owner, "Jane Paston 1712," who probably belonged to the Norfolk family of that name to whom we owe the famous Paston Letters. There are other copies of Some Reflections, both dated 1722, at the British Museum and at Ushaw College, Durham. It seems probable that the 1710 edition is the first edition, and it is likely that it was printed and published in London; it may have been entered in the Stationers' Register, though apparently it does not appear in any of the printed records. On the other hand, the British Museum catalogue suggests Louvain, with a query, as the place of publication of the 1722 edition; but there seems to be no solid reason for this attribution.

The anonymous author of Some Reflections states in his preface that he set out with "no other Intention, than to epitomise R. F. Barry's Remarks on the Life of our Patriarch"; but later on he adds that "Such as compare the two Pieces, will take Notice that I have not confin'd my self to his Matter, much less to his Method. Nothing is passed over, which I concluded material to my Design." He in fact shortened the accounts of miraculous assistance and some of the prayers, and expanded the meditations. It is then to a certain extent an original work, and may be said to be entitled to the distinction of being the first original complete book in English on St. Joseph.

Extracts from the 1722 edition of Some Reflections
are here printed with the generous co-operation of the Librarian of Ushaw College; the further particulars in this note are mainly due to the kindness of the Keeper of the Printed Books at the Bodleian Library, of Mr. A. F. Allison, of the British Museum, and of the Conservateur aux Imprimés at the Bibliothèque Nationale. The editor is indebted to the Reverend G. T. Mahon, of the Mill Hill Missionaries, for first drawing his attention to this book. Ed.]
St. Joseph’s Glory

ALBAN BUTLER
[1710-1773]

St. Joseph’s true glory consisted in his humility and virtue. The history of his life has not been written by men; but his principal actions are recorded by the Holy Ghost himself. God entrusted him with the education of His divine Son, manifested in the flesh. And with this in view he was espoused to the Virgin Mary. . . . Joseph seems for a considerable time to have been unaware that the great mystery of the Incarnation had been wrought in her by the Holy Ghost. Conscious, therefore, of his own chaste behavior toward her, it could not but raise a great concern in his breast to find that, notwithstanding the sanctity of her deportment, yet he might well be assured that she was with child. But being “a just man,” as the Scripture calls him, and consequently possessed of all virtues, especially of charity and mildness toward his neighbor, he was determined to leave her privately, without either condemning or

1 From The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints, March 19.
accusing her, committing the whole cause to God. These his perfect dispositions were so acceptable to God, the lover of justice, charity and peace, that He sent an angel from Heaven, not to reprehend anything in Joseph’s holy conduct but to dissipate all his doubts and fears, by revealing to him this adorable mystery. How happy should we be if we were as tender in all that regards the reputation of our neighbor; as free from entertaining any injurious thought or suspicion, whatever certainty our conjectures or our senses may seem to rely on; and as guarded in our tongue. We commit these faults only because in our hearts we are devoid of that true charity and simplicity whereof St. Joseph sets so eminent an example on this occasion. . . .

Amidst his extraordinary graces, what more wonderful than his humility? He conceals his privileges, lives as the most obscure of men, publishes nothing of God’s great mysteries, makes no further inquiries into them, leaving it to God to manifest them at His own time, seeks to fulfill the order of Providence in his regard, without interfering with anything but what concerns himself. Though descended from the royal family which had long been in possession of the throne of Judea, he is content with his condition, that of a mechanic or handicraftsman, and makes it his business by laboring in it to maintain himself, his spouse and the divine Child. . . .

We cannot doubt that Joseph had the happiness of Jesus and Mary attending at his death, praying by him,
assisting and comforting him in his last moments. Whence he is particularly invoked for the great grace of a happy death and the spiritual presence of Jesus in that tremendous hour. The Church reads the history of the patriarch Joseph on his festival, who was styled the savior of Egypt, which he delivered from perishing by famine. . . . But our great saint was chosen by God to be the savior of the life of Him who was the true Saviour of the souls of men, rescuing Him from the tyranny of Herod. He is now glorified in Heaven as the guardian and keeper of his Lord on earth. As Pharaoh said to the Egyptians in their distress, “Go to Joseph,” so may we confidently address ourselves to the mediation of him to whom God-made-man was subject and obedient on earth.
Sermon for St. Joseph’s Feast

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI
[1696-1787]

We indeed ought to honor St. Joseph, seeing that the Son of God himself was pleased to honor him by calling him father. “Christ,” says Origen, “gave to Joseph the honor due to a parent.” So too does the Gospel: “His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him” (Luke 2:33); and the mother of Jesus herself speaks of Joseph thus: “Thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing” (Luke 2:48). Since, then, the King of kings was pleased to raise him to such a height, it is right, and our duty, to try to honor Joseph as much as we can... “What angel or saint,” asks St. Basil, “ever deserved to be called the father of the Son of God? Joseph alone was thus called.” The words of St. Paul can be well applied to him: “having become so much superior to the angels as he has inherited a more excellent name than they” (Hcb. 1:4). In this name of father, St. Joseph was more honored by God than all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and bishops:

¹ Sermone nella festa di san Giuseppe, Naples, 1771.
for all these have the name of servant, but Joseph alone that of father.

As father, we see him made master of that little family—little in number, but great in composition, made up of the Mother of God and the only-begotten Son of God made man: “He made him master of his house” (Psalm 104:21). Joseph gave orders in that household, and the Son of God obeyed: He was subject to His parents. “This subjection,” says Gerson, “shows the humbleness of Jesus Christ: it also shows the high place of Joseph. To what greater height can a man be raised,” he goes on, “than to have a father’s authority over Him who commands kings?” All were astounded when the sun obeyed Joshua’s call to stop in its course that he might have time to overcome his enemies, “the Lord obeying the voice of a man.” But what was this in comparison with Joseph being obeyed by Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

So long as Joseph lived Jesus respected him as a father, and obeyed him as such for thirty years. Throughout that time it was Joseph’s charge to direct, as head of the family, and it was Jesus’ part to be subject to and obey him, as one given Him by God as foster father. Therefore Jesus did nothing except as Joseph told Him to, and was ever on the alert to hear what He was told and to do it. . . .

St. Bernard calls St. Joseph “a wise and faithful servant, whom the Lord made the comfort of His mother,
the nourisher of His manhood, in fine, the sole and faithful coadjutor on earth of the great council.” Thus St. Joseph was destined not only to be the helpmate of the Mother of God, who suffered so many tribulations, not only to be the guardian of Jesus Christ, but also, in a way, to co-operate in the redemption of the world, for that was the work of the great council of the three divine Persons. God chose him to be in the place of a father to His Son, and charged him to look after that Son and to protect Him from the wiles of His enemies: “Take the child . . .” (Matt. 2:13). It is as if He had addressed him in the words of the Psalmist, “To thee is the poor man left” (Psalm 9:14), and had said: “Joseph, I have sent my Son into the world. And I have sent Him poor and humble, without wealth or visible greatness; so He will be looked down on and called a carpenter’s son, in accordance with your lowly trade. I have willed that you should be poor because I have appointed you to hold the place of a father to my Son, and He is poor: for He is not come to rule in the world but to suffer and die for men’s salvation. On earth, then, you take my place as father to Him; you are His guardian; I leave Him in your hands. He will be persecuted, and you will have a share in His sufferings; guard Him carefully and be faithful to me.” So, St. John Damascene writes, “God gave Joseph a father’s love, care and authority over Jesus. His was a father’s affection, that he might watch over Him with great love; his was a father’s
St. Joseph

responsibility, that he might take great care of Him; his was a father's authority, that he might be sure he would be obeyed in all that he decided for this son.”

Having made him a co-operator in the work of redemption, as St. Bernard says, God willed that St. Joseph should be present at Jesus' birth so that he might be a faithful witness of the glory given by the angels to God at Bethlehem; a witness, too, of what was revealed to the shepherds, who, when they came to visit the Saviour that had been foretold to them, related all to Mary and Joseph; a witness, again, to the coming of the Magi who, guided by a star, had traveled from afar to worship the Holy Child, as they themselves declared. God also willed that Joseph should join with Mary in dedicating the new-born babe: “they took Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22); and then offered Him up to die for the salvation of the world according to the Scriptures, in which the passion of Christ had been foretold, as was well known to them both.

When God saw that Herod sought the Child to slay Him, He sent an angel to warn Joseph in a dream. Faithful and obedient to the divine voice, Joseph arose (in the night, immediately after his dream, as the learned explain it), took the Child and Mary, and prepared to go into Egypt. As quickly as he could he got together some tools, so that he could earn his living in a foreign land, while Mary gathered up necessities for the Child; and they set out alone, like poor pilgrims, on a long and
dangerous journey through the desert to a country where they knew nobody and nobody knew them. . . . On their return in obedience to God’s word, they went to dwell in Nazareth, and there Joseph remained with his beloved family until his death, living in poverty on the small earnings of his humble trade.

[When the boy Jesus was lost in Jerusalem] Joseph did not cease to weep at being separated from Jesus, the love of his heart; but even more for the fear (according to Lanspergius) that Jesus had left him because of some displeasure he might have caused Him and that therefore he was deemed unworthy any longer to have so sacred a trust. Great was his joy when Jesus explained that He had stopped in the Temple on His heavenly Father’s business. From then on Joseph ministered to Jesus until death took him, when it was his blessed lot to breathe his last breath in the arms of Jesus and Mary, so that, as St. Francis de Sales says, Joseph, like the Blessed Virgin, his wife, certainly died of love.

We all ought to have great trust in St. Joseph’s protection, since he was so dear to God because of his holiness. To get some idea of that holiness we have only to consider that God chose him to be foster father to Jesus Christ. St. Paul writes, “He it is who has made us fit ministers of the new covenant” (II Cor. 3:6); and St. Thomas explains this to mean that when God chooses anyone for a particular charge, He gives him the graces
which fit him for it. So, God having chosen Joseph to take the place of a father towards the person of the Incarnate Word, we must indeed believe that He endowed him with all the gifts of wisdom and holiness called for by such a trust. Nor can we doubt that He endowed him with all the graces and privileges granted to other saints. Among these gifts, say Gerson and Suarez, were three special ones: namely, that Joseph was sanctified in his mother’s womb, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist; that he was at the same time confirmed in grace; and that he was always free from inordinate impulses: by the merit of his own purity St. Joseph obtains the grace of deliverance from fleshly inclinations for those who devoutly ask his intercession.

The Gospel calls Joseph “a just man.” What does this mean? St. Peter Chrysologus says that it means “a perfect man, one who has all virtues.” So Joseph was already before his marriage; but how much more holy he must have become after it. Mary’s example alone was enough to sanctify him; but since she is, as St. Bernardino of Siena says, the dispenser of all the graces that God gives to men, how enriched must have been that husband whom she loved so much, and by whom she was so tenderly loved.

But how much Joseph’s holiness must have owed to his many years of association and familiar converse with Jesus. The two disciples going to Emmaus were kindled with divine love by the few moments they spent in our
Saviour’s company and the words He spoke to them—“Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking on the road?” (Luke 24:32). But St. Joseph talked with Christ for thirty years; he listened to His life-giving words; he saw the perfect example of humbleness and patience that He gave, the promptness with which He obeyed and helped His foster father in his work, and in all the household tasks: Jesus’ burning charity must have kindled a great fire of divine love in Joseph’s heart—a heart that was altogether free from earthly affections. It is true that Joseph’s love for Mary was very great; but this love did not divide his heart as is too often the case, as the Apostle bears witness: “He who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided” (I Cor. 7:33). Joseph’s love for his wife filled him still more with divine love. Accordingly we cannot doubt that, during the time he spent with Jesus, he was raised to such a height of holiness and merit as to surpass those of all other saints.

Admitting this, St. Paul writes that in the life to come God “will render to every man according to his works” (Rom. 2:6). What then must be the glory of St. Joseph, who served and loved Him so much while He lived on this earth? At the last day our Saviour will say to the elect: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me . . . .” (Matt.
25: 35). These will have fed Jesus Christ, lodged or clothed Him, in the persons of the poor; but St. Joseph found food, shelter and raiment for Christ in His own person. Furthermore, our Lord has promised reward to whoever gives a cup of water in His name. St. Joseph can say to Jesus Christ that “Not only did I furnish you with food, house and clothing: I saved you from death at the hands of Herod.” What then must be his reward?

All this helps to strengthen our trust in St. Joseph; it makes us reflect that, because of such merits, God will withhold no grace that Joseph asks for those who devoutly appeal to him. St. Bernardino adds that it cannot be doubted that in Heaven Christ treats Joseph with the familiarity and respect which, as a son to his father, He gave him when He lived on earth; rather is it now perfected. Notice those words: familiarity, respect. That Lord who on earth revered St. Joseph as His father will certainly deny him nothing that he asks in Heaven. Moreover, we may add this: Joseph did not, by nature, have a father’s authority over the manhood of Jesus Christ; but he did have it, in a way, as Mary’s husband, for Mary, as the real mother of Jesus, had authority over Him: he to whom the tree belongs has a right to its fruits. Therefore Jesus, when He lived on earth, respected and obeyed Joseph as His superior; and therefore also Jesus in Heaven listens to Joseph’s prayers as though they were commands.

Listen to what St. Bernard says: “Power is given to
some of the saints to help in particular necessities; but to St. Joseph power is given to help in all necessities, and to protect all who devoutly turn to him.” What St. Bernard gave as his opinion St. Teresa confirmed from her own experience. “God seems to have given other saints power to help us in particular circumstances,” she writes, “but I know from experience that this glorious St. Joseph helps in each and every need.” We are certain of this; for as on earth Jesus Christ was pleased to be subject to St. Joseph, so in Heaven He does all that the saint asks. So let us imagine that we hear Our Lord, when He sees us full of wretchedness and affliction, speak to us in the words that Pharaoh used to his people amidst the famine, “Go to Joseph” if you would seek consolation.

By Our Lord’s grace, there is today not a Catholic in the world who is not devout toward St. Joseph; and, amongst them all, those who recommend themselves to him most often and with the most trust and confidence receive graces most abundantly. Never let a day pass, then, without often recommending ourselves to St. Joseph, who has more power with God than any other saint except the Blessed Virgin Mary. Every day we ought to offer some particular prayer to him, and during the nine days before his feast let us redouble our prayers, and fast on the day preceding it. If we ask the gifts that are for our good he will not fail to obtain them for us.

I urge you to ask for three special graces in particular:
forgiveness of your sins, love for Jesus Christ, and a good death. When Jesus was living in Joseph’s household, could a sinner who sought forgiveness from Our Lord have found a more effective means of obtaining it than through St. Joseph? If, therefore, we desire God’s forgiveness, let us turn to Joseph, who now that he is in Heaven is more loved by Jesus Christ even than when he was on earth. Then, I firmly believe that a tender love for the Incarnate Word is the particular grace that St. Joseph ensures to those who turn to him, through the love that he bore Jesus during his earthly life. As for a happy death—we all know that Joseph is the patron of that. He had the happiness to die in the arms of Jesus and Mary; therefore may his devout servants confidently hope that at their own death St. Joseph will be there, helping them, and accompanied by Jesus and His holy Mother. There have been many instances of this.
The Hidden Saint

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER
[1814-1863]

St. Joseph presents us with a similar, yet somewhat different, type of devotion to the sacred Infancy [to that of the Blessed Virgin]. We know nothing of the beginnings of this wonderful saint. Like the fountains of the sacred river of the Egyptians, his early years are hidden in an obscurity, which his subsequent greatness renders beautiful, just as the sunset is reflected in the dark and clouded east. He was doubtless high in sanctity before his espousals with Mary. God's eternal choice of him would seem to imply as much. During the nine months the accumulation of grace upon him must have been beyond our powers of calculation. The company of Mary, the atmosphere of Jesus, the continual presence of the Incarnate God, and the fact of his own life being nothing but a series of ministries to the unborn Word, must have lifted him far above all other saints, and perchance all angels too. Our Lord's birth, and the sight of His face, must have been to him like another sanc-

1 Bethlehem. Excerpts from chap. IV, and from chaps. III, VIII and IX. 161
tification. The mystery of Bethlehem was enough of itself to place him among the highest of the saints. As with Mary, self-abasement was his grandest grace. He was conscious to himself that he was the shadow of the Eternal Father, and this knowledge overwhelmed him. With the deepest reverence he hid himself in the constant thought of the dignity of his office, in the profoundest self-abjection. Commanding makes deep men more humble than obeying. St. Joseph’s humility was fed all through life by having to command Jesus, by being the superior of his God. The priest, who has most reason to deplore the poverty of his attainments in humility, is humble at least when he comes to consecrate at Mass. For years Joseph lived in the awful sanctity of that which to the priest is but a moment. The little house at Nazareth was as the outspread square of the white corporal. All the words he spoke were almost words of consecration. A life worthy of this, up to the mark of this—what a marvel of sanctity it must have been!

To be hidden in God, to be lost in his bright light, is surely the highest of vocations among the sons of men. Nothing, to a spiritually discerning eye, can surpass the grandeur of a life which is only for others, only ministering to the divine purposes as in the place of God, without any personal vocation or any purpose of its own. This is the exceeding magnificence of Mary, that her personality is almost lost in her official vicinity to God. This too in its measure was Joseph’s vocation. He lives
now only to serve the infant Jesus, as heretofore he has but lived to guard Mary, the lily of God. He is as it were the head of the Holy Family, only that, like a good superior, he may the more completely be the servant and the subject and the instrument. Moreover, he makes way for Jesus when Jesus comes of age. He passes noiselessly into the shadow of eternity, like the moon behind a cloud, complaining not that her silver light is intercepted. He does not live on to the days of the miracles and the preaching, much less to the fearful grandeurs of Gethsemane and Calvary. His spirit is the spirit of Bethlehem. He is, in an especial way, the property of the sacred Infancy. It was his one work, his single sphere.

... With some there are seasons, seasons which come, and do their work and go, during which they seem blessedly possessed with the spirit of Bethlehem, and in those times nothing is seen of Calvary but its blue outline, like a mountain on the horizon. Grace has something especial to do in the soul, and it does it in this way. St. Joseph must be our patron at those seasons, as having been sanctified himself, with an apparent exclusiveness, by these very mysteries of Bethlehem. Yet it was not with him, neither will it be with us, a devotion of unmingled sweetness. At the bottom of the Crib lies the Cross; and the Infant’s heart is a living crucifix, for all He sleeps so softly and looks so fair. From Joseph’s first fear for Mary, and the mystical darkness of his tormenting perplexity, to the very day when he laid his
tired head on the lap of his Foster Son and slept his last sleep, it was one continued suffering, the torture of anxiety without the imperfection of disquietude. The very awe of the nine months must have killed with its perpetual sacred pressure all that was merely natural within him; and our inner nature never dies a painless death, as the outer sometimes does. Poverty must have appeared to him in a new light, less easy to bear, when Jesus and Mary were concerned. The rude men and the unsympathizing women of Bethlehem were but the fore-runners of the dark-eyed idolaters of Egypt, with their jealous suspicions of the Hebrew stranger, while his weak arm was the only rampart God had set round the Mother and the Child. The flight into Egypt and the return from it, the fears which would not let him dwell in the Holy City, and the rustic unkindliness of the ill-famed Nazarenes, all these were so many Calvaries to Joseph. Sweet and beautiful as is the look of Bethlehem, they who carry the infant Jesus in their souls carry the Cross also, and where He pillows His head He leaves the marks behind Him of an unseen crown of thorns. In truth, the death of Joseph was itself a martyrdom. He was worn out with love of the Holy Child. It was love, divine love, which slew him; so that his devotion was like that of the Holy Innocents, a devotion of martyrdom and blood.

The foundation, therefore, of Joseph's devotion was, as with Mary, his humility. Yet his humility was somewhat different from hers. It was another kind of grace.
It was less self-forgetting. Its eye was always on its own unworthiness. It was a humility that forever seemed surprised at its own gifts, and yet so tranquil that there was nothing in it either of the precipitation or the ungracefulness of a surprise. He was unselfishness itself, the very personification of it. His whole life meant others, and did not mean himself. This was the significance of his vocation. He was an instrument with a living soul, an accessory, not a principal, a superior, only to be the more a satellite. He was simply the visible providence of Jesus and Mary. But his unselfishness did not take the shape of self-oblivion.

Hence his peculiar grace was self-possession. Calmness amid anxiety, considerateness amid startling mysteries, a quiet heart combined with an excruciating sensitiveness, a self-consciousness maintained for the single purpose of an unintermitting immolation of self, the promptitude of docility grafted on the slowness of age and the measuredness of natural character, unbroken sweetness amid harassing cares, abrupt changes and unexpected situations, a facile passiveness under each movement of grace, each touch of God’s finger, as if he were floating over earth rather than rooted in it, the seeming victim of a wayward romantic lot and of dark divine enigmas, yet calm, incurious, unquestioning, unbewildered, reposing upon God—these are the operations of grace which seem to us so wonderful in Joseph’s soul. It was a soul which glassed in its pellucid tranquility all
the images of heavenly things that were round about it. When mysterious graces were showered down upon him, there is hardly a stir to be seen upon his silent passive
ness. He seems to take them as if they were the common sunshine and the common air and the dew, which fell on all men and not on himself alone. He was like the speechless, silver-shining, glassy lake, just trembling with the thin noiseless raindrops, while it rather hushes than quickens its only half audible pulses on the blue graveled shore. It almost seemed as if, joined with his self-possession, there was also an unconsciousness of his great graces, if we could think that great saints did not know their graces as none other know them. He was not a light that shone, he was rather an odor that breathed, in the house of God. He was like the mountain woods in the wet weeping summer. They speak to heaven by their manifold fragrances, which yet make one woodland odor, like the many dialects of a rich language, as if the fresh wind-driven drops beat the sensitive leaves of many hidden and sequestered plants; and so make them give out their perfumes, just as sorrow by its gentle bruising brings out hidden sweetness from all characters of men. So it was with St. Joseph. He moves about among the mysteries of the sacred Infancy, a shy silent figure. Between the going and coming of great mysteries we just hear him, as we hear the rain timidly whispering among the leaves in the intervals of the deep-toned thunder. But his odor is everywhere. It is the very genius of the place. It clings
to our garments and lingers in our senses, even when we have left the cave of Bethlehem and gone out into the world’s work.

His mind was turned inward upon his dread office, rather than outward on the harvest of God’s glory among men. This follows from his self-possession. He stood in an official position; but it was only toward God, not toward both God and men, as was Our Lady’s case. Hence there was less of the spirit of oblation about Joseph than about Mary. He and God were together. He knew not of others, except as making him suffer, and so winning themselves titles to his love. The sacerdotal character of Mary’s holiness was not apparent in him. He was a priest of the infant Jesus, neither to sacrifice Him nor to offer Him, but only to guard Him, to handle Him with reverence and to worship Him. Like a deacon he might bear the Precious Blood, but not consecrate it. Or he was the priestly sacristan to whose custody the tabernacle was committed. This was more his office than saying Mass. All this was in keeping with his reserve. It was to be expected that the shadow of the Eternal Father should move without sound over the world. Shadows speak only by the shade they cast, deepening, beautifying, harmonizing all things, filling the hearts they cover with the mute eloquence of tenderest emotions. God is perhaps more communicative than He is reserved. For, though He has told us less than He has withheld, yet how much more out of sheer love has He
told us than we needed to know; and what has He kept 
back except that which because of our littleness we 
could not know, or that which for our good it was better 
we should not know?

Some saints represent to us this communicativeness 
of God, and others His reserve. St. Joseph is the head 
and father of these last. It seems strange that while saints 
have often shown forth to men the union of justice and 
of mercy which there is in God, or the combination of 
swiftness and of slowness in the divine operations, and 
others of the apparent contrarieties in God, no saint 
appears to have ever copied him in the union of com-
municativeness and of reserve. We find that illustrated 
only in the Incarnate Word and His immaculate Mother. 
St. Joseph was the image of the Father. The Father had 
spoken once, speaks now, His unbroken Eternal Word. 
Joseph needed but to stand by in silence, and fold gently 
in his arms that Word which the Father was yet speak-
ing. The manifested Word, the outpoured Spirit, of 
them Joseph was not the representative. They only hung 
him round with the splendors of their dear love, because 
he was the image of the Father. Such does he seem to 
our eyes, such is the image of him which rests in our 
loving hearts—mute, rapture-bound, awe-stricken, with 
his soul tranquil, unearthly, shadowy, like the loveliness 
of night, and the beautiful age upon his face speaking 
there like a silent utterance, a free, placid and melodious 
thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity.
Joseph . . . that most hidden of all God's saints, shrouded in the very clouds and shadows which surround the unbegotten Fountain of the Godhead. His soul is an abyss of nameless graces, of graces deeper than those from which ordinary virtues spring, roots which make no trial of the winter of this world, but wait to bear marvelous blossoms before the face of God in the world to come. We can give no name to the character of this sanctity. We cannot compare him with any other of the saints of God. As his office was unshared, so was his grace. It followed the peculiarities of his office. It stood alone. He was to Mary among men what Gabriel was to her among angels, but he came nearer to her than Gabriel; for he was of her nature. What St. John was to Mary after Calvary, Joseph was to her after Bethlehem; so that probably, if we could perceive it, there was an analogy between his holiness and that of the Beloved Disciple.

But his sanctification is hidden in obscurity. It is probable that he had received the gift of original justice, as the Baptist had, though whether it was restored to him before birth, as with John and Jeremias, we cannot tell. It is becoming to think also that by a special grace he was preserved from venial sin. It is most certain that he was a peculiar vessel of the divine predilection, eternally predestined to a singular and incomparably sublime office, and laden with the most magnificent of graces to fit him for that office. For wonderful as was his office
to Mary, his office to Jesus far surpassed it, unless, as is more true, the former was but a portion of the latter.

He stood to Jesus visibly in the place of the Eternal Father. He was loved therefore in a most peculiar way by the divine Person whom he thus awfully represented, and also in a most peculiar way by the Second and Third Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, because of that mysterious representation. The human soul of Jesus must have regarded him, not only with the tenderest love, but also with deep reverence and an inexplicable submission. Meek and gentle, blameless and loving as St. Joseph was, it is not possible to think of him without extreme awe, because of that shadow of identity with the Eternal Father which belongs to him, and hides him from our sight even while it presents him to our faith. We cannot describe his holiness, because we have no term of comparison. It was not only higher in degree than that of the saints; it was also different in kind. But it was eminently hidden in God. His life was an unearthly life. His very place in the world was but a seeming place. He was an apparition in the world, an apparition of the Unbegotten and Everlasting. His soul was as it were withdrawn into itself. He was weak and in years, mild and unresenting, poor and obscure, passive and docile, and yet an inexpugnable fortress behind which the honor of Mary and the life of Jesus were secure. If his hiddenness was like that of God, so also was his tranquility. His justice, like that of God, was so tempered with mercy.
that it almost lost its look of justice and wore the semblance of indulgence. His holiness was one of God's eternal ideas, one of those which He most cherished and kept nearest to Himself. He communicated with God in his hours of sleep, as if his sleep was but the mystic slumber of contemplation. Even now in the Church he stands back under the shadow of the Old Testament, as if that were rather the dispensation of the Father, and therefore the most congenial place for him.

Doubts and fears, anxiety and haste, public notice and difficult responsibility, are trials which press heavily on those whose first manhood is passed, and more heavily than common on a tender and affectionate heart like that of Joseph. We cannot avoid picturing him to ourselves as one who was rather fitted for contemplation than for action, both on account of his exceeding tenderness and also of his remarkable quietness of spirit; yet out of the bashful timidity of a contemplative he had to draw the bravery of an apostle. For well nigh thirteen years the Incarnation hardly allowed him one day of peace; and then when something of an anxious peace came to him at Nazareth, the fires of divine love from the vicinity of Jesus silently fretted his life away. We feel that his whole early life was but a preparation for the unworldly office he was at last to assume.

Most saints have one eminent cross, which towers above their other crosses, and gives the character as well
to their sanctity as to their lives. Who can doubt but that Bethlehem was Joseph’s cross? Yet was it also a land of pleasantness, a very world of joy, even to him. He would hardly have exchanged Bethlehem for Heaven, just as we know Simeon had prayed for his rest and release to wait until he had seen the Lord’s Christ on earth. It was dear to him, not only because it was a cross and he a saint, and the saints are ever enamored of their crosses, but because it was a marvelous and abounding joy. The mysteries which checkered the thirteen years were fountains to him of holy gladness and of divine love. The sight of Jesus was an endless vision, not only soothing the soul, but filling it to overflowing with spiritual sweetness. The light in His eyes, the tones of His voice, the play of His fingers, His attitudes in His various occupations, were all an overwhelming delight to Joseph’s soul. His spiritual discernment and his union with God enabled him to penetrate deeply into all these things.

There was something more truly paternal in [Joseph’s] tenderness to Our Lord than the tenderness of common earthly fathers, because, though he was not a true father, his office came out of a deeper paternity. Divine shadows are substantial. They are shadows in relation to the eternal height that casts them, but they lie defined, substantial and transfiguring, on created things. . . . This communication of the divine Paternity was Joseph’s
highest right to love Jesus. He might love Him as His creature. He might love Him as one of His redeemed. He might love Him with a personal love, as having been laden with gifts and graces by Him. He might love Him as Mary’s child, with a love into which he might throw all the intensity of his love of Mary. He might love Him for His own sake, because He was so winning and attractive and encompassed with divine fascinations. He might love Him as we come to love all whom we have saved from death or danger, or who have permitted us to show them kindness; and this love would be in proportion to the dignity of his own office and the excellence of his Foster Child. But his highest love of Him was from his highest right to love Him, and that resided in his being the shadow of the Father. He loved Jesus in and by his love of the Eternal Father, and by the likeness to the Father which the Eternal Father had communicated to him, whereby he was raised to the further and inexpressible dignity of likeness to the Son Himself, who was also the image of the Father.

Joseph’s devotion to the Eternal Father was also his form of love of Mary. He was especially her husband as the foster father of Jesus. His conjugal office was simply part of his shadow of the Father. His office to her rose out of the same source as his office to Jesus, namely, out of the same shadow. As with Jesus, so with Mary, he might love her for many reasons and with various pure and holy loves. As his spouse, as the mother of
Jesus, as the spouse of the Holy Ghost, as the daughter of the Father, for her love of Jesus, for her love of himself, for her own transcending excellence—for all these things he might love her, and did love her, as only so holy a heart could love. But his love of her, inasmuch as he was the shadow of the Father, was a wider love than any or all of these, and rested upon a yet more divine appointment. Indeed it did in matter of fact presuppose and include all those other loves. Thus his devotion to the Father sank into all the details of his life, by the necessity of the case. It was his vocation, the end for which he was created, the reason of his immense grace on earth, the explanation of his stupendous glory in Heaven. We may thus see how true the doctrine was with which we started, that his whole spiritual life, that peculiar sanctity which he shares with no other saint, was built upon, and resolves itself into, a most incomparably special devotion to the Eternal Father. St. Joseph’s name expresses to our thoughts the shadow of the Father, and the name of the shadow of the Father leaves nothing about St. Joseph unexpressed.
Doctrine and Devotion

JOHN HENRY CARDINAL NEWMAN
[1801-1890]

By "faith" I mean the Creed and assent to the Creed; by "devotion" I mean such religious honors as belong to the objects of our faith, and the payment of those honors. Faith and devotion are as distinct in fact as they are in idea. We cannot, indeed, be devout without faith, but we may believe without feeling devotion. Of this phenomenon every one has experience both in himself and in others; and we bear witness to it as often as we speak of realizing a truth or not realizing it. It may be illustrated, with more or less exactness, by matters which come before us in the world. For instance, a great author, or a public man, may be acknowledged as such for a course of years; yet there may be an increase, an ebb and flow, and a fashion, in his popularity. And if he takes a lasting place in the minds of his countrymen, he may gradually grow into it, or suddenly be raised to it. The idea of Shakespeare as a great poet has existed

¹ From Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching, Vol. II, sec. 3.
from a very early date in public opinion; and there were at least individuals then who understood him as well, and honored him as much, as the English people can honor him now; yet, I think, there is a national devotion to him in this day such as never has been before. This has happened because, as education spreads in the country, there are more men able to enter into his poetical genius, and, among these, more capacity again for deeply and critically understanding him; and yet, from the first, he has exerted a great insensible influence over the nation, as is seen in the circumstance that his phrases and sentences, more than can be numbered, have become almost proverbs among us. And so again in philosophy, and in the arts and sciences, great truths and principles have sometimes been known and acknowledged for a course of years; but, whether from feebleness of intellectual power in the recipients, or external circumstances of an accidental kind, they have not been turned to account. . . . Illustrations such as these, though not altogether apposite, serve to convey that distinction between faith and devotion on which I am insisting. . . .

This distinction is forcibly brought home to a convert, as a peculiarity of the Catholic religion, on his first introduction to its worship. The faith is everywhere one and the same, but a large liberty is accorded to private judgment and inclination as regards matters of devotion. Any large church, with its collections and groups of people, will illustrate this. The fabric itself is dedi-
cated to Almighty God, and that, under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin, or some particular saint; or again, of some mystery belonging to the Divine Name or the Incarnation, or some mystery associated with the Blessed Virgin. Perhaps there are seven altars or more in it, and these again have their several saints. Then there is the feast proper to this or that day; and during the celebration of Mass, of all the worshipers who crowd around the priest, each has his own particular devotions, with which he follows the rite. No one interferes with his neighbor; agreeing, as it were, to differ, they pursue independently a common end, and by paths distinct but converging present themselves before God. Then there are confraternities attached to the church—of the Sacred Heart, or of the Precious Blood; associations of prayer for a good death, or for the repose of departed souls, or for the conversion of the heathen; devotions connected with the brown, blue or red scapular; not to speak of the great ordinary ritual observed through the four seasons, or the constant Presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or of its ever-recurring rite of Benediction, and its extraordinary forty hours’ exposition. Or, again, look through such manuals of prayers as the Raccolta, and you at once will see both the number and the variety of devotions, which are open to individual Catholics to choose from, according to their religious taste and prospect of personal edification.

Now these diversified modes of honoring God did not
come to us in a day, or only from the Apostles; they are
the accumulations of centuries; and, as in the course of
years some of them spring up, so others decline and die.
Some are local, in memory of some particular saint, who
happens to be the evangelist or patron or pride of the
nation, or who lies entombed in the church or in the
city where it is found; and these devotions, necessarily,
cannot have an earlier date than the saint’s day of death
or interment there. The first of these sacred observances,
long before such national memories, were the devotions
paid to the Apostles, then those which were paid to the
martyrs; yet there were saints nearer to our Lord than
either martyrs or apostles; but, as if these sacred persons
were immersed and lost in the effulgence of His glory,
and because they did not manifest themselves, when in
the body, in external works separate from Him, it hap-
pened that for a long while they were less dwelt upon.
However, in process of time, the Apostles, and then the
martyrs, exerted less influence than before over the
popular mind, and the local saints, new creations of
God’s power, took their place, or again, the saints of
some religious order here or there established. Then, as
comparatively quiet times succeeded, the religious medi-
tations of holy men and their secret intercourse with
Heaven gradually exerted an influence out-of-doors, and
permeated the Christian populace, by the instrument-
tality of preaching and by the ceremonial of the Church.
Hence at length those luminous stars rose in the eccle-
siastical heavens, which were of more august dignity than any which had preceded them, and were late in rising for the very reason that they were so specially glorious. Those names, I say, which at first sight might have been expected to enter soon into the devotions of the faithful, with better reason might have been looked for at a later date, and actually were late in their coming.

St. Joseph furnishes the most striking instance of this remark; here is the clearest of instances of the distinction between doctrine and devotion. Who, from his prerogatives and the testimony on which they come to us, had a greater claim to receive an early recognition among the faithful than he? A saint of Scripture, the foster father of Our Lord, he was an object of the universal and absolute faith of the Christian world from the first, yet the devotion to him is comparatively of late date. When once it began, men seemed surprised that it had not been thought of before; and now they hold him next to the Blessed Virgin in their religious affection and veneration.
St. Joseph in the Bible

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE, S.J.
[1822-1893]

If we turn our eyes to the Old Testament, and ask ourselves what we can find there to illustrate the position of [St. Joseph] in the mind of the Church, more than one such illustration suggests itself without difficulty. It is not, so far as we know, asserted that there is any direct prediction which points out the person of St. Joseph, and foretells the exact relationship in which he appears to stand to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother. There might be no direct foretelling of what is in itself so unique. We can hardly expect more than that kind of historical and personal anticipation which consists in the prominence, in the Sacred History, of some person or series of persons who may correspond more or less faithfully to the position and character of St. Joseph. The Church appears to point to this kind of anticipation in the use which she makes of the Old Testament history in her offices for the feasts of this saint. No one will suppose that she thinks her children so ignorant of his-

1 From The Preparation of the Incarnation, chap. IX.

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Henry J. Coleridge, S.J.

Torical facts as to confound the ancient patriarch Joseph, the eldest son of Jacob and Rachel, his dearest and chosen wife, with the spouse of Our Blessed Lady and the reputed father of her divine Son. Yet the Church fearlessly uses the history of the elder Joseph in her services for these days. She must do this, because she sees in that history the best possible commentary to be found in Scripture on the life of our saint.

The history and character of this patriarch are singularly beautiful, even among other such portions of the Old Testament. Joseph is certainly, so to say, the hero of the last twelve or thirteen chapters of the book of Genesis, just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the conspicuous figures around whom the interest of the narrative centers after the history has passed the great epoch of the Deluge. In many features of the story there seems a distinct anticipation of the character of the spouse of Our Blessed Lady. Some of the Fathers have noticed the dreams, on the interpretation of which so much turns in the course of the story, as a part of this anticipation. For the revelations of the will of God and of the mysteries of the Incarnation, which are made to St. Joseph in the gospel history, are made in this way. Again, it seems clear that the obscurity in which the patriarch was so long kept in the time of his servitude in Egypt, and afterward, when his origin was unknown to Pharaoh, and even his existence unknown to his father and brethren, is paralleled in the case of St. Joseph by the evident
obscurity in which he lived, although the lineal descendant of David, and so of the royal line.

If St. Joseph had been at all generally known to his contemporaries as having this royal claim in his own person, he must have attracted the jealousy and hostility of Herod, especially after that wicked king had been deceived by the Magi. In some contemplations on the early years of St. Joseph we find a kind of repetition, in his history, of the persecution of the patriarch by his own brethren. It is, at least, certain that St. Joseph was a humble artisan, not merely knowing a trade, as it is said that all Jews were so brought up, but having to earn his living by labor. We know also that he had no friends, even in his own town of Bethlehem, to shelter him and Our Lady at the time of the Nativity. In these respects he resembles his earlier namesake, as well as in his enforced exile in Egypt. But a more remarkable correspondence between the two lies in the great purity of each. The earlier Joseph refused the solicitations of his master's wife. The saint of the New Testament was fitted, by his marvelous love of purity, which was probably embodied in a vow, as in the case of Our Blessed Lady herself, to be the witness and guardian of her immaculate virginity, both before and after the birth of her divine Child.

But the point of resemblance on which the Church has more especially fastened, in her application of the history in Genesis to the feast of Our Lord's reputed father, is
that of the authority committed to each, the high trust which each discharged with so much faithfulness. . . .

St. Joseph was not the actual father of Our Blessed Lord, any more than the patriarch was the father of Pharaoh. But each exercised the office of a father, the one to Our Lord, the other to the Egyptian king. As the Christian centuries have rolled on, the fatherly office of St. Joseph towards Our Lord has been seen by the devout children of the Church to be continued in his patronage over her. He has become the guide of her spiritual life, the great provider for the needs, temporal and spiritual, of religious communities, the patron of cities and countries, and at last of the whole Catholic Church itself. Thus, these three things are seen more and more to correspond to one another—the office of Joseph in Egypt, the office of St. Joseph in the Holy Family, and the office of St. Joseph, again, in the government of souls and of the Church their mother.

There are other less conspicuous figures and features in the Old Testament history which may fairly be considered as anticipations of the prominence of St. Joseph in the Gospel dispensation. There are stories and anecdotes in Scripture of which we have had to say . . . that there seems no adequate reason for their insertion in the sacred pages, until we come to see their typical beauty and grace. Such are the histories, for instance, of Ruth, of Samson, of Jonas, and others. There are two passages in the history of which this may be said with
especial reference to St. Joseph. The earliest of these is
the delightful idyll, as it may almost be called, of the
"wiving of Isaac." Abraham sends his faithful servant
—as it seems, Eliezer of Damascus—to his own country,
to bring a wife for his son Isaac from among his own
kindred. The Scripture devotes a whole long chapter, as
we call it, in the book of Genesis, to this incident, and
the chapter forms a perfect poem. Two things form its
most beautiful features, the simplicity and purity of
Rebecca and her family, and the devoted fidelity of the
servant of Abraham. It is not difficult to see in him many
points of resemblance to St. Joseph. The object of the
office in the one case is the continuance of the holy line
to which the promise of the future Redeemer had been
more specially allotted. All generations and nations were
to be blessed in Abraham and in his son Isaac. The object
of the office of St. Joseph is to throw his protection and
shelter over the Virgin Mother and the Seed promised to
Abraham and Isaac. In both cases there is conspicuous
and most beautiful faithfulness. Eliezer brings Rebecca
in all her fresh purity to the son of his master, and St.
Joseph, under the name and title of her spouse, is the
guardian and protector of Our Blessed Lady, watching
over her in her earthly pilgrimage as long as his life lasts,
as Eliezer watched over Rebecca in her journey from
Mesopotamia (Gen. 24). It cannot be doubted that
Rebecca, like most of the holy women in Scripture, is a
type of Our Blessed Lady. Eliezer, in many respects, then, is a type of St. Joseph.

The other scriptural story which may be considered as an anticipation of that of St. Joseph is to be found in the book of Esther. Esther deserved to become a great historical figure in the later ages of the Jewish people. She delivered them, by her intercession with the king, her husband, from imminent destruction. In this she is a great type of Our Blessed Lady, and her story thus assumes a sacred significance and an importance which it might not otherwise have attained. We may fairly say, all this might have been true, and yet there might have been no feature in the history which could suggest to us the office of St. Joseph. As it is, however, there is another great figure, by the side of Esther, who seems placed there in a relationship to her which much resembles that of St. Joseph to Our Blessed Lady. This figure is, of course, her uncle Mardochai, who had brought her up from her infancy after the death of her parents, and who acts throughout the whole history as her guardian, protector and guide.

Esther, the queen of Assuerus, is a pure, simple character, as beautiful morally as personally. Her prayer, as given in this fourteenth chapter of the book which goes by her name, is most touching in its fervor and humility, ending as it does by the protest that God knows "that thy handmaid hath never rejoiced since I was brought
hither unto this day, but in thee, O Lord, the God of Abraham." She is not simply, then, the beautiful queen who captivates the heart of the king. She is most devout and holy, and her very words find their echo in the Magnificat of Our Blessed Lady whom she represents. Aman, the enemy of the holy people, who is overthrown by the intercession of Esther, is a well-recognized type of Satan, with whose defeat the prayers of Our Blessed Lady have so much to do. It is therefore very natural to recognize in the character and position of Mardochai a resemblance to the office of St. Joseph, who is the guide and guardian of the true Queen, the Mother of the Incarnate Son. And it is to be noted that in all the cases which we have considered there is in the picture this feature of guidance, protection, government, patronage, authority, conferred upon the person who is supposed to have a typical resemblance to St. Joseph.

Such anticipations as those which have now been pointed out cannot be neglected by Christian students. They lay a kind of foundation on which our ideas of the greatness of St. Joseph may be raised. They give us an outline, however faint, which we may fill in. They let us see how perfect in their order and beauty are the works of God, how the main details of the Gospel dispensation came into their place not by any chance, but as the fulfilment of an eternal plan. The office and the spiritual greatness of St. Joseph tower very far above all these scriptural anticipations. But these help us to understand
that office and that greatness, and they are thus great helps to our devotion, while they confirm our confidence in the instincts of the best children of the Church. We learn from them that, if it is indeed the case that the thoughts of Catholics of the later centuries concerning the blessed spouse of Mary are more definite and more lofty than any of which we can find traces in the scanty memorials which survive of earlier generations, this is not because they are modern inventions and unfounded developments. It is because the Church takes her time to unfold all her riches. She brings forth things new as well as things old, but both are brought forth, at however different times, out of the same treasury. It takes ages upon ages to exhaust it, and yet, as each successive beauty is unveiled, it is seen to have existed in her heart from the very beginning.

From the consideration of the anticipations in Scripture which may be thought to apply to the character and office of St. Joseph, it is natural to proceed to that of the direct statements made concerning him in the sacred pages. After what has already been said, we are prepared to find in the Gospel narrative something corresponding to the anticipations of which we have spoken. And we do indeed most certainly find this correspondence, though we find it in that way in which it belongs to Sacred Scripture to furnish it for us. The scriptural method of dealing with the facts about St. Joseph is the same which is pursued as to other portions of divine truth, especially
with those portions which fall within the scope of our present study. But perhaps there is no more complete and perfect instance of this method than that now before us.

We are often tempted to wonder how it is that so little should have been told us in the Gospel history about parts of the life of Our Lord which are most deeply interesting to us and to all Christians. We wonder why so little is said about the Church, why we are not told more of those long conversations with His apostles which were the chief occupation of Our Blessed Lord after His resurrection, and in which we are told that He was conversing with them concerning the Kingdom of God. And above all, perhaps, we wonder how it is that we hear so little of the thirty long years of the hidden life which were passed in seclusion at Nazareth. There are some instances which may be said to belong to the same class of reticences of Scripture with the facts concerning St. Joseph.

Many good reasons, however, can be assigned for the silences of Scripture. And when we come to know the scope and design of the several gospels, we are no longer surprised at what might otherwise seem to us to be omissions in the sacred story. It is not true that we are told little about the matters of which mention has just been made. But it is true that we are told few things concerning them. In these we are told much and enough for our instruction, and still more than that, enough for our de-
vout contemplation. For these few things are in themselves very pregnant and fruitful in truth. . . .

It may most truly be said that the Sacred Scripture is marvelous in the things which it tells us, and in the manner in which they are told. It is also marvelous, in the second place, in its silence and in the things of which it does not speak. And, in the third place, it is marvelous in the way in which, as to certain things, it seems to combine speech and silence at the same time, by saying in the fewest words, and in a manner which almost escapes attention, things which are found to have very deep and very full meanings, and to convey the most important truths. As all times are not the fittest for the direct exposition of all kinds of truth, it is necessary that Scripture, which is written for all times, should be thus at once silent and eloquent, so to say, on the same points. . . .

Again, Scripture is the word of God, speaking through man. The human author of a divine book has before him a certain definite set of readers, for whom he originally writes, and whose needs and capacities of intelligence he principally, or in the first instance, considers, although at the same time he may look beyond them and shape his composition for those distant from him in time or in place. . . . But the divine Author of Sacred Scripture looked forward to all time, or rather, to Him there is no such thing as time. All times and generations were alike present to Him, with all their needs and all their various
shades of feeling and of devotion. The perception even of doctrine was to grow in the successive generations of the Church, and Scripture was not meant to anticipate all the work of the Christian doctorate.

Certainly it may be said, with regard to the blessed St. Joseph, that the records we have concerning him in the Sacred Scriptures are singularly marvelous, both in their brevity and in their pregnancy. It is self-evident that, when the gospels were first put together, the time had not come in the counsels of God for that full development of devotion to him, and for that estimation of his great sanctity, which are among the chief treasures of the ages in which our own lot is cast, and which have so many things lacking to them which earlier ages of the Church possessed. It is one of the most divine parts of the arrangements of Providence, as regards Christian devotion, that He has chosen to leave so much, especially as relates to the persons most near and dear to Himself, to the loving contemplation of the children of the Church to discover for themselves. Our Lord may have some particular delight in seeing them find out, by their own instincts of piety, those things which had been wrought by Him mainly, as may be said, from the promptings of His own love. He may prefer to have His own heart read and interpreted rather by the heart of the Church than by distinct and formal teaching. And yet it is equally true that He has left us in the sacred records, even on these intimate secrets of His own heart,
quite enough to be the foundation of the whole that we know, the seeds and germs of the whole magnificent system which has surrendered itself to the contemplation of those who have penetrated furthest into His secrets.

These considerations may show us what is the true office, so to say, of the records of Scripture, both with regard to theological and to devotional developments in the providence of God. It is not the office of Scripture to unfold either in their fullness. On the other hand, it is a part of the divine scheme that all these developments should be, in their right manner and degree, founded on the word of God of which Scripture is a part. Further, it must be considered childish to measure the statements of Scripture as by a rule, and rate their value by the number of lines or sentences which they contain. The most divine and pregnant truth may be expressed in a word, a name, a statement which occupies half a line. . . . It is on this principle that we must use the statements of the gospels concerning the blessed spouse of Mary, and we must never allow ourselves to concede for a moment, with regard to the language of Scripture relating to him, that the highest flights of devotion to him, which we see in any of his most fervent clients among the saints, go an inch beyond the foundation which is laid for them in the direct words of Scripture. It is not that the Catholic goes beyond Scripture in his devotion. It is that those who do not see the foundation for this devotion in Scripture are blind in the full blaze of the noonday sun.
Thus we need not wish, in order to build up the fabric of truth on which the hearts of so many devout persons of our time dwell with constant delight in their devotions and contemplations concerning St. Joseph, to travel beyond the simple words of the gospels, rightly understood, in all their legitimate issues and inferences, in the light which is thrown upon them by the acknowledged principles of Christian theology. Although all the four evangelists mention the name of St. Joseph, and tell us that Our Lord was commonly held for his son, we have no details about him, except the few passages which occur in the opening of the two gospels of St. Luke and St. Matthew. There are, in the narrative of St. Luke, very evident traces that the information there conveyed to us comes almost directly, if not quite directly, from the Blessed Mother of Our Lord herself, and for that reason it would not be wrong to call the two or three first chapters of St. Luke, the Gospel of Mary. In the same way, though not with the same certainty as to direct or nearly direct transmission of the details, it might not be unreasonable to say that the two first chapters of St. Matthew are the Gospel of St. Joseph. . . .
Encyclical Letter on St. Joseph

POPE LEO XIII
[1810-1903]

Although We have already several times directed that special prayer should be made throughout the world so that God should be the more earnestly besought on behalf of Catholic needs, nevertheless it can be no matter for surprise that We find the present moment opportune for again urging this duty.

When times are full of trials and difficulties, and especially when the powers of darkness seem free to dare all for the overthrow of Christianity, the Church has always sent up her prayers to God with special fervor and persistence: He it was who brought her into being and watches over her; she turns, too, to the saints for their intercession, especially to the sacred Virgin Mother of God, whose protection, the Church knows, must be the most powerful of all. Sooner or later the harvest of these holy supplications and of the trust put in God’s goodness will become manifest.

You, venerable Brethren, know the times in which we

\(^1\) Quanquam pluries, August 15, 1889.
are living: they are not much less disastrous for the Christian religion than the most calamitous ages of the past. We see that faith, the source of all Christian virtue, is quenched in many people's hearts; charity grows cold; young people grow up amidst moral depravity and mental corruption; the Church of Jesus Christ is assailed on every side by force and by cunning; a ruthless campaign is carried on against the supreme pontificate; the very foundations of religion are attacked with a shamelessness that increases every day. How low the attacks have sunk in our day, and what is promised for the future, is so well known that nothing need be said on this head. Human remedies are not enough for such a dangerous and unhappy state of affairs: we have to call on divine power to come to the rescue.

For that reason We esteem it our duty to appeal to the piety of Christian people, that they may be stirred to implore the help of Almighty God with greater fervor and unwearyingness. On a previous occasion We have directed that the month of October be consecrated to the Virgin Mary under the invocation of Our Lady of the Rosary; and now, as that month is again coming round, We strongly urge the faithful to carry out its observances with all possible devotion, perseverance and religious spirit. We know what a haven awaits us in the Virgin's motherly kindness, and we know that we do not put our hope in her in vain. . . .

But We now have a further purpose, with which you,
venerable Brethren, will zealously co-operate, as you always do. In order that God may listen favorably to our prayers and that He may come to His Church's help the more swiftly and abundantly because of the numbers of His suppliants, We deem it very desirable that the Christian people should learn to invoke, together with the Virgin Mother of God, her virtuous husband, the blessed Joseph; and to do so with high veneration and complete trust. We are quite sure that this is what the Blessed Virgin herself would like.

We know that people are well disposed toward this devotion, about which We are now speaking publicly for the first time: it is already established and spreading. During recent centuries the Roman pontiffs have endeavored gradually to develop and popularize veneration for St. Joseph; and it has greatly increased in our era, especially since Our predecessor, Pius IX of happy memory, listening to the request of many bishops, proclaimed the holy patriarch protector of the Church universal. However, it is so important that reverence for St. Joseph should be well rooted in Catholic customs and observances that We raise Our voice and exert Our authority still further to encourage it among Christ's people.

The special reasons and causes for St. Joseph being named patron saint of the Church, and for the Church relying so much on his consequent aid and protection, are that he was Mary's husband and was looked on as the
father of Jesus Christ. His importance, his grace, his holiness, his glory all arise from that. The dignity of the Mother of God is indeed so high that no created being can be above her. But Joseph was joined with her in marriage, and it cannot be doubted that he comes nearer than anybody else to the height of that dignity by which the Mother of God surpasses all other creatures. Marriage is the closest of all associations and unions, and is of such a kind that it involves community of goods between those bound by it. When God gave Joseph as husband to the Virgin He gave her a companion in life, a witness to her maidenhood, a guardian of her honor; but, in virtue of the marriage compact, He also gave her a sharer in her own most high dignity.

In like manner Joseph’s exalted position stands out luminously among men, because he was by divine will guardian of the Son of God and considered to be His father by the people. So it came about that the Word of God was humbly subject to Joseph, that He was obedient to him, and that He gave him all the dutifulness that children owe to their parents.

By this twofold office Joseph incurred the responsibilities that nature imposes on the father of a family: he was the guardian, the breadwinner, the natural and rightful protector of the divine household of which he was head; and in fact he fulfilled these duties and responsibilities throughout his mortal life. Lovingly and carefully he looked after his wife and the divine Child from day to
day; daily he worked to earn what was necessary for their food and clothing; when the Child was threatened by a king’s jealousy, he found a place of refuge and saved His life; he was the unwearying companion, solace and support of his family in the dangers and discomforts of journeys and the bitterness of exile.

Now the divine household that Joseph governed with what seemed a father’s authority held within itself the beginnings of the nascent Church. As the Blessed Virgin is the mother of Jesus Christ, so she is the mother of all Christians, whom she brought forth on the hill of Calvary amidst the crowning sufferings of the Redeemer; Jesus Christ is as it were the first-born of Christians, who are His brethren by adoption and redemption.

Such are the reasons why the blessed patriarch Joseph must look on the multitude of Christians who make up the Church as being particularly entrusted to him: they form a huge family distributed all over the earth, and he has a kind of fatherly power over it, because he is Mary’s husband and Jesus Christ’s father. It is then natural, right and proper that, just as Joseph used to provide for all the wants of the family at Nazareth and looked after it with religious care, so now from Heaven he should extend his protection and care to the whole Church of Christ.

You, venerable Brethren, have no difficulty in appreciating that these considerations are confirmed by the opinion that the Joseph of old time was a figure of our
Joseph, and that the renown of the son of the patriarch Jacob bore witness to the greatness of the guardian of the divine family that was to be: many Fathers of the Church held this view, and it is accepted in the sacred liturgy.

Over and above the fact that they both bore the same name (a name itself not devoid of significance), you are perfectly well aware of the clear points of likeness between them. In the first place, the first Joseph earned the favor and special good will of his master; he was made steward of his master’s estate, and thanks to his efforts the estate became very prosperous and productive. Then again, and more important, the first Joseph by the king’s orders was entrusted with great power in the land; and, at a time of famine and high cost of living, he provided so efficiently for the needs of the Egyptians and their neighbors that the king decreed he should be called “the world’s savior.”

Thus we can see in this old patriarch the image of the new. The first was successful in forwarding his master’s domestic interests and then went on to render outstanding services to the whole country; in the same way the second, destined to be the guardian of the Christian religion, must be regarded as protector and caretaker of the Church, which is in truth the Lord’s house and the kingdom of God on earth.

In every land all sorts of people recommend and en-
trust themselves to the blessed Joseph's faithfulness and keeping, and there are good reasons for this. Fathers of families find in him the best personification of fatherly care and watchfulness; married people find in him a perfect example of love, concord and wedded fidelity; maidens have in him both a pattern and a protector of virginal integrity. From Joseph, the highborn can learn to maintain their dignity even in misfortune; he can teach the wealthy what riches they should value and work hard to acquire.

But workers, small wage earners and other people of modest condition have a special right to turn to St. Joseph and seek to imitate him. Here he was, a man of royal blood, joined in marriage with the greatest and holiest of women, reputed to be father of the Son of God—yet he spent his whole life working, and looked to an artisan's job for all that he required for the support of his family.

It is true, then, that there is nothing to be despised in a lowly position; and a laborer's work is not only not dishonoring—when virtue is joined with it it can be highly ennobling. Joseph was satisfied with the little he had, and he brought greatness of soul to his acceptance of the difficulties inherent in the humble state of his fortunes; and in so doing he was emulating his Son, who took the form of a servant and—He, the Lord of all—willingly subjected Himself to poverty and want.
Such thoughts as these ought to encourage the poor and all who live by the work of their hands, and enable them to see things in their true perspective. They have the right to get rid of their poverty and to better themselves by legitimate means; but reason and justice forbid that they should overturn the order that God's providence has established. Moreover, recourse to violence, attempts at sedition and use of force, are senseless methods, which generally aggravate the evils against which they are directed. So, if they would be wise, the poor should put no trust in the promises of agitators, but turn rather to the example and help of St. Joseph, and to their loving mother the Church, who every day becomes more and more concerned for their welfare.

Accordingly, anticipating much from your authority and episcopal zeal, venerable Brethren, and in surety that the devout and worthy faithful will voluntarily do more than is laid down, We prescribe that all through the month of October a prayer to St. Joseph shall be added to the recitation of the rosary (according to previous directions); the words of the prayer accompany this letter. This shall always be done every year. To those who say this prayer devoutly, We grant each time an indulgence of seven years and seven periods of forty days.

Some countries have a good and praiseworthy custom of dedicating the month of March in honor of St. Joseph by daily services and prayers. In places where this usage
cannot be conveniently established, it is desirable that at any rate the three days before his feast should be celebrated, in the principal church of each place, with a triduum of prayer. Wherever St. Joseph’s feast on March 19 is not a holy day of obligation, We urge the faithful, so far as they are able, to sanctify it by private prayer in honor of their heavenly protector, as if it were such a holy day.

Meanwhile, as an earnest of graces from above and in token of Our goodwill, We bestow affectionately in the Lord the apostolic blessing upon you, venerable Brethren, and upon your clergy and your people.

*The Prayer*

Having besought the aid of your most holy Bride, we turn to you in our distress, blessed Joseph, and confidently invoke your protection too. We beseech you to look kindly on the heritage that Christ Jesus made His own with His blood, and to use your power to help us in our needs, through the love that bound you to the Immaculate Virgin, God’s Mother, and through the fatherly love that you poured out on the Child Jesus. Most careful Guardian of the Holy Family, protect the chosen people of Jesus Christ. Most loving Father, keep us from all stain of error and corruption. Most mighty Deliverer, look down on us from the height of Heaven: aid us in our battle against the powers of darkness, and defend God’s
holy Church from the guile of the Enemy and from all adversity, as once you snatched the Child Jesus from the jaws of death. Assist us unceasingly, so that, upheld by your example and your help, we may live in holiness, die a holy death and reach the everlasting happiness of Heaven. Amen.
“Go to Joseph”¹

HERBERT CARDINAL VAUGHAN
[1832-1903]

WHO IS ST. JOSEPH?

Joseph, the son of the patriarch Jacob, was the figure of St. Joseph, the son of another Jacob: “Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called The Christ” (Matt. 1:16).

What was truly said of the first Joseph, as to his future, and as to his goodness, his chastity, his patience, his wisdom, his influence with the king, his power over the people and his love for his brethren, is verified much more perfectly, even to this day, in the second Joseph.

Of old it was said to the needy and suffering people in the kingdom of Egypt: “Go to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you” (Gen. 41:55). The same is now said by the Sovereign Pontiff to all needy and suffering people in the kingdom of the Church—“Go to Joseph.”

If you labor for your bread; if you have a family to support; if your heart is searched by trials at home; if you

are assailed by some importunate temptation; if your faith is sorely tested, and your hope seems lost in darkness and disappointment; if you have yet to learn to love and serve Jesus and Mary as you ought, Joseph, the head of the house, the husband of Mary, the nursing father of Jesus—Joseph is your model, your teacher and your father. Truly, in all things, St. Joseph is the people’s friend.

Go, then, to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you.

Go to Joseph, and obey him as Jesus and Mary obeyed him.

Go to Joseph, and speak to him as they spoke to him.

Go to Joseph, and consult him as they consulted him.

Go to Joseph, and honor him as they honored him.

Go to Joseph, and be grateful to him as they were grateful to him.

Go to Joseph, and love him as they loved him, and as they love him still.

However much you love Joseph, your love will always fall short of the extraordinary love which Jesus and Mary bore to him. On the other hand, the love of Joseph necessarily leads us to Jesus and Mary. He was the first Christian to whom it was said, “Take the Child and His mother. . . .” This led a Father of the Church to say, “You will always find Jesus with Mary and Joseph.”
Devotion to St. Joseph¹

POPE BENEDICT XV
[1854-1922]

Looking back over the past fifty years We see the wonderfully flourishing state of the religious institutions that testify to the way in which devotion to the holy patriarch St. Joseph has been gradually developing among the faithful. When, then, We think of the calamities that afflict mankind today, We cannot but appreciate what an opportune time it is to increase this devotion and spread it among Christian people ever more widely.

In our great solicitude, We have in a special way placed the example of St. Joseph before [manual workers], in order that they may follow him as their particular guide and honor him as their patron in Heaven. It was he, indeed, who lived a life like theirs; and for this reason Our Lord Jesus Christ wished to be called “the son of the carpenter,” though in fact He was the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father. Yet how many and how great were the virtues with which St. Joseph adorned his poor and

¹ From the motu proprio, Bonum sane, issued in 1920 upon the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as patron of the Universal Church.
lowly state! No virtue was lacking to ennable the man who was to be the husband of Mary Immaculate and the foster father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Everyone, then, should learn from Joseph to consider the passing things of today in the light of the future good that will endure forever; amid human vicissitudes, everyone should find comfort in the hope of heavenly things, so that they may strive after them in a way agreeable to God’s will: that is, by living soberly, justly and religiously.

With reference to the labor problem, it is here opportune to quote the words of our predecessor, Leo XIII of happy memory, on the matter, for they are such that no other words can be considered appropriate. . . . [Here Pope Benedict quotes the passage on page 200, above.]

Increase of devotion to St. Joseph among the faithful is bound to result in an increase of devotion toward the Holy Family of Nazareth of which he was the illustrious head, for these devotions spring spontaneously from one another. St. Joseph leads us directly to Mary, and Mary leads us directly to the source of all holiness, Jesus Christ, who sanctified the domestic virtues by His obedience to Joseph and Mary. It is therefore our desire that these wondrous exemplars of virtue should serve as inspiration and patterns for all Christian families. The family is the foundation of the human race; and by strengthening domestic society through the bonds of purity, faithfulness and harmony, new vigor, new lifeblood as it were, will be
diffused among the members of human society under the lifegiving influence of Christ’s power: the result will be not merely a putting right of public morals, but a restoration of public civil order itself.

And so, full of trust in the protection of him to whose care and watchfulness it pleased God to entrust His only-begotten Son, as well as the most holy Virgin, We earnestly exhort all the bishops of the Catholic world that they should, at this time of the Church’s need, prevail on the faithful more zealously to seek St. Joseph’s mighty intercession. This Apostolic See has approved many ways of venerating the holy patriarch, especially on Wednesdays throughout the year and during the month dedicated to him; and We wish that, so far as possible, all these devotions should be observed in each diocese at the instance of its bishop. And since Joseph, who died in the presence of Jesus and Mary, is rightly looked on as a most effective helper of the dying, it is our purpose here especially to admonish our Venerable Brethren that they shall use all possible means to encourage religious societies founded to seek St. Joseph’s intercession for the dying, such as the Association for a Happy Death and the Pious Union of St. Joseph’s Passing, established for the benefit of those who are drawing their last breath. . . .
St. Joseph the Helper

ALEXIS H. M. CARDINAL LÉPICIER
[1863-1936]

St. Joseph extends his powerful aid to all the faithful who turn to him, but there are some who benefit thereby very particularly: those people, that is, whose condition or state in life gives them a certain likeness to him. In the first place, there are those who, longing to maintain a spirit of fervor in their hearts, give themselves wholly to God’s service by undertaking life under the vows of religion. It is as if it were by a natural instinct that such persons turn to Joseph with complete confidence, and receive through him the help that they need in order to persevere in the spirit of their exalted vocation.

St. Joseph is also the special patron of those who, experiencing the strong temptations of the flesh, wish nevertheless to live in continence, for the love of God and to keep up their religious devotion, against which the sin of impurity wages unremitting war. These too find

effective help in their spiritual needs in this holy patriarch, guardian and father of virgins.

But it is especially at the hour of death that the reputed father of the Incarnate Word exerts his solicitious protection, he who himself was helped in that supreme moment by Jesus and Mary. He does not fail to ask God for the grace of a happy and holy death on behalf of those devout souls who trustfully call on him, for the grace that enables them to overcome the attacks of the Enemy who at that critical moment does all he can to drive them to despair. Such is the teaching of Pope Benedict XV: “St. Joseph, who died in the presence of Jesus and Mary, is rightly looked on as a most effective helper of the dying.”

St. Joseph’s aid is not confined to helping us in our spiritual needs; continual experience shows that he is no less eager to help in our temporal needs as well. We have only to look at the impressive generosity with which he comes to the assistance of the temporal good works which Christian charity never fails to produce in the Church. That, indeed, is one of the great wonders of our age—the countless charitable institutions that are born, that grow and increase, under the protection of this glorious patriarch.

We can see an image, an anticipated picture, as it were, of this corporal providence on the part of St. Joseph in the story of that patriarch of olden time who bore the
same name. He commended himself to his master, earned his complete trust, and was put in charge of his household. Later on, he was given authority over all Egypt, and fed the whole people when days of famine came. The power of the new Joseph is not less than that of the old. Wondrously does he provide for the bodily needs of those who turn to him, and we may say that Jesus Christ himself invites us so to do, through the words that Pharaoh once spoke to his people: “Go to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you” (Gen. 41:55). And hearing this invitation, the faithful trustingly approach the holy patriarch, saying in the words spoken by Jacob’s sons to his namesake: “Our life is in thy hand. Only let my lord look favorably upon us, and we will gladly serve the king” (Gen. 47:25).

St. Joseph’s universal protection and help do not stop at the prayers he offers up for us before the throne of God and his promptness in thus coming to our aid. He exerts it furthermore through the pattern of virtue that he ceaselessly presents to our eyes, as the great Pope Leo XIII eloquently recalled. . . . Priests especially can find in St. Joseph’s life examples of virtue fitting the holiness of their state, as the famous priest Frederick William Faber so well reminds us: “Look at the parallel between St. Joseph and the Catholic priesthood. Was he the steward of God’s house? So are they. Was he the dispenser of God’s gifts, as the Church calls him? So are they. Was he the keeper of the Bread of life? So are they.
Did he handle, carry, lift up and lay down the body of Jesus? So do they. If Jesus was subject to him, so is He, and even more wonderfully, to them . . .” (The Blessed Sacrament, Book II, Section 5).

Finally, it was again Leo XIII who reminded Catholics that every state and condition of life can find its model in St. Joseph: fathers of families . . . husbands and wives . . . maidens . . . the high-born wealthy . . . and especially the workers and other people of modest condition. . . .
Joseph’s Love for Mary

MICHAEL O’CARROLL, C.S.Sp.

In the love of Joseph for Mary there was present every element natural and supernatural that perfection demands. He did not love her with his mind and will only, for he was a person who had reached completion and fullness in all he did. It is unthinkable that he loved her for mere passion and physical attraction. For in him passion was subdued and physical qualities had a subordinate place. They were the necessary avenue to the soul. They were also sacramental of the divine in whose image the Son has been created.

The attraction between Mary and Joseph followed a triple channel. They sought first to attune their free acts to the divine rhythm in which they were wholly contained. In their words and gestures, in their mutual conduct and in their final choice, they moved with a certainty of divine help and divine pattern which was absolute. They had not the misgivings of the immature that God is indifferent to the destiny and happiness of two

1 From The King Uncrowned (Cork: The Mercier Press), chap. II. With permission of the publisher.
beings who choose each other in love. They had not the crudeness of the passionate who degrade themselves by perverting the order instituted by God and by following impulses that drive them from His way. Consciousness of God is not difficult for two beings who wish righteously to seek out the way of their mutual destiny. Their meeting is an act of Providence; their growth in knowledge and love needs at every stage His assistance and His protection; their exchange of freedom if it is to bring happiness must touch the ultimate source of freedom which is the sovereign will of God. Realization of that truth was implicit in all that Mary and Joseph did.

Since Our Lady was of the family of David, tradition demanded that she should be given a husband of the same family. Joseph was chosen. Why? The relatives of Our Lady would have said that he seemed to them suitable in age, in dignity and in occupation. They did not know that Mary was the most perfect creature, or that Joseph was consummate in holiness. They rejoiced to see two friends so well matched and so docile. It was a ready agreement. It was framed in the formalities prescribed by the law. A dowry—at their social level mostly clothes and household furnishings—was fixed by the representative of the groom. A marriage portion was also to be entrusted to the future husband by the bride’s relatives or guardians.

All this outer form the elders saw. But Mary and Joseph saw far more. With intuition that was faultless
each saw in the other a necessary counterpart. Mary had privately taken a vow of virginity. With a sensitive instinct she instantly recognized the man to whose nature her virginity could be safely entrusted. She sought such a man not for herself but for God, for to Him her virginity closely bound her. Joseph in this moment of his mature manhood had also reached a direct communion with the Deity. He had attained, because of his special predestination in grace, a certainty of judgment enjoyed by the great mystics only at the very height of their unitive ascent. He kept step with God. In his meeting with Mary he had certainty of her divine vocation.

Against the limitless background of the divine there were, I have said, two other elements in the love of Joseph for Mary. One was the harmony of spirit that existed between them. Both acted on a conception of love which we should call in this age idealistic. It was love stripped of all the ignoble things which lessen it—self-interest, barter, servility. It was love as a form of communion between two persons each endowed with delicate and heroic reverence for the other. . . .

This ideal of love was realized between Mary and Joseph through their total acceptance of the primacy of spirit. In a different and higher sense than the early Christians they were "one heart and one spirit." Their minds had been fed at the same divine source—the inspired writings of their people. Their mentality of outlook had been formed near to identity by free and com-
plete observance of the rich traditions of Israel. Their hopes for the future were the same. Conflicts or tensions between Mary and Joseph on any fundamental problem of life was impossible.

The first and crucial test of that harmony of spirit was Mary’s vow of virginity. We know from her word to the Archangel Gabriel that Joseph’s love had passed the test; for though espoused to him she still could say, “How shall this be done since I know not man?” The praise of Joseph implicit in these words is high. He had taken Mary but he had taken her in God, and God who had accepted her vow spoke to Joseph the message that would ensure Mary’s protection. Who can doubt that, on the spiritual plane where their intercourse moved, Joseph had an intuition that he must choose this way of integrity in the flesh? Who can doubt that his resolve to love Mary gave him a communion with her spirit and that he, like her, had through the spirit triumphed over the flesh? Spirit answered spirit, and as they mounted high above mere physical need their flight became completely one.

Yet it was not in spirit alone that they loved. The third factor in the mutual exchange of gifts was in the order of the body. Their physical nature they had consecrated, and thus their bodily appetites elevated by chastity became, as it were, sacramentals. The tenderness which accompanies love on the physical plane was not a prelude to physical union. It was for them the symbol, the external sign, of spirit and of grace. In the expression of this
symbolic language there was peace. They had serenity. For they were established in an order which was guaranteed by God.

The intercourse of these two elect moved thus in a wondrous cycle where the divine and the created, spiritual and corporal, had each entire freedom. Before them stretched, as for every other pair so united, the uncharted expanse which we name the future.
The Virginal Marriage

JEAN GUITTON

I imagine Joseph young and strong; a countryman; very much alive, like the shepherd of the Lebanon described in the Canticle of Canticles. In the course of my life I have encountered many young heroes—in the fields, in the forces—who have suggested just such a clear-eyed type: peasants, soldiers, airmen, combining purity and virility in equal luster.

At this rate we must give up seeing the Virgin as a young Tuscan girl. There must be something of Joan of Arc in her. And as for Joseph, “gentle, humble, chaste, zealous, charitable, resigned”—for these words of the familiar prayer we must substitute (not to contradict but to complete them) a sequence such as this: “strong, proud, virile, confident, impatient, just, divinely rebellious.” Such terms as these would depict Joseph the Just.

Why should he not have loved, or have had his love returned? Why should he not have desired and then divined in her he met, some peaceful evening when his

\footnote{From \textit{The Virgin Mary}. Translated by A. Gordon Smith (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1952).}
work was done, a love that would fully respond to his own? Joseph’s love could have been unbounded, not to be expressed in words, fierce as a torrent, calm, smooth and unruffled as a lake, fresh as springing water. He no doubt perceived in this girl an affinity to himself; but he would have felt her superiority. A man’s love molds itself on that of the woman; hers to guide quietly the impulse of the man. It was Mary who bestowed on Joseph the gift of virginity, as she was to bestow it with her smile on countless young men, and on the world-wide race of priests, whom she enables to preserve so easily their manly virginity. Yet she took from him nothing of his natural vigor, nothing of his zest and fervor; she diminished nothing of his capacity to give and receive tenderness. The eyes of Joseph were changed through meeting hers; his senses were sublimated, caught as they were in the radiance of that body unique in all the world. Here was a strange and peaceful moment, recalling the first love in the first days of the world. . . .

“The fascination of virginity,” says Novalis, “the thing that makes it so unspeakably alluring, is the presentiment of motherhood, the intuition of a world to come, destined to be born from it. It is the truest image of the future.” Novalis puts into the aptest words the difficult idea I want to express. Joseph and Mary had renounced their parenthood; they had no idea of the fruitfulness that was latent in their sacrifice, no presentiment of the Unnameable, the Incomprehensible, that was destined
Jean Guitton
to supervene so quietly between them. Yet their marriage
had no resemblance to a self-enclosed union; it was not,
as it were, a double cloister in isolation. There was a
hope invading it. A feeling, there must have been, that a
world of the future reposed in their relationship. The fu-
ture which is present, in every instalment of the present,
which gives it its sense of peace—how much more was it
here! Their love, like all other loves, but truer, had its
center of gravity in what not yet was. Joseph and Mary
may have had no thought of the Future, but the Future
was about them; they breathed it already in the great and
solemn happiness they both enjoyed.

Thus they truly “came together,” and their coming
together was something wonderful to them. Mary, with-
out seeking him, had found the one being in the world
with whom she could be completely at ease. Of that first
meeting we know nothing; but bearing in mind that law
of our destiny whereby the rhythm of our lives tends to
repeat itself—to be, in fact, like us—we may imagine the
meeting with Joseph according to some such plan as that
of the Annunciation. Whether this meeting lasted
months or a few minutes, it must have passed through
these phases: there must have been an initial request,
which could have come only from Joseph; a surprise and
a silence; a repeated plea from Joseph, explaining him-
self further and calling to mind ancient blessings; finally,
the decisive word, the Quomodo fiat istud . . . , “How
can that be, since I have no knowledge of man?”—
Joseph's enlightenment, his assurance of respecting her desire; and at last, Mary's *fiat*, before this sign from God. Afterward, no doubt, a visit to various kinsfolk with whom she shares her joy.

For the rest, bearing in mind how the events in sacred history are linked up, how they are clarified and repeated, we may think the meeting of Mary and Joseph was prefigured in the first loves recounted to us by Scripture. There was, as I have said, in this love of Mary and Joseph that newness and first youth, both of the world and of the human heart, which marked that of the first of men and the first of all women; here, however, the order was inverted, and the higher dignity belonged to the woman; it was the man, this time, who seemed part of her being, of her bone, of her thoughts. Like Rebecca, Mary had doubtless been met at the well, that well in Nazareth which is still to be seen; she would have been watched, like her, as she drew water, she of whose nature water was the symbol. Doubtless hers was the love prefigured by that of the Shulamite in the Canticle of Canticles, in the splendor of the Syrian springtime; he whom she chose had perhaps to "wait and come again." In the love of these two, both so notably silent, the phases of longing and waiting must ever be shrouded in silence. What we know of the character of Joseph suggests a man of vigor, prompt to act, decided in his opinions and "reserved"—as we say of someone who seldom reveals himself. There is something in him that reminds us of Peter; without
Jean Guitton

Peter's frailty, but with some of that immediate acquiescence we find in Peter, and a courage greater than Peter's—the courage that consists in making a decision in the night. It was something robust and steadfast, something virile that the Virgin savored in this man after her own likeness.
The Feast of St. Joseph the Workman

POPE PIUS XII

FROM ITS BEGINNING We put your organization [The Catholic Association of Italian Workers] under the mighty protection of St. Joseph, and true it is that there could be no better guardian to help you to intensify the spirit of the Gospel in your lives. We said then that that spirit comes to you, and to all men, from the heart of the God-man, the Saviour of the world; and certainly no worker was ever more deeply and wholly penetrated by it than the reputed father of Jesus, who lived with Him in the closest intimacy of family life and work. And so We say again today, “If you want to be close to Christ, ‘Ite ad Joseph’—Go to Joseph.”

Your association must bring an awareness of Christ’s presence to its members and their families, and to the whole world of labor. Do not forget that your first duty is to safeguard and foster Christian living among workers. To do this, it is not enough to fulfill your religious duties and to encourage others to fulfill theirs: you must deepen

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1 From an address to the Catholic Association of Italian Workers, May 1, 1955.
your knowledge of Christian teaching, and continually improve your understanding of what is required by the moral order in the world as regards all that touches the rights and duties of the workers today—that order which is established by God and taught and interpreted by the Church.

Go ahead with courage and perseverance; and do not be led astray by false principles. False principles are indeed at work. How many times have We declared and explained the Church’s love for the workers—and yet the wicked slander is still spread abroad that “the Church is allied with capitalism against labor!” The Church is the mother and teacher of all men, and she is always specially concerned for those of her children who are in more difficult circumstances; and she has in fact made a weighty contribution to the equitable improvement already obtained by various categories of workers. In giving Our Christmas message in 1942 We said: “The Church, always moved by religious considerations, has condemned the various systems of Marxian socialism, and she condemns them still, for it is ever her duty and right to save men from movements and influences that endanger their everlasting salvation. But the Church cannot be ignorant of the fact that, in his efforts to better his condition, the worker comes up against a certain structure which, so far from being in conformity with the nature of things, is opposed to God’s order and to the purpose He has assigned to this world’s goods. However
false, dangerous and reprehensible are the methods followed, who—and particularly what priest, what Christian—can be deaf to the cry which rises from the depths, which appeals to justice and the spirit of brotherhood in a world ruled by a just God?"

Jesus Christ does not wait for the door to be opened to Him before entering the world of social problems, with its systems that do not derive from Him, whether they be called "secular humanism" or "socialism without materialism." His divine kingdom of truth and justice is present even there where class warfare constantly threatens to get the upper hand. The Church is therefore not restricted to making appeals for a more just social order: she also sets out its fundamental principles, and urges civil rulers, legislators, employers of labor and business directors to put them into practice.

The activity of Christian forces in public life certainly means support for the enactment of good laws and the building up of institutions suitable to the times; but it means even more that the rule of empty slogans and deceitful words is rejected, and that the ordinary man feels himself upheld and encouraged in his legitimate expectations and demands. It is essential to form a public opinion which, without nosing after scandals, is not afraid frankly to point to persons and situations which do not conform to just laws and institutions, or which dishonestly conceal what is true. To enlist the influence of the plain citizen, it is not enough to give him a voting
card or some similar device. If he is to be associated with the leaders, if he is for the common good from time to time to suggest a remedy for a dearth of useful ideas and for the inroads of selfishness, then he must have the necessary personal energy and enthusiastic determination himself to contribute toward infusing a healthy morality into all matters of public concern. . . .

Dear sons and daughters, present here in this sacred [St. Peter’s] square, and you, working men and women throughout the whole world, We stretch out Our arms to you with a father’s tender love, like to that with which Jesus drew to Himself the multitudes who hungered for truth and justice: be assured that you will have a guide, a defender, a father beside you in every need.

Discordant but alluring voices are directed at you from various quarters—some to enslave your souls, some to debase you as human persons, some to defraud you of your lawful rights as workers. Tell Us openly, here under the free sky of Rome, can you, amid so many voices, recognize who is and always will be your sure guide, your faithful defender, your true father? Beloved workers, the Pope and the Church are inseparable from the divine mission of guiding, protecting and loving, especially those in tribulation, who are the more beloved the more they are in need of protection and help, whether they be workers or other children of the people.

We, the Vicar of Christ, desire clearly to reaffirm this duty and obligation of Ours, here, on this first day of
May—the day which the world of labor has adopted as its own proper feast day; and We do this in order that everybody may recognize the dignity of work, and that this recognition may inspire social life and legislation, grounded on the equitable sharing of rights and duties.

Thus acclaimed by Christian workers and having, so to speak, been given Christian baptism, the first of May is and will be, not an incentive to discord, hatred and violence, but a recurring encouragement to contemporary society to bring about what is still lacking for social peace: a Christian feast, therefore; that is, a day of rejoicing for the concrete and advancing triumph of the Christian ideals of the great family of labor.

In order that you may remember this meaning of the day, and so that We may in a way at once make a return for the many precious gifts brought to Us from all parts of Italy, We have the happiness to announce Our decision to institute—and we in fact do now institute—a liturgical feast of St. Joseph the Workman, to be observed precisely on the first day of the month of May.

Are you pleased with this gift of Ours, dear workers? We are sure that you are, because the humble workman of Nazareth not only personifies the dignity of the manual worker before God and the Church, he is also the ever-provident guardian of yourselves and your families. . . .
The Roman Liturgy

Proper Preface of St. Joseph

It is truly meet and right, proper and availing to salvation, that we should always and everywhere give thanks to thee, holy Lord, Father almighty, ever-living God, and that we should magnify, bless and extol thee with due praise on the festival of blessed Joseph: that good man whom thou didst give as husband to the virgin mother of God; that true and careful servant who was set over thy family to be the guardian and foster father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, thine only-begotten Son, conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Through that Son the angels praise thy majesty, the dominions worship thee, the powers stand in awe; the heavens and their hosts join with the blessed seraphim in hymns of joyful happiness. We pray thee let our voices join with theirs as we sing with humble praise: Holy, holy, holy . . .

PRAYERS

Feast of March 19

May we be helped by the merits of the husband of thy most holy mother, we beseech thee, Lord: so that
through his intercession we may be given what we cannot obtain by ourselves; who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

We pay thee, Lord, the homage that is thy due, humbly beseeching thee that thou wilt safeguard thy gifts within us, through the prayers of the husband of the mother of thy Son Jesus Christ Our Lord, that blessed Joseph on whose worshipful festival we offer up to thee this sacrifice of praise; through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Be present with us, we pray thee, merciful God, and preserve in us the gifts thou hast bestowed, through the intercession of blessed Joseph thy confessor on our behalf; through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

*Feast of the Solemnity*

O God, who in thine unutterable providence wast pleased to choose blessed Joseph for the husband of thy most holy mother, grant, we beseech thee, that we may deserve to have as our advocate in Heaven the protector whom we revere on earth; who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

Upheld by the protection of the husband of thy most holy mother, we ask of thy goodness, Lord, that thou wilt make our hearts reject the things of earth and love thee, the true God, with perfect love; who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

Strengthened at the source of thy divine gifts, we be-
seech thee, Lord, our God, that as thou dost gladden us by the protection of blessed Joseph, so thou wilt make us partakers of his glory in Heaven through his merits and prayers; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMNS

*Te, Joseph, celebrent agmina caelitum*

May Heaven's loud host the virgin spouse proclaim,
And faithful choirs resound great Joseph's fame,
Who, bright with merit, has deserved to be
In nuptial ties, O Mary, joined with thee.

The pregnant maid he saw with wondering eyes
And anxious thoughts increased his just surprise,
Till an archangel from above revealed
The sacred mystery in her womb concealed.

His arms embraced the world's new-born delight,
From Herod's rage secured his Saviour's flight;
Him lost he sought and in the Temple found;
Thus happy tears are with possession crowned.

Others in th' other world are crowned with bliss,
And wear the palms which they've deserved in this.
But he, more happy in his Lord's embrace,
E'cn here on earth beholds Him face to face.

May Joseph's vows, O sacred Three in One,
Prevail that sinners may approach thy throne,
Where sweetest hymns shall consecrate thy name
To endless blessings and immortal fame.

Amen.

(Translation from the *Primer* of 1706).
Caelitum, Joseph, decus
Joy of the saints! who didst uphold
Our life's sure hope, the world's one stay—
Joseph! as now thy praise is told
Hearken to us in love today.

The great Creator made it thine
To be the spouse of purest Maid,
And father of the Word divine
In name—salvation's work to aid.

Thou seest with joy in manger lie
The Saviour sung by seers of yore,
And Him, the Son of God most high,
In lowliness thou didst adore.

The King of kings, the Lord of all,
The God whom Heaven in awe attends,
Whose nod makes trembling demons fall,
To thee in meek submission bends.

To God most high, the Three in One,
Be praise, who gave such grace to thee.
He makes us win what thou hast won,
The joys of life eternally.

Amen.

(Translation by R. F. Littledale).

Iste, quem laeti colimus
Worshipp'd throughout the Church to earth's far ends
With prayer and solemn rite,
Joseph this day triumphantly ascends
Into the realms of light.
The Roman Liturgy

O blest beyond the lot of mortal men!
O'er whose last dying sigh
Christ and the Virgin Mother watch'd serene,
Soothing his agony.

Loosed from his fleshly chain, gently he fleets,
As in calm sleep, away;
And, diademed with light, enters the seats
Of everlasting day.

There, throned in power, let us his loving aid
With fervent prayers implore;
So he may gain us pardon in our need
And peace for evermore.

Glory and praise to thee, blest Trinity!
One only God and Lord,
Who to thy faithful ones unfailingly
Their aureoles dost award.

Amen.

(Translation by Edward Caswall).

At present writing the proper of the Mass and Office for St. Joseph the Workman has not yet been published.
St. Joseph’s Age

DENIS O’SHEA

Not a single word in the canonical gospels suggests that St. Joseph was a feeble old man at the time of his espousal or, indeed, that he was in any way an unsuitable match. From the fact that their ages are not mentioned one can infer that there was nothing unusual about either. On the contrary, whenever a really old person is mentioned, the evangelists do refer to their old age, as in the cases of Zachary, Elizabeth and the prophetess Anna. St. Luke says simply that the Blessed Virgin was “espoused to a man” (1:27), not to “an old man,” like Zachary (1:18), or to one “advanced in years,” like Elizabeth. With their insistence on marriage as the natural means for the propagation of the Chosen People, an elderly man, not a member of the eccentric sect of the Essenes, who had remained single must have been a rare phenomenon among the Jews of the period. No normal man dared remain a bachelor lest his name be blotted out of the records of his tribe. Owing to the lack of definite

¹ From Mary and Joseph (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1949), chap. V. With permission of the publisher.
evidence due to the silence of the evangelists, no precise age can now be affirmed of St. Joseph. Nevertheless, it was certainly the custom for men to marry at an early age. The age of eighteen is recommended in the Talmud. The rabbis said that “up to the age of twenty the Holy One, blessed be He, watches for a man to marry, and curses him if he fails to do so by then.” . . . Hence the most probable age of St. Joseph at his espousal was about eighteen, an age so very suitable according to the customs and beliefs of the Jews of the period. . . .

The Christians of the first and second centuries were nearer in time to St. Joseph than the apocryphists, and therefore should have been better informed. What did the early Christians believe was the age of the foster father of the Saviour? Is there any evidence on the subject? The monuments of the primitive Church do afford some data. . . . [In the catacomb of Priscilla at Rome] there is a fresco which is probably the earliest surviving representation of the Holy Family. It depicts the Blessed Virgin as seated and as clasping her Child to her bosom, while a young man stands before her pointing to a star overhead. It has been suggested that this figure represents the prophet Isaias, who had foretold that Emmanuel would be born of the virgin. Really this opinion seems rather far-fetched. It is more reasonable to follow the opinion of the archaeologists who more naturally identify him with St. Joseph. De Rossi, the great Catholic archaeologist, assigns the date of this fresco to the reigns of
St. Joseph

Trajan or Hadrian, or at the very latest to the period of the Antonines...

How did the Christians of this early date paint the picture of St. Joseph? They represented him as a young man without a beard. In other representations found elsewhere in the catacombs he is never depicted as a man of advanced age, "the conventional representation of Joseph as an old man, with which we are so familiar, being of later date." De Rossi, who more than any other man is thearchaeologist of the catacombs, states decisively and conclusively: "The type of St. Joseph found in the sarcophagi and monuments of the first four centuries is invariable, and is completely different from that which we have found since then. He is always represented as young and beardless." These figures in the catacombs were made before Christendom was inundated by the spate of apocryphal literature. Thus the exaggerations of the authors of the apocrypha are refuted by the evidence of the monuments of the early Christians, the first generations of the converts of the Apostles themselves. The authors of the apocryphal gospels have not been complimentary to St. Joseph in making him out to have been a venerable ancient at the time of his espousal. It is not age which makes a man chaste, but grace and self-control. These are not less potent at eighteen than at

*Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, "Mary in Art."
*Bolletino di archeologia cristiana, 1856.
eighty. It is youth that is generous, brave and strong. St. Joseph had to be all three, and he was.

To the great number of [later] paintings which represent St. Joseph as an old man there is one notable exception, and by a notable artist. The beautiful “Sposalitio” or “Espousals of the Virgin” by Raphael is justly famous and there are copies of it everywhere. The artist seems to have drawn upon the apocryphal gospels for some of his ideas . . . [but his] genius and sound instinct have saved him from the apocryphal writers’ blunder of belitting the bridegroom. In the picture there is only one person far advanced in years, only one figure with a venerable white beard, and it is not Joseph, but the high priest. Raphael has painted Joseph with the short crisp beard of a man before the prime of life.
St. Joseph’s Trade

EDMUND F. SUTLIFFE, S.J.

The word τέκτων may . . . mean either an artisan or craftsman in general, or a carpenter in particular, and the sense is indicated by the context. But the special difficulty of Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 arises from this, that there is no context. Supposing for a moment that the Nazarenes had spoken Greek, there would have been no ambiguity about the phrase, for they all knew Our Lord and St. Joseph and had seen them at their work. But it may be urged, suppose some person acquainted with Greek, but utterly unacquainted with Christian tradition, were to read these sentences, he could not tell whether his fellow townspeople spoke of Our Lord as the craftsman or the carpenter. Were this so, St. Joseph’s trade would afford a striking instance of the importance of tradition, written or oral; for by this argument, without tradition we could not know what trade Our Lord and St. Joseph followed. But it is natural and probable that the words used by the scornful Nazarenes

should denote the definite trade He followed, rather than refer to Him in general as an artisan. It was more natural for them to say: "Is not this the son of the carpenter?" than "Is not this the son of the artisan?" They were all artisans in some sense or other, for all Jews, even the rabbis, followed a trade. There could be no reason why St. Joseph, rather than another, should be called "the artisan": if he was the village carpenter there is every reason why he should be called "the carpenter."

This argument, therefore, derived from grounds of probability, together with a study of the meaning and usage of τέκτων, goes to show that the text of Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 indicates that Our Lord and St. Joseph were carpenters. The added authority of tradition gives moral certainty. . . . The writers who speak of St. Joseph as a smith are all Latin. The fact that there is not a single Greek among their number is striking, and suggests that they were misled by the common meaning of the word faber. And if this seems surprising, it is to be remembered that every one of these writers is interested, not in the historical and literal sense of Holy Scripture, but in its moral and spiritual lessons.

GUSTAF DALMAN²

In the small market of the town [of Nazareth], which serves a large district, there is today no special lane of

² From Sacred Sites and Ways (The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge), chap. III. With permission of the publisher.
Carpenters or Joiners. Only the forging of sickles and winnowing-knives can be considered a trade characteristic of Nazareth. From Mark 6: 3 and Matt. 13: 55 we know that Joseph and Jesus belonged to a class of artisans in Nazareth. The Greek τέκτων, used of Our Lord, does not specify the trade. . . . But as early as in the Protevangelium of James (9: 1), we find Joseph with a builder’s hatchet. . . . Nazareth must have had its builders or masons; but together with them, there must have been one or more workers in wood, who put up the roof beams of the house and also supplied the modest requirements of a village, as, for instance, ploughs and yokes, and spare parts of these; also doors, trunks, and bedsteads in particular.

The post-Christian Jewish literature knows of no special carpenters, but together with the mason (bannay), the naggar, who was both mason and maker of the above-mentioned articles. And Jesus (as well as Joseph) was considered in rabbinic as well as in Christian-Palestinian writings to have been a naggar. According to the Protevangelium of James (13: 1), Joseph had to do with buildings, evidently as a carpenter, as in 9: 1, where he throws away a hatchet. On the other hand, according to Justin (Dial. c. Tryph., 88), he made ploughs and yokes, and the apocryphal gospels give a similar description. It was accordingly something unusual for Joseph to make bedsteads. Only the Arabic Infancy-gospel, ch.
37, mentions doors, milk pails, boxes and bedsteads. His trade sometimes even caused Joseph to stay away from home for certain periods in “Capernaum by the sea,” where he eventually moved with his family (Pseudo-Matt., 10:1; 40).
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In the Cahiers de Joséphologie from 1953 to 1955, published by the Centre de Recherches et de Documentation, Oratoire Saint-Joseph, Montreal, there appeared a long and most valuable bibliography of St. Joseph, the work of Father Aimé Trottier, c.s.c. This bibliography has been republished by the Centre as a separate volume, of 283 pages, including analytical, chronological and geographical indexes, under the title Essai de bibliographie sur Saint Joseph. It records only books and booklets, excluding periodicals, articles in reviews and reference works, and collections of extracts. This bibliography contains over 6000 entries, including second and subsequent editions of many books. It begins in the late fifteenth century, and records works in twenty-six languages, published in forty-three countries throughout the world.