

SAINT JOSEPH





# SAINT JOSEPH

By

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*Translated and edited 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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 plural, "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. Matthew, despite his conciseness, says more. Like Luke, he emphasizes Christ's virginal conception and birth: Joseph is not His father. But Joseph appears clearly as the head of the Holy Family. He is a just man, a God-fearing man; he has, too, a sensitive love for her who is his bride: he is afraid of bringing shame on her, and considers 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 mention 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 person who in the first place is responsible for Jesus' safety. It is to him that the warning angel appears; he commands and is obeyed (Matt. 2:13-4). There are no particulars of this journey into Egypt, only a rough indication 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> [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;<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> [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.<sup>4</sup> 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,

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 56.

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

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.<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>5</sup> [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 world-wide 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.<sup>6</sup> We have to come down to the twelfth century to find any significant texts in the West.<sup>7</sup>

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.

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

<sup>7</sup> The witness of the Venerable Bede and St. Peter Damian does not touch St. Joseph directly (V. Mercier, *Saint Joseph* (1895), pp. 358-9). For St. Bernard, see below, pp. 57-62.

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-

fore 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.<sup>8</sup>

These meditations, written during the thirteenth century 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

<sup>8</sup> [These *Meditationes Vitae Christi* were freely translated into English about 1415 by Nicholas Love, and given the title *The Mirror of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*. For excerpts, see below, pp. 63-6. Nicholas Love was prior of the charterhouse of Mountgrace 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 upbringing. That, St. Thomas declares, is enough to constitute 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 account 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;<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> 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 betrothal 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.<sup>10</sup> The conciliar fathers listened

<sup>10</sup> 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? <sup>11</sup> Such ideas were taken up by artists and used in their pictures.

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

<sup>11</sup> [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*<sup>12</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> 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 Saints, après Jésus et Marie* (*Devotion to St. Joseph, the Kindest and Most Beloved of Holy People after Jesus and Mary*).<sup>13</sup> 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 Jacquinet'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

<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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

<sup>14</sup> See below, pp. 75-7.

about Joseph, and the nineteenth of his spiritual conferences is expressly concerned with him;<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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

<sup>16</sup> 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 mística 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.<sup>17</sup>

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

<sup>17</sup> [For John the Baptist, cf. Christ's words recorded by St. Matthew, 11:11, and by St. Luke, 7:28. *Trans.*]

We may mention a collective work by members of the order of the Servants of Mary, *Dissertatio historico-scripturistica 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).<sup>18</sup>

### *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

<sup>18</sup> 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,<sup>19</sup> 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

<sup>19</sup> See below, pp. 193-202.

the Solemnity feast in paschal time to the rank of a double of the first class, with an octave.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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-

<sup>20</sup> [This liturgical festival has now been superseded. *Trans.*]

<sup>21</sup> See below, pp. 205-7.

<sup>22</sup> See below, pp. 222-6.



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

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 mankind, 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 expressed mankind's acceptance of the divine work of redemption. 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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-

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Lebreton, *La vie et l'enseignement de Jésus-Christ*, I, 59-64.

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.<sup>25</sup> 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

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Pius XI in *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-found 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.

II  
*THE WRITINGS*







# The Angel's Message<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 Mary<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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,

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 FRANCISCAN<sup>1</sup>

(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-

<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Love, *The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*. See above, pp. 19-20. The above excerpts are somewhat modernized.

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 Child 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Love uses this word, but in its earlier form, *charres*.

# The Fatherhood of St. Joseph<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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. Joseph<sup>1</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup>"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<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 Conference<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup>

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,<sup>2</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> [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 honoring; 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-

fidid 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?

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 bonds slave. 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