



ST. JOSEPH – THE MAN

We have spoken of Christ and Our Blessed Mother for several weeks now. Please allow me this one article on St. Joseph. As one book puts it, “St. Joseph the Silent.” Yet when Our Lady spoke to the three shepherd children of Fatima, She makes an important statement: “The sound of victory will be heard when the world recognizes the sanctity of St. Joseph.” I wanted to wait to write about St. Joseph since we are near his feast day. He is the head of the Holy Family and I want to speak of his role in the Infancy narratives.

How much can you say about St. Joseph? He is easier to pray to than speak about in a certain sense. For instance, it would not take three minutes to read aloud every verse of Holy Scripture in which his name enters.

The very obscurity of St. Joseph is comfort for the common man, in whose anonymous footprints most of us march. We relish the thought that the closest St. Joseph ever came to the limelight was under the Star of Bethlehem, and even there he was lost among the angels and the shepherds and the kings. It was his destiny to serve God in the shadows. So if you are quietly trying to live a good life for the love of God and the salvation of souls, and don't give a damn for the praise of men, Joseph is your Saint.

If St. Joseph was an insignificant nobody in the eyes of the world, he was mighty important in the eyes of the Almighty. Of all the people on this planet, he was the one chosen to be the spouse of the Virgin Mary and the foster-father of God's own Son. In the beginning, while the Word was being woven Flesh in Her immaculate womb, Joseph allowed her to go on cooking and dusting and sewing and sweeping, but after a while he would not hear of her going to the well for water. Christmas was coming.

Speaking of Christmas, it was Joseph who indirectly determined where the Boy was to be born, because Caesar's conceited census commanded them to go the village of their ancestors, and Joseph's ancestor was David whose home had been Bethlehem. And now poor Joseph, descendant of kings, had to be content with a cave. Before the glory of the star and the melody of the angels, there was much misery that first Christmas.

It was Joseph too to whom the angel appeared soon afterward with instructions to take the Child and His Mother and flee into Egypt. Notice that though in that little family group the Child was Divine, and the Mother the one immaculate soul on earth, still Heaven dealt directly with the head of the family, Joseph. In that little blessed trinity upon earth, it was Joseph who made the decisions and gave the orders. But judge how humbly he must have carried his authority, knowing that in all things save authority he was so inferior to them. Was he perhaps put at the head of the Holy Family to give the high and mighty of the world a sterling object lesson in humility?

It was Joseph, too, who in a certain way gave Jesus status in the community of Nazareth. When rumors reached there of incredible miracles that flowed from the hands of Christ, the townspeople asked: “Is this not the carpenter's son?” The carpenter they knew, who spent his sweating hours in a swirl of sawdust as he hammered and sawed and planed away. What they did not know was that the finest thing that Joseph ever carpentered or built was his own character. Joseph may have been a low-income, struggling workman but he saluted and served the highest standards. How could it be otherwise with the Child Jesus toddling in and out of his shop?

The point is that if we all tend to be influenced by our surroundings, how St. Joseph must have been polished like a diamond by the constant presence and the radiant example of Our Blessed Lord Himself! If Jesus in one sighing moment left the imprint of His tortured face on Veronica's veil, how deep an image He must have engraved on Joseph's heart through all those long and intimate years! If closeness to Christ means anything, what other saint, always excepting Mary, can compete with St. Joseph? As one of the blessed in Heaven, he is also close to us. We err gravely if we think of St. Joseph only as a remote historical personage occupying a shadowy place on that dim and distant bridge swinging between B.C. and A.D. But since He has a prominent place in the court of Heaven, he can, through his intercession at the throne, reach us, with the long arm of God's goodness. Because he is so close to Jesus, he can be of unique help to us. I know he has to me all my life and why I chose him as my Confirmation patron Saint. All we have to do is pray to him with confidence and resignation. Confidence because of his influence, resignation because the wisdom of God is prone to bestow not what is most sought by us by what is beneficial to us!

However, there is one prayer to St. Joseph that Heaven eagerly desires to grant – a good death. Because Joseph died in the arms of Jesus and Mary, he is the patron saint of a happy death. Perhaps you fear death now. This does not mean you will fear death when it comes. Even martyrs have trembled up to the very threshold of their ordeal. God sends His grace *when we need it*, and we do not need this grace now. But if we put it in the hands of St. Joseph, then we can be certain that the grace will come, filled with patience, courage, confidence, even joy – at the right time. With all this being said, is it any wonder why Our Blessed Mother said at Fatima, “*The Sound of victory will be heard when the world recognizes the sanctity of St. Joseph?*” May he intercede for the Church, for the world, for our families and for our souls that one day we might glorify God with him in Heaven!! God bless.