

Saint Joseph, the Saint for our Times

Friday, June 4, 2021 ~ St. Joseph, Spouse of the Mother of God



How did they first meet? Were their parent's neighbors and Joseph always the boy next door who watched Mary from infancy on? In such a small town, like Nazareth, they would have known each other from Mary's early childhood. When home from the Temple, Mary would have seen Joseph playing with the other boys, and noticed his prompt obedience whenever his parents called him. Joseph would have seen Mary's charity with the other girls and her obedient deference to others, especially her parents. They knew the sound of each other's voice and the joy in one another's laughter, the twinkle in each other's eyes as they teased and saw humor in the little world in which they lived and in God's marvelous creation. Mary would have watched as Joseph was apprenticed to learn the trade of a carpenter. Joseph, though a little older, would have noticed as St. Ann prepared Mary to be a woman, teaching her all the skills necessary for her future life as wife and mother. We know not at what point they each gave their love to the other. Was it when Mary was brought home to stay, a young woman, ready for marriage or when it was announced that their betrothal was arranged or after the betrothal, as they prepared their future home? When their marriage was arranged, it was not to a stranger, but to someone known and trusted. This trust was absolutely necessary, for Mary had a secret to share with her future husband. She had consecrated herself to God and wished to remain a virgin.

While little known to many Christians, the Israelites had a form of virginal marriage. However, it required that the woman who had consecrated her virginity receive the permission from her betrothed when they first became betrothed, and if he refused, she was released from her consecration and it was not considered a breaking of her vow. Once he approved it, the husband was not allowed to change his mind later on in time. Joseph must have already given Mary permission, and in fact, tradition (with a small t) has it that both of these two young

people after prayerfully listening to the Hebrew Scriptures and recognizing that it was time for the Redeemer, had offered themselves as virgins to serve the long-expected Messiah. We do not know if St. Joseph and Mary had both made their vows separately and then told each other when they were betrothed, or if they discussed the coming of the Messiah and through their communal prayer felt a call to make it together. However, before either one said “yes” to God, through His messenger, they said “yes” to each other. As is normal for those betrothed, Mary and Joseph, were a young couple filled with joyful love of each other, guided and strengthened by their even greater love of God the Father. Between them was a unity of heart and mind. What was lacking, was understanding about which virgin from their tribe was to be the mother of the Messiah, and an understanding of what was meant by “Son of God” when referring to the Messiah. What was about to happen to them would be even more astounding than if a newly betrothed man had the greatest king in the world show up at his door and tell him, “Mary is my most beloved and heavenly daughter. She is to be the mother of the king, and I want you, poor carpenter from Nazareth to take her into your home, as your wife, and raise her son as your own.” Only this King is God, the Son is God and Mary is also the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Who is God!

All of this was part of God’s plan. Just as God had begun His first covenant with a married couple, Adam and Eve, He was beginning His new covenant inside a marriage, in a family filled with love of God and each other, and the joy and peace found in living God’s will. All of this must have already been put into place before the angel appeared to Mary, for otherwise, Mary’s, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (Luke 1:34) would have made no sense. Once Mary had been given the secret of the King, she waited for God to share it with Joseph, waited and trusted that he would accept God’s will as well.

Some might wonder at the possible break in the relationship of love and trust considered when Joseph became aware of Mary’s pregnancy. Especially since Mary’s relationship with Joseph was so perfectly united that she was able to leave it to God to announce the coming of the Incarnation to Joseph. How did he discover her pregnancy? One strong possibility is that according to the norm of the time, a father, husband or close male relative would have to accompany Mary to Elizabeth’s and come to accompany her back home.

If Joachim was still alive, he would have been too old and feeble to make the journey to a town in Judah. It would only be natural that Mary's betrothed husband would give his permission and then see her safely to her cousin's home. This would have put Joseph next to Mary as she greeted Elizabeth. Imagine his interior response as he witnessed what happened between these two women! "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord* should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed* that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." (Lk 1: 41-45) As he journeyed, alone, back to Nazareth, during the 3 months before going to bring Mary back home, what passed through his mind and in his prayer? Knowing Mary as he did, Joseph could never have spent the time thinking her guilty of adultery!

Scripture refers to Joseph as a Just/Righteous man. But by Jewish law, a just man who believed his wife guilty of adultery was required to condemn her and have her stoned to death. The only way he could have been just and not condemned her was if he recognized her as the virgin foretold in Is. 7:14. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign;* the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel." In the Douay edition of the Bible, it is translated, "But while he thought on these things..." Mt. 1:21. Thought on these things...Joseph was a man, who even when things appeared one way, took time to think about them and seek how God viewed them." Yet how deep must have been God's silence. "As a man of prayer, one who recognized the working of God in another, Joseph knew that Mary showed the signs of one who "carried the clear marks of a divine presence." (p. 90, *The Glories of Saint Joseph* by the Monks of St. Joseph Abbey). Joseph also recognized that she was with child and knew that, since they were virgins, it could not be his. St. Jerome in *Commentary on St. Matthew*, cap. i, wrote "If it was a precept of the Law then, not only the guilty, but those who had knowledge of their guilt, were under the penalty of sin, how could Joseph, in concealing the sin of his wife, be styled Just?" (p. 199, Healy) This leaves us to know that Joseph, having discerned she is without sin, and this being the time of the expected Messiah, to

be born of a virgin from the House of David, Mary must have conceived through the working of God. In humility, Joseph believed that he could best obey God by “dimitted” separating from her. As Sister mentioned last night, “dimitted” is the same word used by St. Peter after the first great catch of fish. “Dimitted” is also the same word used in Matthew 19:5 “For this reason a man shall dimitted/leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife...” Joseph’s plan was not an act of repudiation of Mary or disobedience of the Law, but a sacrifice of love for God and Mary. This is easy to understand if we take a moment to look at St. Louis de Montfort description of Mary’s relationship with the Trinity: “Mary is the sealed fountain and the faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit where only He may enter. She is the sanctuary and resting-place of the Blessed Trinity where God dwells in greater and more divine splendor than anywhere else in the universe, not excluding His dwelling above the cherubim and seraphim. No creature, however pure, may enter there without being specially privileged.” (True Devotion, paragraph 5, St. Louis Marie de Montfort). St. Joseph did not know that he was being specially invited to this privilege. So, it is only natural that Joseph would surrender his rights as her betrothed husband. It was only when he, out of love and obedience, was willing to give up the person he loves more than life, that God gave Mary back to Joseph. In denying himself, Joseph received both the Mother of God and the Incarnate Word into his keeping. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” (Matthew 1:20)

It is at St. Joseph’s annunciation, in his sleep, that he realizes God’s call for him to assist in this mystery of the Incarnation. The self-gift and the self-sacrifice of Mary and Joseph is an expression of their love for God and one another. And even though they never consummated their marriage, they lived the inseparable union of souls, the openness to life, and the fidelity of the sacrament necessary for this to be a true marriage. As with all true marriages, both persons brought the gifts God had given to them, to be shared in a covenant with God, husband and wife. Pope St. Leo XIII wrote in the encyclical *Quamaquam Pluries* “...that Joseph was the spouse of Mary and that he was reputed the father of Jesus Christ. From these sources have sprung his dignity, his holiness, his glory. In truth, the dignity of the Mother of God is so lofty that naught created can rank above it. But as Joseph has been united to the Blessed Virgin by the ties of

marriage, it may not be doubted that he approached nearer than anyone else to the eminent dignity by which the Mother of God so nobly surpasses all created natures. For marriage is the most intimate of all unions, which from its essence impacts a community of gifts between those joined together by it. Thus, in giving Joseph the Blessed Virgin as spouse, God appointed him to be not only her life's companion, the witness of her maidenhood, the protector of her honor, but also, by virtue of the conjugal tie, a participant in her sublime dignity. And Joseph shines among all mankind by the most august dignity, since by divine will he was the guardian of the Son of God and reputed His father among men. Hence it came about that the Word of God was humbly subject to Joseph, that He obeyed him and that He rendered him all those offices that children are bound to render to their parents.

The first Adam had received Eve, his bride as he slept, now, and for the rest of his known life, St. Joseph will receive messages concerning the care and protection of his wife and child, during his sleep and will be called to wake and immediately act upon those messages. As the head of the family, Joseph will show the same obedience to Jewish laws, to Roman laws and decrees that are moral, and the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. St. Joseph, "Get up and take Mary, as your wife, into your home," and he does. Augustus Caesar orders all Jews to go to the city of your people for a census, so Joseph sets out to Bethlehem with Mary. Jewish law requires purification and redemption of the first-born son, it calls for journeys to Jerusalem to worship, and all of these things are part of the way they live their lives. It was not easy, imagine "...behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt,* and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him. Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. (Mt. 2: 13-14) What would have happened if Joseph had delayed in obeying? The Savior was to be born in Bethlehem; the soldiers did not delay in heading to Bethlehem to kill the baby boys... In all things of God, Joseph's response is immediate. Which is shown in his response after Herod's death. As soon as the angel tells Joseph that it is safe for them to leave Egypt and return to Israel, they head back toward Bethlehem, but when once again the angel speaks to him in his sleep and tells him to, "Take the child to Nazareth," Joseph immediately changes direction and there by provides safety and anonymity for the Redeemer and His Mother.

Joseph knew that he was infinitely inferior to the Incarnate Word of God, and to the Blessed Mother of God, yet knowing the will of God in how a family was to be set up, St. Joseph humbly submitted to commanding Jesus and Mary. How difficult for this humble saint to be obeyed by God, the Word Incarnate, and the sinless Mother of God. "...he did so with the same reverence as that with which the angels served Him in Heaven; and with good reason, for it was indeed, a fearful thing to be charged with directing the conduct of God, and to be placed as superior over Him in whose presence the highest of creatures, the most exalted of the angelic hierarchies, the Seraphim and the Cherubim, prostrate and annihilate themselves, casting their crowns at His feet." (p. 357, Healy) It is in this circumstance of living the normal family life, that Joseph experienced the losing of the Christ child. How great the suffering, to fear having failed in an obedience to God to protect Jesus! Many were the interior examination of conscience, to see if the loss is due to a lack in his, St. Joseph's custodial care of the Holy Family. Imagine the suffering of watching the pain in Mary's face as they searched all day long and found nothing. Even as Joseph suffered for Mary, Mary suffered for her beloved Joseph. Her correction of Jesus aimed at the pain and anxiety suffered by Joseph only to hear the words, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

We know not how long St. Joseph remained after that. The family returned to Nazareth, and Joseph continued to lead the Holy Family, form Jesus as a faithful Jewish man, and train Jesus as a carpenter. But with the loss of Jesus for three days, St. Joseph, like John the Baptist, begins to decrease. While Jesus returns to Nazareth and is obedient to Mary and Joseph, the time is limited and St. Joseph recognizes that in obedience to God, he must begin to let go.

The time eventually came where this beloved saint was called to practice his obedience of suffering, no longer able to support and defend the Holy Family. In the end, St. Joseph served in prayer and suffering. Joseph neared his death, wrapped in the love of Jesus and Mary, knowing that the prophecy of Simeon had not yet been fulfilled. As the time grew near, Joseph knew that he must surrender to death leaving them to suffer the passion without him. He must trust in the merciful Father to provide someone to stand by them during this last trial.

How hard it must have been to say “Fiat, Thy will be done,” allowing another to take his place. As in all things St. Joseph trusted and obeyed.

At the moment of her fiat, Mary became the Mother of God, and Joseph, as her husband became the Spouse of the Mother of God. From his fiat, spoke in action and not words, Joseph became the “father of Jesus” with all of its responsibilities and graces. Joseph was present at the birth of Jesus, he provided the food and clothing, safety and shelter necessary to keep Jesus alive. He helped teach the Incarnate Word to speak, and the One who made all creation how to be a carpenter and make the things needed on earth. The Second Person of the Trinity, worshipped as God, was taken to places of worship and taught to worship as a Jew, by Joseph. It is from Joseph, son of David, that Jesus gained His legal title Son of David. Chosen by the Triune God to be the Spouse of the Mother of God, Joseph was put in the position of commanding the Son of God and being obeyed. In the little home, the only palace St. Joseph could provide for the Mother of God and the Incarnate Word of God, in Nazareth, Bethlehem, Egypt and again in Nazareth, the Holy Family, united in total love, teach us how to live as a family and the joys of a loving husband and wife, Joseph and Mary. It is because of St. Joseph’s special call by God and his continual fiat, that even today, he is given his special reverence, respect and obedience by Mary, the Mother of God and Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God. For in all things, this beloved Spouse of Mary, the Mother of God, puts the will of God first always and immediately.