

Saint Joseph, the Saint for our Times

Tuesday, June 8, 2021 ~ St. Joseph, Most Faithful



St. Joseph - A Hidden Fragrance

Have you ever sniffed a fragrance not knowing the source? Joseph is that fragrance in our life, concealed but potent. It may be your experience that you love St. Joseph, but are not as aware of his presence as Mary's...again, if this is the case, it is part of his hiddenness.

In this written "talk" we will explore St. Joseph's interior life, looking at his faith, a faith expressing itself in silence, waiting, and adoration.

His Faith

What is faith? Scripture tells us that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1)

Joseph, our model in trusting faith, not only believed in divine teaching, but saw God in all life's circumstances, even when these circumstances defied all common sense. Jesus appeared as a baby, a little boy. Joseph believed in his child's divinity.

What is Faith's greatest challenge? St. Peter Julie Eymard, in the book, *March, the Month of St. Joseph*, writes it is a God Who is powerless and weak. (47-49) The first Christians witnessed miracles during Our Lord's public life, and after His Passion & Death, His Resurrection. These miracles, especially the Resurrection, ignited Faith among the first believers.

Joseph had no such miracles.. It is difficult to picture St. Joseph's constant belief. Joseph looked on Our Lord and physically saw only humanity hiding Our Lord: a crying babe, a toddler trying to walk, a boy learning for the first time the carpenter's trade.

Additionally, it was at times challenging for St. Joseph to be faithful, as it is challenging at times for us. We all have dreams for our life. Joseph probably had his dream. When God changed that dream, Joseph accepted. We each have our aspirations and most likely some of them have been shattered.

When a dream breaks, we face heart-ache and anger. Why me? This initial response is healthy, if it isn't prolonged---our emotions naturally resist a perceived evil. However, Joseph teaches us to trust in the midst of broken dreams and see God's dreams, far surpassing any happiness, our aspirations could give.

His Silence

Now let us look at St. Joseph's silence.

Mary at least spoke a few words recorded in the Gospels; Joseph had none. Action marked Joseph in the Gospels; he immediately took Mary as his wife, despite his agonizing doubts over his worthiness. God willed it; it was done. He immediately left for Egypt to protect Jesus, despite the journey's difficulty. God willed it; Joseph obeyed.

Cause of his heroic acts? His contemplative prayer, wrought by silent receptivity to God. Silence is not taciturnity, an unwillingness or fear of speaking. True silence consists of protecting interior dialogue with Our Lord.

Another word for silence: attentiveness. Fr. Jordan Aumann, eminent writer of spiritual theology, tells us attentiveness is needed to respond to the Holy Spirit. Joseph's only desire in his life was to be with Jesus and Mary; therefore, he was silent or attentive to Them.

What is the effect of silence? In his book on silence, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*, Cardinal Robert Sarah, former Head of the Congregation for Sacred Liturgy, shows how quiet envelopes those who love: "When we are lovers, we always notice the slightest gesture of the one whom we love. It is the same with prayer. If we are accustomed to praying often, we can grasp the meaning of God's silence. There are signs that only two fiancés can understand. The person of prayer is also the only one to grasp the silent signs of affection that God sends him." (94)

Silence Enables Answering God's Calls

Often people ask, "How can I know what God wants?" Pope Francis answers by describing St. Joseph.

After each dream, Joseph had to change his plans and take a risk, sacrificing his own plans in order to follow God's mysterious designs of God. It may seem strange to us that he would trust in dreams, without hesitation.

"Why?" mused the Pope. "Because his heart was already inclined towards God. A small indication was enough for his watchful 'inner ear' to recognize the Lord's voice." God's call to each of us, said Pope Francis, happens in the same way. "The Lord quietly speaks in the depths of our heart, drawing near to us and speaking to us through our thoughts and feelings."

False Notions of Silence

Despite the real power in silence, people have strange notions. The devil likes us to avoid silence. The *Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis show hell as the "Kingdom of Noise." The *Letters* portray a master devil, Screwtape, instructing a devil who is new on the job, just beginning to tempt humans. Screwtape reveals a strategy: Distract the humans with noise. If we become distracted, we can't hear God's voice in silence. Just listen to Screwtape in C. S. Lewis' own words:

Sacred Music and silence—how I detest them both![Hell] has been occupied by Noise—Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile—Noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end...The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. (65)

The devil makes silence appear as emptiness seems to have in some degree succeeded. Pope Benedict XVI discusses this contemporary emptiness. "Many of us want to fill every empty moment with music and images out of fear of **feeling** this emptiness. This is a trend that has always existed, but today has risen to such a degree that we call it anthropological mutation." What in the world did the Pope mean by this term? The Pope Emeritus answers:

“As we grow less used to silence, we become less human.” In this century, is this difficult to believe?

Evidence shows how constant noise hurts us physically, emotionally, intellectually: chronic noise leads to increased anxiety, depression, and poor cardiovascular health. The opposite is true: we grow in our humanity when we keep silence; pausing quietly, we can check in with our body and our emotions. Checking in helps us take better care of ourselves, as well as increasing awareness of what we are bringing into our relationships.

A study showed that regular contemplative practice has multiple positive impacts on our brains, improving working memory, “verbal filter,” focus, and emotional regulation (feeling emotions without being overwhelmed.) Because of his contemplative silence, St. Joseph was not only spiritually holy, but also physically, emotionally and intellectually healthy!

St. Joseph teaches us the purpose for silence: enhancing our relationships with God and people in our lives. Can you think of anything more valuable?

How to Practice Silence

Wise men speak because they have something to say; Fools speak because they have to say something. -Aristotle

1. Stop Talking – We live in a world that makes silence uncomfortable. Sometimes we find ourselves talking just to talk.

2. Choose Words Wisely – Let’s talk with purpose, accomplishing something good with our words. When speaking let’s say something that inspires, that makes people laugh, that shows wisdom, that shares love.

3. Listen – We’re all guilty of having conversations in which we are ‘halfway listening’ meaning we take in the overall topic but all the while thinking about what we want to say next and when can we jump in. Here’s a chance to practice silence -not just being silent with our mouths---, but actually listening with our whole being and being attentive to the other person.

4. Don’t React – Silence can create peace in the midst of conflict. If someone in our lives ---our spouse, co-worker, friend, decides to practice ‘random acts of rudeness’ with us, there’s nothing that says, other than our ‘ego’, that we have to react. Let’s take away the idol of the

false self and enthrone Our Lord, who will inspire us to either remain meekly silent or to come back with loving responses.

Silence allows us to hear what the other is really intending and what's important in the situation. Think about a situation in which instead of simply being reflective, we reacted instantly to what was said either with words or a text. Now think about that situation and what would have happened if we had remained silent – maybe the conflict would have disappeared or we would come back with wise thoughts.

Again, Joseph shows us the way. It is difficult to imagine our saint 'talking just to talk,' interrupting, reacting to insults; it is easy to see him choosing words with wisdom, creating a special atmosphere, and being the peacemaker.

5. Carve a space for solitude, even if it means waking up five minutes earlier. Even the busiest parent can have some silence: the mother as she nurses her baby in night's quiet, the father as he drives to work. It may not be long, but at least it is there!

6. Finally, let us not fill every second with noise. If we're driving, leave the radio or music off. When home, turn off the TV. Avoid mindless checking of our phones while in line or in spare moments. God does give us precious time to be silent; let us embrace these moments. If nothing comes to mind at these times of quiet. say a Memorare Novena, Hail Mary's or the Jesus Prayer.

Where do you and I find our comfort? Hopefully the answer is God first. In all his trials Joseph sought comfort first from his interior life with God.

Joseph's Waiting and Our Waiting

Joseph experienced waiting. How did he respond? With patience, marked by trust. He did not know what to do with his pregnant betrothed, who exuded a supernatural mystery. He only knew he was not good enough. However, how could he just leave her? This struggle did not disappear. Likewise, you and I often have situations come up in our life that demand at times a **patient waiting**. Like Joseph, in our struggles we need trust.

Other situations in life often arouse toxic responses. I imagine that Joseph encountered rebuffs, mocking glances, and controlled any inclination to fight back. Probably In his travels,

other pilgrims rudely passed him, or he was behind a group whose donkey trotted extremely slowly. Did Joseph yell out or get angry at the rude or slow drivers?

We too in traffic often experience highway rudeness of erratic drivers or the painful slowness of the driver ahead of us. What is our response? (pause) Is it that of Joseph's?

Joseph, the First Adorer (along with Mary of course)

St. John Paul II named St. Peter Julian Eymard, of whom I've already quoted, "The Apostle of the Eucharist;" St. Peter Julian exuded a holy obsession for the Real Presence. Eymard also revered St. Joseph. This isn't a coincidence. Eymard teaches since St. Joseph lived a life of adoration. He called St. Joseph along with Mary the "First Adorer."

As an adorer entirely given to Jesus, St. Joseph labored near Him, giving Jesus his time, his life. St. Eymard writes that Joseph adored the Incarnate God even while He was in Mary's womb, a living ciborium. If St. Joseph lived with Jesus for many years, St. Peter tells us, it is logical that he lived in perpetual adoration. Their home was like an adoration chapel.

St. Peter Julian enjoins us: Have confidence in St. Joseph. Take him as the patron of your life in adoration!

Conclusion:

Joseph Most Faithful lived with silence, waiting and adoring love. His hidden life evoked intense riches of grace.

Imagine seeing the moon enter a cloud. The cloud becomes transfigured with light. St. Joseph, like this cloud, sinking his entire being in Jesus, must have shone interiorly.

I want to share an unusual novena I found that is easy to make. Fr. Louis Lallemand, a great master of the interior life, composed this Novena. Fr. Lallemand one day urged two young priests to make this 9-day prayer to St. Joseph. He promised they would obtain everything asked for, if they showed St. Joseph special honor and spread devotion to him.

One priest said he had one intention but wished to change it on the second day of the novena. The intention was the grace of speaking and writing worthily of Our Lord. The fervent young priest wanted a grace more helpful to his holiness. Fr. Lallemand told this priest he had

already received his first intention. That young priest for the rest of his life became a renowned preacher and author. On the second day St. Joseph answered his call!

How to make this Novena

You do not need any particular words to say. Every day, four times a day, turn to St. Joseph in spirit and honor him; these visits by the way, may be made in the car, office, tractor--- anywhere, at any time.

1. During the 1st visit reflect upon St. Joseph's fidelity to grace. Think about upon the action of the Holy Spirit in his soul. At the conclusion of this brief meditation, thank God for so honoring St. Joseph and ask through his intercession for a similar grace.

2. Later, consider St. Joseph's fidelity to the interior life and how prayerful he was. Reflect/ thank God/ ask.

3. Later still, contemplate St. Joseph's love for Our lady. Reflect/ thank God/ask.

4. Finally in a fourth visit, ponder St. Joseph's love for the Divine Child. Reflect/ thank God/Ask.

Conclusion

St. Joseph models for us the interior life, especially by his trusting faith, silence and adoring love of the hidden Jesus. May St. Joseph inundate each of you with these graces especially in your daily lives, and may you too become a hidden fragrance for others.

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