

Saint Joseph's Apostolic Work

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ST JOSEPH'S APOSTOLIC WORK.

1. GLORY OF DOMESTIC LIFE.

JOSEPH was not a Priest. Jesus is the model and the glory of Priests and of those that give up family life to work for God.

But Joseph is the honor of wedded life; he shows the world the virtues that are to adorn that state, the virtues by the practice of which those living in wedlock are to become holy.

We have seen in a previous article that Christian family life is to be modeled on the example of the Family of which Joseph was the head.

Now, the Catholic Church is an organization to perpetuate and keep ever freshly before us the family life of Nazareth. But here there comes in an astonishing element that enables the Church to carry out this project in a divinely perfect way. For the Man who is the centre of the family life, the Divine Person whose assumption of our flesh created that Family, is actually present in our midst, in His living human nature; eternally youthful; the same strong, loving Presence that filled His Mother's heart with sweet emotion when He flung His arms around her neck in the Temple and kissed away her tears; the same Man that gripped Peter so firmly on the stormy lake in the darkness and whispered so intensely, "Man of little faith, why did you doubt?"; the same Presence that comforted the poor, despairing adulteress whom rough men dragged before Him, wishing to stone her to death for sins they themselves were steeped in; and His pure lips said, "Neither will I condemn you: go and sin no more"; the same Presence that thrilled Mary Magdalen, the broken, sobbing woman, as she wept at the tomb because His body had been 'filched away' as she thought; the same Jesus that made the hearts of the doubting and desolate disciples burn within them with a new fire of hope as they plodded along the road to Emmaus, on Easter Sunday; the same Master from whose lips penitent, remorseful Peter heard the golden words — truly "words of eternal life" — "Simon, son of John, love you Me more than these?"

How Devotion Helps. This Man is still with us, and His family life is still a living reality, because, although Mary and Joseph are not bodily present with us (as Jesus is), still we are in actual communication with them in heaven; they hear our prayers; we can converse with them.

This will help us to understand better the relationship between our devotion to Mary and Joseph and our devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus is bodily with us because He is our salvation; and personal contact with Him as Man is the seed and source of our eternal life — that is, of our sharing the life of God. "I am the bread of life (the bread nourishing eternal life in your soul). He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life: and I will raise him up on the last day."

The whole organization of our religion, therefore, is to bring us into close, personal contact with Jesus, to make His Eucharistic Presence available for all to enjoy and to profit by.

Mary and Joseph Keep Us Loyal. Now, devotion to Mary and Joseph draws us into close contact with Jesus. So it was, for example, that devotion to Saint Joseph helped Saint Teresa of Avila. But for that devotion, she might have drifted altogether away from Jesus. She cultivated friendship with the Keeper of the Child, and his powerful assistance kept her loyal and true to the Master. Just as, for example, an officer in the French army, through frequent intercourse with some very loyal and ardent admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte, might be kept strong and faithful in the service of the Emperor; whereas contact with disaffected persons might cool his devotion and lead to complete alienation. Our attitude to those that rule us is often the result of our conversation with fellow-subjects.

Now, Mary and Joseph were Christ's most loyal servants and followers. They answered His call more perfectly, with more wholehearted devotion, than any other of His creatures. They loved Him more unreservedly, turned away from everything opposed to His service more absolutely and resolutely, than any others. Consequently, intercourse with them will strengthen our loyalty to Him as nothing else can. They stand nearest the throne, they know Him best; they realize most perfectly who He is, what His rights and claims are; and, therefore, they can draw us to Him as none others can. Hence, they are preeminently guardians of His Eucharistic Presence; devotion to them promotes intensely devotion to Him.

A Scene of Human Love. And still it is the Family Life that we can learn about in imitation of this Holy Family. For the relationship of these three human beings is ever presented to us as one of family affection — Mary, loving Jesus as her God, but also as her darling Son, to whom she gave His being as Man; Joseph, loving Jesus as God, but also as his dear Foster Son, over whom he exercised parental authority by express wish of God Himself.

So that it is a scene of human love that is presented to us, and we are encouraged to join that little circle of friends in the only way in which one can join such a circle — namely, by love. Love is the talisman that wins entrance to this Divine Household. One might come there, perhaps, to ask for favors through some other motive, such as fear or reverence or necessity. But to be one of the family, to share its secrets, its joys, its sorrows, you must love. This is what Jesus means to convey to us when He displays His Heart ablaze with flames of love — namely, that to come to Him and know Him as a Friend you must love Him. He is thirsting for our love — that is the great secret He wants us to learn.

The Hound of Heaven. It is the secret at the heart of the world. For God created the universe to be a home for Jesus, and for men and women who would love Him. Jesus is the First-born — the predestined (before all others) in God's eternal decrees; and all other creatures — both angels and men — are created to honor and love Him. The glorious material universe is made to lead men to God, and one of the Divine Persons has entered into and become a part of the material creation in order to carry out His plan of winning our love.

Still with unhurrying chase
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet.

If you love people truly and sincerely with an honorable, upright affection, you can do what you like with them. Jesus is no exception; rather He thirsts for love as no human soul ever has thirsted,

and is using all possible means to persuade us to love Him. And Joseph, His faithful friend, is one of Christ's most powerful auxiliaries in this divine pursuit.

2. GUARDIAN OF VIRGINS.

Saint Joseph — because he is the Patron of Family Life — is the guardian of the innocence of children. The man to whose keeping God entrusted the spotless innocence of the Virgin Mother will surely take good care of the souls of children whom parents place under his protection. And he discharges this duty by promoting the life of grace in their souls — since it is only God's grace that can strengthen and safeguard the soul against temptation.

The Gift of Grace. The life of grace in the soul has two aspects. First, just as we possess a spiritual soul to be the active principle of our physical existence, so in grace God bestows upon us a permanent abiding gift, a new supernatural principle, which makes us share in His own life. This is called sanctifying grace. And so long as we possess that principle we are in the state of charity and are united with God.

But then besides this, we exercise acts of the theological virtue of charity, whereby we love and seek God above all created things for His own sake, because He is God and infinitely transcends all things that are not Himself.

Our Highest Activity. The constant seeking of God thus, because He is God, constitutes our real life, our truest and highest activity. It is for that activity we were created, that is the highest point capable of attainment by a created being. The exercise of those acts constitutes the life of the soul of Jesus, the Son of God. And He came into the world to communicate that same wonderful life to us. Without Faith and Hope that life is impossible, just as the fragrance and beauty of the rose are impossible without the sun's light and heat: but still Faith and Hope do not constitute the life. That life is Charity.

God's Instrument. Here then we see the work that God wants to effect in the soul; and to secure this great result, Jesus instituted the Blessed Sacrament. This is His instrument for accomplishing this divine work. The instrument is great and wonderful, because the work to be done is so marvellous.

God's design in giving us this food is to fill our souls more and more with the light of Faith and banish the darkness of worldliness and creature worship. He is continuing day by day the work of destroying idolatry, which He began when He came on earth. In our hearts, He is ever striving to break the idols and pull down the shrines which we so readily build to creatures, that He may erect there a Sanctuary to His Father, and make us adorers in spirit and in truth. Therefore, an intense faith and spirit of worship should be the first fruits of our reception of the Eucharist. Saint Catharine of Siena prayed incessantly for the gift of a perfect Faith. We should come ceaselessly to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with this earnest petition, "Lord give me faith. To whom shall we go but to You? You have the words of eternal life."

The form in which He resides in our midst, the deep silence of the Eucharist, mark His design of developing our Faith. To come to Him in His sacramental state and bow in reverence before Him requires an act of faith. That faith it is that reaches out and catches hold of Him in spite of the veil that hides Him from us. "Blessed are those that have not seen and have believed."

The Commander in Chief. Hope too is kindled by His presence in our midst. What army is not fired with enthusiasm by the actual presence of its Commander-in-Chief? Think how Napoleon's soldiers were roused to fight when the great General appeared in their midst as, for example, at Marengo!

They forgot every danger, thought nothing impossible, refused no sacrifice, because the General was present; his eye was upon them, they might win a word of praise from him that would tingle in their hearts, and make hot blood leap to their cheeks all their lives long when they remembered it.

Well — and what of ourselves? Are we not an army, surrounded by foes striving to drag us away from God? Is not our Commander also camped in our midst, right beside us here to cheer us on? And shall we be afraid? In the Blessed Sacrament Jesus Christ is ever present with the light of victory shining in His eyes, with strong cheering words falling like music from His lips, bidding us hope in Him and be brave. You remember how His strong melodious voice rang out across the Lake to His doubting, frightened friends. “Be of good heart — it is I — be not afraid.” That is His battle cry ever. So to the terrified Peter as he sank in the tossing waves He cried: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Again when roused from sleep in the boat, after stilling the storm: “Ye cowards why are you all afraid? Where is all your faith?” And to the two desponding disciples on the road to Emmaus: “O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so enter into His glory?”

The Bread of Life. And finally, life — the true life of the soul — Jesus would communicate to us through this heavenly Food. That is why it is given as food — because it is to support life. Without food, we starve to death. And so “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you.” The giving of supernatural life is the special effect and result of partaking of the Eucharist. So Jesus tells us repeatedly: “The bread of God is that which comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world. If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.”

Jesus the Source of Life. If then we wish to live well this life of Charity, let us go to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; let us unite ourselves closely to Him, and then this glorious life will come plentifully into our souls from contact and union with Him. He is the source of life — therefore He will impart it to us. We may be cold, and heavy, and listless, but His intense fervor will cure our weakness. He is living with God-like intensity this life of Charity, and it is by coming to Him that we also shall be enabled to live that life and give to God that perfect service which He demands of us and to secure which, He brought us into being.

3. MAINSTAY OF FAMILIES.

Saint Joseph is the Support or Mainstay of Families — both the domestic and the religious family: that is, both of the group of people who dwelling together constitute the home, and of the group of people that dwell together as part of a religious order or congregation in order to promote God’s interests in the world. The Holy Family of Nazareth is the model of both: — it was the first Christian Family and also the first Religious Family or Congregation. For to be a religious means to consecrate your life to the immediate personal service of Jesus — renouncing worldly interests and pleasures in order to secure this. It means giving yourself up to a life of strict poverty, chastity and obedience — and such was in very truth the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Now Saint Joseph was the Pillar or Support of the Holy Family because he was its responsible Head — to whom it looked for everything. And he is also the Pillar or Support of all future Christian families — both domestic and religious — both by his powerful prayers and intercession and also by stimulating his clients to intense devotion to Mary his Spouse.

When God wished to reform the social state of the world He began by reforming the family: and in order to reform the family He set to work to restore Woman to her rightful place both in the esteem of mankind and as a cooperator in the work of saving souls.

Woman's Elevation. One of the startling things which God did when He came to save the world from sin, was to set woman on a pinnacle of glory such as no human mind had ever dreamt of or conceived as possible for her. The pagan world, men whose hearts had completely turned away from God and refused to worship Him, had degraded woman to the lowest depths of infamy. She had become the plaything of man's passions — all the beauty and purity of her soul drowned in an ocean of sin. God came to restore His handiwork and in order to do this He elevated woman-kind to an unspeakable dignity by choosing a woman to be His own Mother.

Mary's Glory. On that supreme fact — on the glorious position of Mary of Nazareth as the Mother of God, — the Catholic Church has ever concentrated her attention: her children have ever been enraptured as they contemplate with love and admiration this fair vision of the woman "clothed with the sun," who is actually the Mother of Him who is God.

In honoring Mary thus the Catholic Church is honoring all womankind, is helping to lift up all women to new heights of holiness and purity. She is faithfully following the footsteps of her Founder — since no one ever reverenced or honored women as Jesus did. All the noble chivalrous respect for woman that has shone so brightly down the Church's story has come into the Christian life as an echo of the chivalry of Christ.

Women in the Gospel. In the Gospel story, they stand out vividly — the women whom Jesus specially honored.

First and foremost and above all, the glorious sinless woman who was His Mother. The most elevating, tender, purifying influence that comes (or should come) into the life of every man born into the world is love and reverence for his mother. That sentiment is closely interwoven with the heart strings of our nature: and it has been exalted and ennobled to an indefinitely high degree by Christ's love for His Mother.

Lifting Up the Sinner. But Jesus came not only to set before mankind the perfect type of saintly womanhood in the pure unsullied Virgin that knew no sin and lived all on fire with love of God: but He came also to lift up the fallen and show that the sinner could live again to God. And so we see standing beside His sinless Mother on Mount Calvary, the other Mary who had been a sinner but now is living with God in ecstatic love.

During His earthly life, Christ chose women to be His 'helpers' and 'apostles': so all down the history of the Church it has been the same. And one of the triumphs of the Catholic Church, one of the treasures she is proudest of and loves to point to and exult in, is the long roll of women Saints, who from the very beginning have given such splendid examples of heroic virtue.

Saintly Mothers. In every walk of life, they have been found. A great number of them have been mothers of families, who besides being saintly themselves have given to the Church a gift that is worth more to her than gold and precious stones or any earthly treasure, namely, saintly children.

Many others, on the contrary, have lived a cloistered life, separated from the world: giving themselves up to prayer and penance, both to shield their own souls from evil and to labor for the salvation of others who are turned away from God. And it is marvellous how often such women, living secluded lives hidden with Christ in God, have nevertheless exerted extraordinary influence on the history of the Church either during their lifetime or after their death. One need only mention such instances as Saint Catharine of Siena, Saint Gertrude, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Margaret Mary and many others.

The Maid of Lisieux. In that glorious roll of famous women stands the little Carmelite, Saint Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897, canonized in 1925). When she died, her name was hardly known beyond the convent walls, except to a few family friends. Today, a few years after that quiet death-bed scene in Lisieux her name has become a household word all over the five continents, wherever Catholic people are found.

And if you ask how and why? If you ask who was her publicity agent to secure for her a reputation such as no other person of modern times has attained in such a brief period; the answer is this: God Himself was her publicity agent: it is He who has made His little servant known by the number and wonderful nature of the miracles He has wrought at her intercession.

Her Mission to Mankind. And if again you ask why has God acted thus? What is the special benefit to His Church and to souls, which He wishes to secure by making Saint Therese so well known? What is the particular part this childlike Carmelite has to play in God's plan? I think it is this: Saint Therese is to be the greatest, the most attractive and most successful Apostle of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in modern times.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart means that one realizes deeply the central truth of the Christian revelation — that God is love. The supreme lesson, which God became man to teach to the world, is just this: "God is love."

In order to propagate in the world this great devotion to His Sacred Heart, Christ chose His consecrated Spouse: Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. She died in 1690, over 200 years ago. Since that time, many other fervent Apostles of the devotion have appeared and continued the good work of Saint Margaret Mary. But in our days, an Apostle of a special type was called for.

The Rush of Modern Life. During the past hundred years, the world has changed vastly in its ideas and outlook and even, it would seem, in the actual physical constitution of its men and women. As the result of marvellous discoveries in science, there is an enormous increase in the world's machinery. Life has become far more complicated. Everything moves more swiftly. People spend a far greater amount of time travelling by motor car and railway, by steamship and aeroplane. Girls and women take a part in professional and public life in a way that was undreamt of a century ago.

Then too the enormous increase in the production of books and newspapers: the universal habit of reading, the almost unrestricted license of the press: the coming of moving pictures and wireless broadcasting: all these things have revolutionized modern life: and one very evident result of all this increased hustle and bustle and excitement is the ever increasing strain on the nervous system.

Moreover, there is abroad a widespread tendency to skepticism in religion. Books attacking the fundamental truths of the Faith are accessible to all and are unfortunately freely read. Add to all this the craze for bodily pleasure — for 'jazz parties', 'weird dances', 'exotic' amusement of every kind.

Persuasive Teacher Needed. Evidently, amid all this din and hurly-burly the claims of God and of His love have little chance of making themselves heard. The teachers or preachers that will succeed in winning attention when speaking on that theme must make their appeal in very persuasive accents indeed. And so God sent this gracious, attractive child Saint who has so quickly become the darling of the whole world, Sister Therese of Lisieux.

That her method of appeal is suited to modern conditions is proved by her phenomenal success. Probably nothing quite like it has ever been known in the history of the Church before.

Her Secret. If you try to analyze her system and discover her secret, it reduces itself to this: She speaks unceasingly about the love of God: about the beauty and overwhelming attractiveness of this heavenly Lover and shows how easy it is for everyone to love Him. She robs religion of its terrors.

Although a Carmelite Nun, a member of one of the most austere orders in the Church, vowed to a life of penance, poverty and prayer: still she so tells the story of that life that we see it all bathed in the golden light of love: and all the elements that tend to frighten or repel ordinary folk disappear and one sees only the soul lifted up to close mystic union with the divine Lover, whilst exteriorly occupied with a round of the simplest and most commonplace daily duties.

Is not that just the striking characteristic of the story of Jesus Himself? Everything about it is so simple, so unaffected: His life, apart from the miracles of healing which He worked during His public career, is so ordinary and homely.

A Successful Advocate. And so Saint Therese of Lisieux is a powerful and successful advocate, pleading God's cause to a busy, rushing, pleasure-loving world. Pleading God's cause, I say: for that is what it means to be an Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

It means drawing people to realize that God loves them and is begging for their love in return. Jesus Christ displays His Heart all ablaze with flames of love, in order to bring home to mankind at one glance that the quality by which He wishes especially to be known is this: that He is a Lover, that He loves as no man ever loved.

4. SOLACE OF THE AFFLICTED.

Thou hast not forgotten the long, dreary road.
When Mary took turns with thee bearing thy God.

FATHER FABER.

Saint Joseph can comfort the sorrowing, because he has suffered. The story of his life is meager in details, but it tells of sorrow all through, as is the case always with near friends of Jesus.

First, his mental anguish is narrated in Saint Matthew, until the angel came to bid him have no fear and to take home his beloved wife, Mary; for the Child that was in her womb was of the Holy Ghost. Then the pains and sufferings of the journey to Bethlehem, of the night in the stable, the flight into Egypt.

Saint Joseph knows the sorrows of life; and because he has learned from Jesus the secret of charity for the miserable, he is pre-eminently our refuge and consolation in our troubles. Experience proves his right to this blessed title.

God wants us to trust Him; that is the constant exhortation running through all His utterances in the Holy Scriptures. He is ever whispering to our hearts: "It is I, fear not." He knows well that this whisper is the one thing we need to hear that we may trust Him and lean on Him. We are crushed by the sense of our own impotence and insignificance in the universe, and this little voice stealing through the turmoil of creation gives us courage, since it tells us that, weak as we are alone, we can count on His boundless strength.

Behold the Lilies. "Behold the lilies, how they grow. They labour not, neither do they spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field . . . God does so clothe, how much more you, O ye of little faith." Hinting that we, too, must

let God work for us. He loves us and wants to take on Himself the duty and pleasure of working for us, of making His creation serve us and beautify us.

Beauty is the outward sign of perfection of organism. God wishes to perfect us, and thus make us fair in His eyes. We are vessels in the hands of the potter, and must undergo rough treatment at times, be burnt or baked it may be, but all to make the final result more beautiful and more lasting. The clay vessel is useless until it has been hardened in the fire. The furnace of the soul is tribulation, without which we remain soft, useless clay. So, we read, "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation." (Ecclesiasticus 2:5.) How differently men would spend life if they took these views of pain and suffering!

The Ring of Our Espousals. Blessed John of Ruysbrook (1293-1381) says: "The whole universe is the ring of our espousals bestowed upon us by God." And if my Bridegroom is the jeweler who has shaped this ring and studded it with precious stones for me, surely I may lean confidently on Him who has had the skill and the will and the affection to give me that gift. The ceaseless changing hues of nature: the flashing radiance of spring, the rich beauty of summer, the soft mellow glories of autumn, the cold whiteness of winter, are but the glistening of this jeweled ring as He turns it in His hand, flashing its facets in order to win my smile of approval. It was to gain this smile from me that He made the world; for He made the world that from it, I might praise Him; and the subtlest and most delightful praise is the smile of approval breaking like dawn on the face of one we love. Think of God looking to me for that! It is only explicable on the same principle as we explain a grown-up man or woman longing for a smile from their baby boy — namely, we say it is love, and then all is explained.

So to wipe away my tears and to hush my sobs, to smooth my face and bring the sunshine of laughter into my life, Jesus is a baby in the arms of Saint Joseph. Joseph's business is to present this great Child-God to the world, that in Him all may find solace in their troubles.

5. HOPE OF THE SICK.

"It was fit we should make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is come to life again; he was lost and is found." Saint Luke 15:32.

The instinct of Catholics makes them turn with confidence to the Foster Father of Jesus for help in sickness of soul or body. And the experience of centuries proves that this confidence is not misplaced. After Mary, no one understands more fully the tenderness and mercifulness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And those especially who are sick of soul — afflicted with the dread disease of sin — will find in Saint Joseph a powerful advocate to obtain for them the grace of perfect conversion.

Saint Joseph knows well the joy indescribable which the salvation of a sinner brings to Jesus, and since he loves his dear Foster-Son with all the intensity of his strong nature, he works unceasingly to win back erring souls and present them to Jesus.

The Prodigal Son. Think of the radiant joy of a village wedding; or the intense feeling in the home circle when the father recovers from illness; or the relief we have felt when some great trouble was unexpectedly lifted off our shoulders. Such, Jesus tells us, is the relief to His Heart when a sinner comes back to Him, resolved to serve Him fervently in future. On the one hand He paints very vividly the wretchedness of the poor prodigal; and on the other hand the wholeheartedness, the boundless goodness of the father, not merely patiently receiving the boy, but quivering with joy because of his return, and enriching him with the very best gifts in order to show his gladness. The

fatted calf is killed to make the household a feast; the best robe is brought forth to cover the boy's wretchedness and nakedness; a ring is to adorn his finger as a sign that he is the honored guest, and there are shoes for his feet to help him to take part in the dance. The father does not wish him to live depressed and gloomy, but bids him to rejoice over his own safe home-coming and over his father's love. Who should more intensely rejoice over the sinner's return than the sinner himself?

One of the sweetest joys of heaven will be the thought that, although we sinned, yet we have escaped the doom we richly deserved, that we are safe with Him! We shall exult to think that we have not lost Him, that He is ours, for ever and for ever irrevocably!

Royal Gifts. I say we repentant sinners have the best right to rejoice. For now we have His shining silken robe, the royal robe of Grace upon us, which gleams and sparkles in the sun of His Presence in every action that we perform. We have the jeweled ring of His seven Gifts marking us as His guests and specially honored friends. We have the shoes of His actual supernatural help given to enable us to run rejoicingly in His commandments and holy service. Surely, it is matter for exultation that He thus stoops to us; that He is thus gentle and kindly and respectful towards us. All the refinement that charms us in others is but a ray of the gentle, exquisite courtesy that Jesus shows to us. His love refines the soul; and those that love Him deeply are usually very gentle. How unbecoming would gloom and sadness be in those that are thus clad and thus honored, as if a bride and bridegroom should show a gloomy countenance on the wedding morning! For us every day is a wedding day, our soul's bridal honors may be kept ever fresh, we may have eternal spring in our hearts, if we are but ever intent on loving Him well and profiting by His gifts.

"I Came to Cast Fire." In this parable of the prodigal son, Jesus sums up all that is strongest and best and most touching in human affection, in order to give us some concept of the great love of His own Heart. When we meet persons without bitterness, who are free from suspicion, who have no lurking resentment in their eyes, but have a sincerely loving heart full of genuine tenderness, making allowance for every weakness, encouraging and consoling, how they win us! And that multiplied a million-fold is what Jesus is. What it must have been to meet Him, to know Him, to listen to Him speaking of Charity! If men flamed up with a great fire as they listened to Peter the Hermit or Saint Bernard or Saint Ignatius or Saint Francis Xavier, what was it to listen to Jesus Christ speaking about His love and telling of the fire He came to cast upon the earth, the fire He so longed to see enkindled in the souls of men?

6. SAINT JOSEPH, PATRON OF THE DYING.

Saint Joseph has a unique claim to the position of patron of a happy death, since he died the most blessed of deaths, assisted when dying by Jesus, his Judge, and Mary, his Judge's Mother. Hence, the children of the Church have ever specially turned to him with trust when praying for the grace of dying in God's grace and of securing that peace of conscience and spirit of trust that will counteract the terror that naturally assails the soul when it has to face the great passage from time to eternity.

The soul that is nearing the end of its pilgrimage has special difficulties to face — namely, the weariness and heaviness and despondency that result from sickness; the attacks of the demons, who are more earnest and persistent when death approaches, in order, if possible, to make the soul relax its grip upon God just when it is about to enter into possession of Him for ever. The weakness of physical nature (which we call sickness) and the strength of spiritual foes call for some special assistance; and hence Saint Joseph, as patron of a happy death, is also the hope of the sick and the

terror of demons. He is the hope of the sick, for they turn and see him holding the sweet Babe in his arms, and that sight gives them courage.

This kindly old man with the Omnipotent Child gives them new strength, and revives Faith and Hope and Charity in the soul; and just because of this, the demons dread him, and dread devotion to him; and they do their best to spread lies about Saint Joseph and the effect of devotion to him. One common notion they sedulously propagate is this, that if you pray to Saint Joseph he sends you crosses; and one meets not infrequently people who are actually afraid to turn to Saint Joseph in their troubles lest a worse thing befall them!

This spreading of false reports is surely a proof that the demons dread his influence! And so, as patron of a happy death, as the saint who by his prayers secures that supreme grace for his clients, he is the Protector of Holy Church, guarding her interest at the moment which is of greatest importance in the life of the Church's children, keeping ward and watch at the portal between time and eternity, and snatching from destruction the souls that, at that narrow gate, are in risk of being torn from the Church for ever.

7. TERROR OF DEMONS.

The devil's efforts are directed chiefly to make men turn away from God. It matters little whether he effects this by attacking their Faith, making them deny God; or their Hope, leading them to despair; or their Charity, by inducing them to live in sin; provided he can get God out of their lives. Our efforts must be to turn constantly and resolutely to God, to force ourselves to think of Him, in spite of the alluring voices of creatures that would entice us away from Him. In this life-struggle, one of our best helpers is Saint Joseph, who is the terror of demons on account of the power of his intercession to obtain graces for his clients to lead them to holiness.

The Omnipotent Child refuses nothing to His Foster Father, to whom He — God — owes a debt of gratitude that He — God-like — will go on paying for all eternity.

Let us study a remarkable scene in which Jesus Himself teaches His friend Saint Peter a striking lesson in this matter of unhesitating faith and trust. It is told in the fourteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel. The disciples were on the Lake at dead of night — tossed by the fierce west wind and rowing desperately to make Capharnaum. Suddenly in the darkness, a ghostlike figure looms up walking over the waves; and they cry out in terror. Then they hear a Voice: "Be of good heart; it is I, be not afraid," and they knew it was the Master. But Peter leaping up cries out: "Lord, if it be You, bid me come to You upon the waters." Peter seeing Jesus but dimly still doubts and asks for a sign — and a wonderful one — to prove His presence. And when Peter cried out, immediately Jesus caught him and said: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Without delay, Jesus helps him. So, I must lean on Him, and in spite of the obscurity of time, which makes it hard to see Him, reach out to Him by faith. It is even thus Jesus comes to us in our trials suddenly and yet dimly, demanding a certain ready act of faith on our part. We have to be daring, in order to reach Him; sometimes we must risk life itself, as Peter did, and then, when we take the plunge, when we step away from the boat of creature comforts on to the unstable, dancing waters of faith, we feel His strong hand and hear His strong, cheering voice in the gloom, and know in very truth it is He, and no ghost. What music that voice made in Peter's ears on that stormy night!

The Sea of Life. The tossing sea for me is the round of daily life with its ups and downs, and my walking on waves consists in boldly facing my duty for His sake. I see Him dimly across the waters of time, and to get to Him I am trying to walk those waves; it is for His sake I am doing my work.

He, too, is walking that sea of duty, and by His strength, I shall succeed in keeping afloat; and if the wind is strong then, if I call, He will at once reach out and hold me in His strong grasp.

“Recollection” is just this peering through the gloom to catch the form of Jesus; at times, we see Him, then again, He is hidden; but in every circumstance of life, we must keep on trying to see Him.

Jesus on the Waters. How cold and desolate Peter would have felt if Jesus were not there, if it had been merely an imagination, a phantom on the waters! What a bleak and hopeless thing life is — a barren waste of waters — when there is no Jesus nearing in the gloom! And how the black is turned into gold, and the sullen, stormy night to a radiant summer’s morning, when Jesus speaks! How we forget the sorrow and the misery when we have Him in the boat with us! And the glorious thing is that He wants to be with me, and He wants my soul to be His Bride, with my heart fixed on Him in every change and chance of life. And so, at every turn of the road of life, I have Him, in the Blessed Sacrament or in the poor — dimly shadowed forth in either case — walking across the sea of time, to be reached by an act of faith; for the same impulse that drove Peter out on the sea will help us to plunge through the darkness of the Sacramental covering, and so reach Jesus dimly hidden in that sacred blackness, or else to pierce through the thick obscurity of poverty and rags, and behind that veil see Jesus Himself, who lives for us in the poor.

And, as it needed courage on Peter’s part to cry out, “Lord, if it be You, bid me come to You upon the waters,” so it needs courage to pierce the shroud of bread and wine, or of rags and poverty, nakedness and homelessness, sickness and misery, that hides Jesus from us. By these two veils, the Sacramental veil and the veil of poverty, Jesus tests our faith. If you ask why, I ask, Why this scene in Galilee? Why the dim, sudden apparition barely discernible in the gloom, the stealing form that frightened His friends and led to Peter’s tremendous leap? It was, I take it, to stir up Peter’s will, to rouse the man to a sublime act of faith. If so, Christ’s plan of living in the Blessed Sacrament and living hidden in the poor and the homeless and the sick, is to stimulate our wills, and to spur us on to strong acts of faith. The Blessed Sacrament and the poor are two touchstones testing the souls of men, two rocks on which we either suffer hopeless shipwreck or else get firmly anchored, so as to belong to God and possess Him forever.

8. PROTECTOR OF HOLY CHURCH.

A patron, according to Roman usage, was one on whom a client leaned for support, direction and help in difficulties. Saint Joseph is patron of the Universal Church, and also patron of the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharistic Presence of Jesus constitutes the very life of the Church. It is the bond of union that links together into one mystical body the souls that belong to Jesus. To have deep unshaken faith in the presence of Jesus beneath the Sacramental veils, to assist daily at the Sacrifice of the Altar as if one were standing on Mount Calvary watching the Crucifixion, to partake of Christ’s Body and Blood, and so become one with Him in intimate, personal union, to walk in the light streaming from the glorified countenance of the Risen Master and taste the fragrance of His Divine Presence — all that wonderful intercourse and communion with Him which the Eucharist makes possible for us — that it is that constitutes the great secret of Christ’s chosen friends on earth. They walk, indeed, amidst a pagan world — surrounded by men that are blind to the things of faith; they move about amongst those who have only deaf ears for the Gospel teaching; but amidst the coldness, listlessness, contemptuous scorn of unbelievers the fervent soul walks with Jesus and feeds hungrily on His Royal Presence.

And this internal activity of the soul, this mystical union with the God-Man veiled in the darkness and silence of the Eucharist lies at the heart of Catholicism, and is the secret source of the supernatural strength whereby the children of Jesus overcome the world. His prayer to the Eternal Father has secured this supreme benefit for them.

Saint Joseph's Task. Now, Saint Joseph's task is to foster this devotion, to promote this union with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and by doing so, he is fulfilling his duty as Patron of the Church.

It may seem strange to speak of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Blessed Sacrament; in other words, as Patron or protector of Jesus Himself. And strange it would be unless we knew Joseph was appointed by God Himself to be Foster Father, protector, guardian and educator of Jesus when He was a Child on earth. Then it was that Joseph was first appointed Patron of the Church, when the Church consisted of three members — Jesus, Mary and Joseph. For though Jesus is the Founder of the Church, He is also its most illustrious Member; just as Saint Francis, Saint Dominic, or Saint Ignatius, whilst founders were also members of the Orders they created. The very existence of the Church at that time was dependent on the fidelity of the village carpenter — Joseph of Nazareth.

This is indeed a mystery of divine condescension, a part of that marvellous "emptying of Himself" which the Incarnation of the Word involves. Jesus assuredly needed no human brain to guide His steps — no human hands to toil for Him. He who clothes the lilies and feeds the ravens would scarcely be without resources to supply His own wants. Yet, His plan was to lean on others, to practise submission and obedience, and so teach us humility, not merely by word, but by the irresistible argument of example. This conduct of Jesus — the Man-God — in thus living the life of an apprentice, carrying out dutifully the behests of the master-carpenter Joseph, has done more to make obedience and submission easy for our proud nature than all the teachings of all the moralists and philosophers that have ever lived.

The Nazareth of the Eucharist. Thus it was, when Jesus lived His hidden life with His parents at Nazareth, and fed their souls by His daily Presence. And now that He is living His other hidden life in the Nazareth of the Eucharist, and still teaching us lessons of humility and obedience by His example, Joseph has also his part to play in this new 'childhood life' of the Man-God.

For we may dare to say that Jesus is eternally a Child. Has He not said to all: "Unless you become as little children you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"? And will He not Himself be the first to carry out this injunction? Will not Jesus of Nazareth be, in the most perfect sense, a childlike soul, that He, too, may share most fully in the Kingdom of God?

The word "child" may be used in different senses or connotations: Sometimes it is used to indicate lack of physical development in body or soul. So we speak of an adult whose mental growth has been arrested as being very childish. And when used in this way the word implies imperfection — it indicates that the nature of the person in question has not grown or expanded in the normal way.

A Childlike Soul. But the word "child" may also be taken in a very different sense: namely, when it is used to connote the qualities that constitute the perfection, the charm, the irresistible attractiveness and loveliness of childhood. These qualities, although they so often disappear as years advance, still sometimes are preserved in spite of the assaults of worldliness and so we get a "childlike" soul.

It is not fewness of years nor an undeveloped state of body or mind that constitute childhood in this sense, but rather a certain freshness of spirit that remains unspoiled by contact with the things of

life. Usually as years advance, passions develop and the attraction of material things, the lure of gold, the enticements of pleasure, the white glare of honor, gradually ensnare and enslave the soul, so that it becomes worldly and “grown up” in the evil sense of the term. The freshness of innocence is lost — the soul is defiled with the dust of earth, and is childlike no longer.

Now, using “childhood” in the higher and nobler sense, we repeat that Jesus remains eternally a Child. His gaze is ever fixed steadfastly on that Vision Beautiful, the contemplation of which keeps the soul tender. Sordid inclinations and choices that soil and weaken the soul had no power over Him. His Heart was ever fresh, stainless, pure as clearest crystal. No untruth, no unworthy suspicion, no harsh judgment, no unkind word, no evil thought ever marred the perfect serenity of His soul.

Christ’s Humility. And there was (and is) ever in Him that attitude or disposition that is peculiarly characteristic of the child — namely, trustful humility. Although conscious of His position, although bold and uncompromising in asserting His claim to the most astounding dignity possible to a creature — still He was ever exquisitely humble, with the simple, unaffected humility of the child. He came — so He tells us — to be our servant. Try to realize what this means. Think of the awful majesty that belongs to Him as Lord of creation — and then weigh the meaning of these words: “I have come not to be ministered to, but to be the servant of all.” And our Servant He has remained ever since. In the Sacrament of Penance He is ever at our beck and call. In the Eucharist He is ever waiting to do our bidding. He died upon the Cross to render us service — just as the men that fell at Gallipoli or on the fields of Flanders died to render us service.

And so His childhood continues in the Blessed Sacrament forever. And Saint Joseph still has his part to play in guarding Him there.

Wisely, then, the Church calls Saint Joseph her Patron; wisely, each year she reminds her children of this title on the feast of his Patronage on March 19; and wisely too shall we act if we choose Saint Joseph in a special way to be our Patron, and beg him to fulfill for us the Patron’s duty of furthering our interests at the Court of the Royal Child who paid him such marvellous honor as holding for Him the place of His Father in heaven.
