

Joseph, the Just One Virgin-Spouse of Mary, Virgin–Father of Jesus

This is how the birth of Jesus came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “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. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. (Matthew 1:18-24)

We have heard this passage often but are we satisfied with the usual explanations regarding Joseph’s decision to divorce Mary quietly upon learning of her pregnancy before they lived together? How do we understand this fear of Joseph’s in light of the clear Scriptural definition of his character as a just, a righteous and holy man of God? While not one word of his is recorded in Scripture, his actions speak volumes to us as a model of humility and obedience to the Will of God. Let us reflect on Matthew’s words in reference to what St. Joseph says about himself to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil in the message of Our Lady of America© and in reference to the views held by many of the early Church fathers.

In early October of 1956, about a week after Our Lady’s first appearance to Sister Mildred under this new image, St. Joseph spoke to Sister though she did not see him at this time.

It is true, my daughter, that *immediately* after my conception, I was, through the future merits of Jesus and because of my exceptional role of future Virgin-Father, cleansed from the stain of original sin. I was from that moment confirmed in grace and never had the slightest stain on my soul. This is my unique privilege among men.

My pure heart also was from the first moment of existence inflamed with love for God. *Immediately*, at the moment when my soul was cleansed from original sin, grace was infused into it in such abundance

that, excluding my holy spouse, I surpassed the holiness of the highest angel in the angelic choir.

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Fostoria, Ohio, Pg. 13.)

We learn from Scripture that some souls, by divine predilection, were cleansed from original sin before birth, e.g., John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus. Luke's Gospel gives the account of the Visitation and Elizabeth addressing Mary as the "Mother of my Lord," proclaiming the infant in her womb leapt for joy at the presence of the Indwelling God in Mary's womb. This has been understood by the Church as John's baptism and cleansing from original sin. **Early Church doctors have given us a theological principle that the closer one is to God, the greater is one's holiness.** No one is closer to God than Mary for she was singularly privileged to be the Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, and to bear the Word of God in her womb and give Him flesh. Joseph, too, was given a singular privilege by divine predilection to be the putative, legal father of Jesus on earth that places him next to Mary in **a marriage truly made in heaven.** He is second only to Mary and surpasses all other saints in dignity and holiness. The early doctors of the Church agreed that there was **"no grace conceded to any other saint, except Mary, which was not granted to Joseph."** If John was baptized at six months in the womb, Joseph would have been baptized and cleansed from original sin even sooner. Since Mary was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her life, and Joseph's privilege is lesser than hers but above all others, the view is held that Joseph would have been cleansed from original sin the moment after his conception, being given a fullness of grace similar to Mary's. St. Joseph's words confirm this.

Mary and Joseph, by these singular privileges and exalted vocations are in a class by themselves. Church Fathers speak of Mary and Joseph being part of the order of the Hypostatic Union because of their intimate involvement with Jesus in the hypostatic union of His human nature with His divine nature and person as the God-man. These three are the trinity on earth, the Holy Family. Since God chose to create man as family, He must redeem man as family, and sanctify us as **His family**, the Church. Thus the Redeemer needed to be rooted in a human family with a mother and a father. We see in the message of Our Lady of America© that Joseph identifies himself as sharing in the redemptive mission of Jesus and Mary, true to his participation in this order of the Hypostatic Union.

"My heart suffered with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mine was the silent suffering, for it was my special vocation to hide and shield, as long as God willed, the Virgin Mother and Son from the malice and hatred of men.

The most painful of my sorrows was that I knew beforehand of their passion, yet would not be there to console them. Their suffering was ever present to me and became my daily cross. I became, in union

with my holy spouse, co-redemptor of the human race. Through compassion for the sufferings of Jesus and Mary I co-operated, as no other, in the salvation of the world.” (Diary, Pg. 13.)

Now let us return to the passage in Matthew’s Gospel discussing divorce. How much better we understand it if we reflect on the teachings of the early Church fathers regarding Mary and Joseph, their virginity, their betrothal and their marriage.

We know Mary was consecrated to God at age three when her parents presented her to the temple in gratitude to God for delivering them from the shame of infertility. Mary resided there for about eleven years, abounding in holiness and the study of the sacred writings. The early church Fathers held that while in the temple Mary was led by the Spirit to make a **vow of virginity, conditional to God’s Will, of course.** St. Thomas, in accord with the ancient Fathers, says that

... “Mary stood, as it were, on the confines between the Old and the New Law; so that her vow was akin to the New Law in that it was a consecration of her virginity to God, and it savoured of the Old Law in that it was made conditionally. To make an absolute vow of perpetual virginity would have been, so to say, to go beyond the spirit of the Mosaic Law, which favoured, if it did not prescribe, matrimony.”

(Edward Healy Thompson, THE LIFE AND GLORIES OF SAINT JOSEPH, Tan Books and Publishers, Pg. 108.)

The common view of the Church fathers was that **Mary, like Joseph, was of the house of David.** Joseph was a nephew of Anna, mother of Mary and sister of Joseph’s father, Jacob, in the line of David through Matthan. Joseph was also son by affinity (marriage to Mary, thus son-in-law) to Heli (Joachim), Mary’s father in the Davidic line through Solomon. There are no accidents with God. Whether one traces Jesus’ genealogy through Mary as recorded in Luke or as son of Joseph as recorded in Matthew, Jesus is irrefutably of the line of David as was necessary for the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the Messiah. Any female descendant of the line of David was expected, almost as a religious obligation, to marry in the hope she might bring forth the Savior. **(Thompson, Pgs. 62-66.)** Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich in her visions recorded in **THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY** speaks of Mary’s reluctance to leave the temple (around age fourteen) to marry, but with the temple priests bidding her to do so because she was of the line of David, she humbly obeyed, seeing it as God’s will.

It was the opinion of many of the doctors of the Church that there would have been no suitable spouse for Mary or one who could understand her great mission unless God prepared one for her who would be given all the necessary grace to share in it with her with a great mission of his own. We are familiar with the view from Tradition that the temple priests were involved in choosing a suitable husband for Mary and did so with prayer and an ancient religious custom: all eligible suitors were invited to bring a

rod to the temple and whichever rod bloomed would be God's choice of a spouse for Mary. Joseph's bloomed, for he had been fashioned from all eternity as Mary was, to be the legal and putative father of Jesus, standing in the place of the heavenly Father over Jesus during the formative years of His human life. At the appointed time Joseph would disappear and the Holy Trinity would manifest itself at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, proclaiming Jesus the Son of God. Then Jesus' public work of redemption would begin, around age 30, the age considered ripe for a mission.

The Apocryphal sources that interpret the wording of "brothers and sisters of Jesus" in the Gospels to mean children of St. Joseph were refuted by the great body of church fathers who held the belief that Joseph was a virgin by his own election before he was chosen to be the husband of Mary. St. Jerome defended Mary's perpetual virginity against the Heretic Helvidius and also defended the virginity of Joseph, stating, **"but her spouse Joseph was ever a virgin, so that of this virginal marriage a virginal Son should be born."** (Thompson, Pg. 89.) St. Thomas Aquinas questioned how Mary, if vowed to virginity, could give her hand to Joseph in marriage and replies that **"the Blessed Virgin, before contracting espousals with St. Joseph, was certified by God that he had himself formed the same resolve of preserving perpetual virginity, and therefore that she exposed herself to no peril by her union with him."** (Thompson, Pg. 90.) How appropriate that the Virgin-Redeemer who inaugurates the New Covenant that prefigures the New Jerusalem where there is no marrying or giving in marriage, as there is no need for it, should have a Virgin-Mother and a Virgin-Father. We see thus the necessity of marriage for Mary with a virgin spouse like herself who would be a putative father (perceived to be so by the public), in order to root the Savior in the human family He was to redeem and to hide both Jesus' divinity and Mary's divine maternity and perpetual virginity until the appointed time for them to be revealed. Their humble hidden life was the means to this end and Joseph was ordained the guarantor of shielding these awesome mysteries by assuming the role of husband and father. Surely God who took such delight in creating so pure and holy a dwelling place for His Son in Mary would never allow her purity to be questioned.

With all this in mind, let us look again at Matthew's account citing Joseph's fear and decision to divorce Mary quietly to avoid exposing her to shame? Some translations of this Scripture say, "To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph..." The question is, were Mary and Joseph only betrothed or were they married?

The nuptials had already been celebrated, according to the true sense of Scripture, a point which has been clearly established by the Holy Fathers and Doctors, and, in particular, by the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas. Thus we find St. Matthew calling Joseph the husband of Mary, and Mary the wife of Joseph. ... Those who contend that the marriage was not solemnized until after Mary's visit to Elizabeth, which lasted three months, and Joseph's discovery of her condition, raise an unsurpassable difficulty; for how in that case could one of the primary

objects of their holy union have been attained, that of shielding the honour of the Blessed Mother of God? (Thompson, Pg. 166.)

Regarding divorce, many of the early fathers held firmly the belief that **Joseph did not doubt Mary's purity but feared his own unworthiness to be her spouse** and to participate in the awesome mystery God was working in her, for he came to understand that she was the Virgin spoken of by Isaiah who would give birth to the Savior. **This notion of divorce was not about separating Mary from him but about separating himself from her, the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God!**

The Mother of God my spouse! The Son of the Most High born in my house! No, such an honor was not for him. ...Could he in the face of the world continue to accept, recognize, and treat Mary as his wife, who had conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost? Could he appear to claim as his son the Holy One who was to be born of her? He shrank with holy consternation from the very idea. In his just mind such conduct assumed the appearance of acting out an impious falsehood. No, his place was not there. What could he do, then, but privately depart, and go to hide himself among the deserts and solitudes of the Jordan, there to weep over his unworthiness. (Thompson, Pg. 195.)

How the encounter with an angel in his dreams must have allayed Joseph's fears of unworthiness as the angel, addressing him as "son of David," bid him **accept his own great mission to be putative and legal father to Jesus** by giving Jesus His name, Savior of His people, and to take Mary, his wife, into his home, along with the holy duty to protect her honor and to care for her and her Child. No doubt the angel assured Joseph of divine assistance in this sublime vocation, for when God gives a mission, he first gives the grace to fulfill it. So Joseph, the just one, prepares the way for Jesus, the Justice of God.

The Church has long honored St. Joseph, even on the First Wednesday of the month in years past, but devotion to him waned over the years as the Church turned its attention to pending heresies. Now is the time to rediscover Joseph, the just one, the Virgin-Spouse of Mary, the Virgin-Father of Jesus, he who gives the heavenly Father a human face. In an age when many seek to redefine the human family in ways contrary to God's design and try to reduce the importance of fathers in the family or eliminate them altogether, the following words of St. Joseph spoken to Sister Mildred on the eve of his feast, March 18, 1958, are of the utmost importance.

"I bring to souls the purity of my life and the obedience that crowned it. All fatherhood is blest in me whom the Eternal Father chose as His representative on earth, the Virgin-Father of His own Divine Son. Through me the Heavenly Father has blessed all fatherhood, and through me He continues and will continue to do so till the end of time."

“My spiritual fatherhood extends to all God’s children, and together with my Virgin Spouse I watch over them with great love and solicitude....Mine was perfect obedience to the Divine Will, as it was shown and made known to me by the Jewish law and religion. To be careless in this is most displeasing to God and will be severely punished in the next world. ...Let fathers also imitate my great purity of life and the deep respect I held for my Immaculate Spouse. Let them be an example to their children and fellowmen, never willfully doing anything that would cause scandal among God’s people. Fatherhood is from God, and it must take once again its rightful place among men.”

“The privilege of being chosen by God to be the Virgin-Father of His Son was mine alone, and no honor, excluding that bestowed upon my Holy Spouse, was ever, or will ever, be as sublime or as high as this.” ... “Behold this pure heart so pleasing to Him Who made it. ... The Holy Trinity desires thus to honor me that in my unique fatherhood all fatherhood might be blessed. ... In honoring in a special way my fatherhood, you also honor Jesus and Mary.” (Diary, Pgs. 27-29.)

**“I am the protector of the Church and the home, as I was the protector of Christ and His Mother while I lived upon earth. Jesus and Mary desire that my pure heart, so long hidden and unknown, be now honored in a special way. Let my children honor my most pure heart in a special manner on the First Wednesday of the month by reciting the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary in memory of my life with Jesus and Mary and the love I bore them, the sorrow I suffered with them. Let them receive Holy Communion in union with the love with which I received the Savior for the first time and each time I held Him in my arms. Those who honor me in this way will be consoled by my presence at their death, and I myself will conduct them safely into the presence of Jesus and Mary.”
(Words of St. Joseph, March 30, 1958, Diary, Pgs. 31-31.)**

**Oh that St. Joseph might conduct us into the presence of Jesus
and Mary-- both now -- and in death! Amen!**

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