

## The Interior Lives of St. Joseph and Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil



According to his vocation, then, Saint Joseph is essentially a shadow, which, like an ordinary shadow, passing noiselessly over the earth and covering everything it meets, conceals his Son, Jesus, and even the marvels of his spouse, Mary, her virginity and divine motherhood. The saint throws himself heart and soul into this unique vocation of placing the mantle of obscurity over everything and during his whole life does not deny this vocation, even by a single word. He wishes to be hidden and to remain so. With what

revelations could he not have startled the world concerning his virginal spouse, who was the object of important prophecies of old, and the hope of his people?

(Rev. Maurice Meschler, S.J., *THE TRUTH ABOUT ST. JOSEPH*, Encountering the Most Hidden of Saints, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, NH, 2017, Page 104.)

St. Joseph and Mary lived a hidden life with Jesus for the first thirty years of Jesus' life in their little home in Nazareth where they sanctified manual labor and the domestic life. Not a word from St. Joseph is recorded in Sacred Scripture, but his immediate and humble obedience to the Will of God expressed by the angels is, and speaks volumes about his holiness. He was the man closest to Jesus on earth, and, after Mary, the greatest human person to walk on this earth. His life was one of contemplative silence in the sacred solitude of the sanctuary of his home, where he could gaze, at any moment, upon the Face of God. Could anything be more blessed than that? His home was God's paradise on earth, for in it dwelt the most Holy Trinity in a way no creatures could ever imagine. Being of the house of David gave Joseph no worldly privileges, but it did serve to connect his Son to the ancient prophecies regarding the Messiah Who would descend from that royal line, and Who would reign over a kingdom that would never end. Joseph died carrying his secret to the grave, that in his home he had sheltered the Son of God and the Queen of Heaven. At that appointed time, he quietly disappeared, and the heavenly Father came forth to proclaim Jesus as His Beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased and bid us listen to Him. Joseph was the shadow of, and the most perfect image of, God the Father, a model for all fathers on earth. **"Fatherhood is from God, and it must take once again its rightful place among men."**

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil's Diary, *OUR LADY OF AMERICA*, Tiffin, Ohio, Pg. 27.)

Joseph shared the authority of the eternal Father over Jesus those thirty years of Jesus' hidden life in Nazareth. Can we imagine the profundity of prayer, the moments of ecstasy, the divine revelations that must have been shared over time between these three persons of the earthly trinity? Surely Mary's divine Spouse and her divine Son revealed to her, and she to Joseph, God's unfolding Plan of Redemption for all mankind, preparing them for their unique participation in it. The roles of Mary and Joseph in Jesus' redemptive mission were ordained in heaven, from all eternity, as surely as was their marriage. Nothing could separate the intimate familial bond between Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Each had a vital role in our salvation, in descending order and varied degrees: Jesus first, Mary second, and Joseph third. For too long, Joseph has remained hidden in the life of the Church, the mystical body of which he is Father and Protector, as he was of Jesus and Mary while on earth. Now is his time to be exalted in all his glory and to be recognized as co-redemptor with Jesus and Mary through his foreknowledge of, and compassion for, the intense sufferings of Jesus, and of His Mother, Mary, who was there at Jesus' side, in His terrible Passion and crucifixion.

**“Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor.”**  
(Sister’s Diary, Page 30.)

**Him whom countless kings and prophets had desired to see, Joseph not only saw but conversed with, and embraced in paternal affection, and kissed. He most diligently reared Him whom the faithful were to receive as the bread that came down from heaven whereby they might obtain eternal life. Because of this sublime dignity which God conferred on his most faithful servant, the Church has always most highly honored and praised blessed Joseph next to his spouse, the Virgin Mother of God, and has besought his intercession in times of trouble.**

(Pope Pius IX, *Quemadmodum Deus*, December 8, 1870.)

Sister Mildred’s life mirrors that of St. Joseph. Early in her religious life her spiritual director, Father Paul F. Leibold, discerned that she had a contemplative vocation. He advised her to enter the cloister in order to consecrate herself more completely to God alone. Hers was to be a **sacrifice of praise** to the Most Holy Trinity, as her “yes” to the invitation of the Bridegroom of her heart would unite her to His sufferings in ways she could never have imagined. Not only did Jesus ask her to wear a copy of His crown of thorns, but He also asked her if she would allow Him to nail her to His cross. No wonder some think she may have had the interior stigmata. We won’t know until or if we open her coffin. As for a sign, Jesus told her, **“Thou thyself shall be the sign, the sign I will give to the world. A little, white dove, a sign of peace, yes, the reign of peace in the world.”** (Letter, July 1955.) Jesus always asks, invites; He never forces our free will. With her “yes”, Jesus then said He would lay her on the altar of sacrifice, so like the Lamb of God Who was laid upon the altar of sacrifice on the mount of Calvary. We may never know the scope of St. Joseph’s inner visions and understandings of the Passions of Jesus and Mary, nor the magnitude of his compassion for their sufferings, but we do know the extent of Sister Mildred’s extraordinary participation in Christ’s Paschal mystery from her letters to her spiritual director. **“If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you,”** Jesus said. (John 15:20.) She shared in His rejections and abandonment by His own and, at times, seemingly by His Father---those dark nights of the soul---offered for the eternal salvation of sinners. She, like Jesus, like Mary, like Joseph, was a victim soul, called to a **mission of expiation for the sins of others**. Sister was told she would have to endure many dark nights and attacks from Satan to expiate the many sins against the chaste virtue. (Undated letter.) Our Lady of America’s message is all about a return to Faith and Purity if we wish to know the peace of God within us!

In her April 12, 1958 letter to Father Paul F. Leibold, Sister Mildred addresses the Martha and Mary dilemma and states the primacy of prayer, the primacy of the interior life, living in communion with the Divine Guest within, the Indwelling Most Holy Trinity, through sanctifying grace. The hidden or interior life is the spiritual and nobler part of one’s life, for it elevates one to a more sublime human existence than the exterior life, because it is totally dedicated to the highest good, God Himself. Like the story of Martha and Mary, while both roles are necessary on earth, the better part is always Mary’s at the feet of Jesus, absorbed in God Himself, that end for which we were all created, the beatific vision and everlasting contemplation of the fathomless and magnificent splendors of the glory of God. St. Joseph reveals to his spiritual daughter, **the “Secret of secrets,” living in that interior castle that is the kingdom of God within us.** Sister states: **“Like his holy Spouse, St. Joseph also never ceases to remind me of my first duty, the first duty of every soul, especially the chosen, of living with God in the interior castle of our hearts.”** So, on March 30<sup>th</sup>, before voicing his own requests, St. Joseph spoke of this first duty which comes before all others.

**“It is time. Kneel my beloved daughter, for God is about to reveal to you a secret of the interior life. Few there are who learn it and fewer they who live it in its fullness. This secret, dear child, is being with Him Who is within you and has made your soul His kingdom. There are many who know this Doctrine, but few to whom God reveals its secret operations. Few souls there are who empty themselves of all things that they may possess this Secret of secrets, this ultimate glory of all living, this union with the Divine, ending in Eternal Vision.**

**This secret cannot be written, lovely child, its deepest meaning will be made known to you in the interior depths of your child-like soul, in your humble heart, where Love has found Its resting place, Its palace beautiful. *They who would possess for themselves the mysterious workings of this Divine Secret must strive to cultivate in silence and humility this love for the Eternal Being dwelling within them. We lived this life, beloved child, so to attain it souls must imitate, as far as possible, the fullness of our union with the Indwelling God.*” (Letter, March 12, 1958.)**

**What is a contemplative soul? A contemplative life?** Many accuse those who withdraw from the world to live a more hidden life in the cloister, totally dedicated to God and prayer and penance for the salvation of souls, as wasting their lives. Is there any greater work than to expiate for sin and to pray for the salvation of souls? Sister Mildred’s letters speak of sisters in the active order trying to talk her out of entering the cloister and to return to teaching. But Jesus Himself is the best argument for the magnificent worth of the contemplative life spent in prayer and intimate union with God. He spent thirty of his thirty-three years on earth in the quiet of Joseph’s home, in an atmosphere of ceaseless prayer, in communion with the Trinity Who dwelt with them. Such ordinary and humble activity, yet the greatest work on earth! How humbling is the reality of the Real Presence of Jesus, the Most High God, in small, consecrated hosts, hidden away in the tabernacles of our churches, just so He can be here with us and come into our hearts when we receive Holy Communion and make us a living tabernacle! The greatest works are often done in silence and obscurity, without fanfare or accolades, but in humble surrender to the mysterious ways of grace. The greatest hunger of Jesus is for our love, keeping Him company in the sanctuary of our own hearts! Contemplation is the beatitude of the soul, the end for which we were created, communion with the Divine Guest within, the beginning of the beatific vision in which we will spend eternity contemplating the things too great to even be imagined by the human mind, things God has prepared for those who love Him. Contemplation is the better way, that way of life that stands up against our culture’s tyranny of relativism, for it keeps us focused on ultimate Reality and Truth. It speaks against the dictatorship of noise and the over-activity that sends so many into fits of frenzy and chronic collapse. It draws us away from the globalization of superficiality, for it bids us go out into the deep and explore the depths of God’s infinite and merciful love for us, His utter humility and His utter simplicity!

**“My little white dove, how humility and simplicity are despised by the proud of this world. Oh what a loss they suffer. For despising the humble they despise Me, and someday I, the humble Christ, will judge them. By My humility and simplicity of heart, I glorified My Father more than all the Angels and Saints together. So it is that the humble soul glorifies God more than all the great of this world.” (Sister Mildred’s letter to Father Leibold, August 16, 1956.)**

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