

Joseph, the Father of Jesus

How is this so?

There is but one fatherhood, that of God the Father, the one Creator of the world, “of all that is seen and unseen.” Yet man, created in the image of God, has been granted a share in this one paternity of God (cf. Eph 3:15). St. Joseph is a striking case of this, since he is a father, without fatherhood according to the flesh. He is not the biological father of Jesus, whose Father is God alone, and yet he lives his fatherhood fully and completely. To be a father means above all to be at the service of life and growth. Saint Joseph, in this sense, gave proof of great devotion. For the sake of Christ, he experienced persecution, exile and the poverty which this entails. He had to settle far from his native town. His only reward was to be with Christ.

(Scott Hahn, JOY TO THE WORLD, How Christ’s Coming Changed Everything (And Still Does), Image Press, New York, Pg. 81.)

Sacred Scripture tells us little about St. Joseph and does not record a single word uttered by him. Matthew’s Gospel cites the genealogy of Joseph as a descendant of King David and calls him a righteous man betrothed to Mary. When Mary was found with child, Matthew writes that an angel assured Joseph in a dream that this Child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that he should take Mary into his home, and that he was to name the Child Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins. Matthew cites Rome’s call for a census, whereupon Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem, the ancestral town of his birth, to register. Wise Men from the East, having seen a new star in the heavens indicating the birth of a king, were led to Jerusalem. They inquired of Herod where this child might be and were told of the prophecy regarding Bethlehem in Judea. There they found the Child with His Mother, Mary, and his father, Joseph. Matthew tells of Herod’s order to slaughter all male boys under the age of two in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Again, an angel warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt with Mary and the Child until told to return. Upon Herod’s death Joseph was told it was safe to return to Israel, and he settled in the little town of Nazareth in Galilee where Jesus remained until His mission was to begin.

Mark’s Gospel does not mention Joseph but tells how the town of Nazareth rejected Jesus, stating Jesus was a carpenter, implying it was a trade he would have learned from his father. Luke’s Gospel recounts the Annunciation to Mary, the betrothal to Joseph of the house of David, the journey to Bethlehem for the census, and Mary and Joseph’s observance of the Mosaic Law in presenting Mary’s firstborn son in the temple to be dedicated to God. Luke also recounts Mary and Joseph’s observance of the Jewish Law, especially in taking Jesus with them to Jerusalem for the Passover when he was twelve. On their return home they discovered Jesus was not in the caravan, so they hastened back to Jerusalem and found Jesus in the temple explaining the Scriptures to the Jewish teachers. **Herein lies a great insight into the fatherhood of Joseph and the Fatherhood of God.** Luke says **His parents** were amazed when they found him in the temple, and, like any mother, Mary asked, “Son, why have you done this to us? **Your father and I** have been terribly worried trying to find you.” And Jesus answered, “Why did you have to look for me? **Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house?**” Then Jesus went home to Nazareth and was obedient to them like a son should be. Luke’s genealogy of Jesus says “**he was the son, so people thought, of Joseph.**” In other

words, Joseph was the **“putative” father of Jesus**, which means that to the general public Jesus appeared to be the natural son of Joseph. All this was God’s plan to conceal those great mysteries of the Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God, the Virgin-Fatherhood of Joseph and the divinity of Jesus, until the time God had appointed for these to be made manifest, along with his own Divine Fatherhood. Likely, a chosen few, like Elizabeth, who knew the Scriptures well, were enlightened to these great mysteries. John’s Gospel makes no mention of Joseph but goes immediately into that great prologue of Jesus’s eternal existence with the Father with whom He is one.

Scott Hahn calls Joseph the **“Silent Knight, the Holy Knight,”** for his actions speak volumes about his humble obedience to the Jewish law, to the Will of God, and to the fulfillment of his God-given vocation as guardian of Heaven’s two greatest trusts, Mary, Mother of God, and Jesus, Son of God. The evangelists spoke of Joseph more as spouse of Mary than father of Jesus, affirming that Joseph had no biological role in the conception of Jesus, but that does not make Joseph any less a father. Scott Hahn elaborates:

By Jewish law, he was Jesus’s father, and this is evident in Matthew 1:25, when Joseph exercises the father’s right to name the child. He exercises all the duties of fatherhood, moreover, by protecting Mary and Jesus and supporting them through the dangers of Herod’s reign (see Matthew 2:13-22). According to Jewish custom, Jesus received full hereditary rights through Joseph, even though he was adopted. (Hahn, Pg. 69).

While those referring to Joseph as **“foster father”** may intend to protect Mary’s virginity and God’s fatherhood, they may actually do more to hinder our understanding of the true fatherhood of Joseph as the earthly image or icon of the heavenly Father. The Jewish law, the Roman law and our own law concede that an adoptive father is as much a father as is the natural father. Mary herself, on finding Jesus in the temple, confirmed Joseph’s fatherhood when she said, **“your father and I.”** Neighbors confirmed Jesus as Joseph’s son when they called Him the carpenter’s son. Joseph is truly a father to Jesus, more in the manner of God the Father, than any natural father on earth.

God is more Father than any man on earth, though he fathers without gender, without a body, without sexual organs or a sexual act, and without a spouse. God’s fatherhood is perfect, so we know that fatherhood is not primarily *physical*, but rather *spiritual*. The fatherhood of Joseph is spiritual and real, though virginal, just as the fatherhood of God is spiritual and nonphysical. ...Later in life, Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35). He never assigned his disciples the role of father in his life—not even by analogy. That was the singular privilege of Saint Joseph to be the earthly father of Jesus. (Hahn, Pgs. 70-71)

All this is magnificently stated by St. Joseph himself in words to Sister Mildred Neuzil, visionary for the Our Lady of America Devotion®, on the eve of his feast in 1958.

“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. Fathers must come

to me, small one, to learn obedience to authority: to the Church always, as the mouthpiece of God, to the laws of the country in which they live, insofar as these do not go against God and their neighbor. 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." [On March 19, 1958, St. Joseph said:] "The privilege of being chosen 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.

Dear child, I was king in the little home of Nazareth, for I sheltered within it the Prince of Peace and the Queen of Heaven. To me they looked for protection and sustenance, and I did not fail them. I received from them the deepest love and reverence, for in me they saw Him Whose place I took over them. So the head of the family must be loved, obeyed, and respected, and in return be a true father and protector to those under his care. In honoring in a special way my fatherhood, you also honor Jesus and Mary. The Divine Trinity has placed into our keeping the peace of the world. The imitation of the Holy Family, my child, of the virtues we practiced in our little home at Nazareth is the way for all souls to that peace which comes from God alone and which none other can give."

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Lodi, OH, Pgs. 27, 29.)

St. Joseph declared himself protector of the Church and the home, just as he was protector of Jesus and Mary while on earth. He said Jesus and Mary wish his pure heart, so long hidden, be honored in a special way. He asked that we honor him on the First Wednesday of each month with the Joyful mysteries of the rosary that recall his life on earth with Jesus and Mary. Respecting the Church's designation of the Glorious mysteries to be prayed on Wednesdays, the rosary honoring St. Joseph on the First Wednesday is to be an additional one. St. Joseph also asked that we receive Holy Communion in union with the love with which he received the Savior for the first time and each time he held Him in his arms. So, let us pray this ancient prayer that contemplates Jesus asleep in St. Joseph's arms, so near to his pure and fatherly heart, and ask him to pray for us.

St. Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in thee all my interests and desires. O St. Joseph, assist me by thy powerful intercession and obtain for me all spiritual blessings through thy foster Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, so that, having engaged here below thy heavenly power, I may offer thee my thanksgiving and homage. O St. Joseph, I never weary contemplating thee and Jesus asleep in thine arms. I dare not approach while He reposes near thy heart. Press Him in my name and kiss His fine head for me, and ask Him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath. St. Joseph, patron of departing souls, pray for me.

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