

## **Mary and Joseph and the Interior Life Living in the Presence of God**

**“It is the wish of my Son that fathers and mothers strive to imitate me and my chaste spouse in our holy life at Nazareth. We practiced the simple virtues of family life, Jesus our Son being the center of all our love and activity. The Holy Trinity dwelt with us in a manner far surpassing anything that can ever be imagined. For ours was the earthly paradise where once again God walked among men. ... The Divine Trinity will dwell in your midst only if you are faithful in practicing the virtues of our life at Nazareth. Then, you also, my children, you also will become another paradise. God will then walk among you and you will have peace.”**

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pg. 8,  
November 8, 1954 locution.)

This passage reminds us of God's original design for mankind in the first paradise where Adam and Eve were created in grace and walked and conversed intimately with Him in the Garden of Eden. He loved them and delighted to be with them and they were so happy in His presence. He had created them in His own image as persons with an immortal soul and the gifts of intellect and free will that set them over the rest of His material creation. When confronted with choice, without which there is no freedom, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and unleashed the evils of sin on all their posterity. God made garments to cover their shame as they were driven from the garden of innocence, and He promised them a Redeemer who would wash them white as snow in the Blood of the unblemished Lamb. God willed to clothe them with the likeness of His own Son as the white garment of salvation that would admit them into that paradise that would never end. In the fullness of time God gave us a new family in which He so delighted to dwell and walk again amongst men. Jesus, the Beloved Son of God and heart of the heavenly Trinity would become the Beloved Son of Mary and Joseph at the heart of the earthly trinity, the Holy Family, and would restore the whole human race to a greater and more intimate communion with God.

Blessed John Paul II addressed the unique role of this Holy Family in the whole economy of salvation. Mary and Joseph in union with Jesus constitute a hierarchy of grace all their own, the hypostatic order entrusted with the redemption of mankind. Thus, Jesus is Redeemer and Mary and Joseph are co-redeemers with Him. We are accustomed to seeing Mary as co-redeemer at the foot of the cross but have failed to grasp St. Joseph's identification with Christ's passion prior to his own death in foreknowledge and compassion for the sorrows of Jesus and Mary. Blessed John Paul II suggests Joseph was given in marriage to Mary not only to conceal her perpetual virginity and Jesus' divinity until the appointed time, but to share as no other in the unprecedented grace of her Divine Motherhood with his own Virgin-fatherhood as he stood in place of the heavenly Father over Jesus during those hidden years. Having been molded as one heart with Jesus and Mary by her Divine Spouse in their common life in the cloister of Nazareth, it is most plausible that Joseph's heart would be inseparable from those of Jesus and Mary in sharing Christ's

Passion as well. These privileges to Mary and Joseph are unique, as they have never been nor will ever be given to another. This earthly trinity was essential to the heavenly Trinity's plan of salvation. Joseph shared differently than Mary but as surely in the Passion of Jesus.

**At the culmination of the history of salvation, when God reveals his love for humanity through the gift of the Word, it is precisely the marriage of Mary and Joseph that brings to realization in full "freedom" the "spousal gift of self" in receiving and expressing such a love.(16) "In this great undertaking which is the renewal of all things in Christ, marriage -- it too purified and renewed -- becomes a new reality, a sacrament of the New Covenant. We see that at the beginning of the New Testament, as at the beginning of the Old, there is a married couple. But whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth. The Savior began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union, wherein is manifested his all-powerful will to purify and sanctify the family - that sanctuary of love and cradle of life."(17) (Blessed John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos, Guardian of the Redeemer*, August 15, 1989.)**

The Holy Trinity is a family of three persons in one Godhead. The Holy Family is the most perfect reflection of the inner life of the Trinity, that endless reciprocity of giving and receiving love which is synonymous with life. Every family on earth, the basic unit of every society, takes its origin and has its fulfillment in the family of the Most Holy Trinity. Wherever Jesus is the Trinity is for these three persons are consubstantial one with the other, and the closer one is to God, the All Holy, the holier one is. Has anyone on earth ever been closer to God than Mary and Joseph? Mary carried Jesus in her womb and both carried Him in their arms, pressed Him to their breasts, and cared for His every human need. Every moment of every day was lived in the Divine Presence! Prayer must have been as natural as the air they breathed. The awesome awareness of God in their midst would have made words an intrusion upon their quiet communion of love. The silence that accompanies awe in the presence of God would have hovered over that home like the rays of the sun. No one is greater than Mary and Joseph among men, yet, great as they are, they looked upon themselves as nothing before God, but God cannot resist the humble heart and ravishes it with His glory. This is the wondrous work of the interior life, the soul's romance with God: to behold His Face and to be held in His Presence. What loving glances toward Jesus must have interrupted Mary and Joseph's daily tasks! Could the cloud or the pillar of fire that signified God's Presence with His people of old compare to this Divine Presence that bathed their every action and penetrated the deepest recesses of their souls where God reigns as the First Love of every person He has created? Shouldn't every Christian home be such a sanctuary of God's Presence, such a house of prayer and peace?

Sacred Scripture does not record a single word from Joseph but St. Joseph did speak with Sister Mildred Neuzil in October of 1956, shortly after Mary's appearance as Our Lady of America®. He spoke of **his own unique privileges** because of **his role** in our salvation as spouse of Mary and father to Jesus. Scripture tells us the Baptist was cleansed from original sin in the sixth month in the womb of Elizabeth when she greeted

Mary, pregnant with Jesus. Joseph, being second only to Mary in holiness and privilege, must then enjoy this privilege even earlier than John. Many in the early Church so believed

**“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. My heart suffered with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mine was a 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 future 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.)

Sister Mildred recorded that Our Lady is **“*anxiously concerned about our inner life*”** (Diary, Pg. 10.) and about purity of heart without which there can be no purity of body or thought or action. Such purity is at the heart of holiness, doing what we do for the love of God. The interior life consists of seeking God in everything, living a life of prayer and contemplation and the practice of living in the Presence of God. It involves intimate, friendly conversation with Christ and a focus on internal prayer over external action, choosing the better part at the feet of Jesus while striving to make all action the fruit of prayer. It implies the deep confession that without God, without Christ, we are nothing and can do nothing, but with God, with Christ, all things are possible. We must contemplate the Face of Jesus found most clearly in His Word in order to become the “new man”, divinized into the image of the Son and capable of intimacy with the Most Holy Trinity. God wills our sanctification. We must become possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrate with His Spirit and rest filially in the Father’s heart. We must be a child of God. The mystery of the Trinity is made present in the mystery of the Incarnation that brings God to us so we may become like God. Mary and Joseph show us that holiness is allowing God to take **us** by the hand to form us into His own image. It is more about what we **allow God to be and to do to us** than about **anything we can do**. In his Apostolic Exhortation ***Novo Millennio Ineunte*** Blessed John Paul II placed sanctity as the most important priority of the Catholic Church. He called on our communities to be schools of prayer. He emphasized the primacy of Christ and the primacy of the interior life and of holiness.

**There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with His grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that “without Christ we can do**

nothing” (cf. Jn 15:5). It is prayer which roots us in this truth. It constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. ... We must resist this temptation by trying “to be” before trying “to do.”

On March 11, 1958, St. Joseph appeared to Sister Mildred and asked her to kneel and hear a message that would bring countless souls to a new way of life.

“Through you, small one, the Trinity desires to make known to souls its desire to be adored, honored, and loved within the kingdom, the interior kingdom of their hearts. I bring to souls the purity of my life and the obedience that crowned it. ... (Diary, Pg. 27.) [Then he appeared with his flaming heart lying on a cross.] The cross, my little one, upon which my heart rests is the cross of the passion, which was ever present before me, causing me intense suffering. I desire souls to come to my heart that they may learn true union with the Divine Will. ... 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. ... 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. ... 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.” .... (Diary, Pgs. 28-31.)

Let us spend some time this Lenten season pondering St. Joseph’s share in Christ’s Passion while studying his virtues enumerated by Our Lady to St. Bridget of Sweden.

### **St. Joseph’s Virtues**

“St. Joseph was so reserved and careful in his speech that not one word ever issued from his mouth that was not good and holy, nor did he ever indulge in unnecessary or less than charitable conversation. He was most patient and diligent in bearing fatigue; he practiced extreme poverty; he was most meek in bearing injuries; he was strong and constant against my enemies; he was the faithful witness of the wonders of Heaven, being dead to the flesh and the world, living only for God and for heavenly goods, which were the only things he desired. He was perfectly conformed to the Divine Will and so resigned to the dispositions of Heaven that he ever repeated: ‘May the Will of God ever be done in me!’ He rarely spoke with men, but continually with God, whose Will he desired to perform. Wherefore, he now enjoys great glory in Heaven.” (Tan Books, *Favorite Prayers to St. Joseph*, Charlotte, NC, Pg. 50.)

Let us pray with St. Joseph: “May the Will of God ever be done in me!”

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Fostoria, Ohio, March, 2014.

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