

St. Joseph, Virgin-Father and Co-Redeemer with Jesus and Mary

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.

(Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, Diary, “*Our Lady of America*©,” Fostoria, Ohio, pg. 13 – locution to Sister in early October, 1956, shortly after Our Lady’s first appearance on the feast of the North American martyrs, September 25, 1956.)

Providence has chosen to keep Joseph rather obscure during the first centuries of Christianity, but now wishes him to be better known and revered. Hence, we will focus on some of the theological implications referenced in St. Joseph’s locution to Sister Mildred and will ponder on them in terms of their significance in understanding St. Joseph’s role in the Hypostatic Order of grace and God’s plan of salvation for all mankind, and on his role within the Church and in our spiritual lives as we journey toward holiness, toward final union with God.

As a result of his obscurity in the past, information from apocryphal sources, such as the protoevangelium of St. James, has emerged and spread, especially throughout the Eastern churches and into the west as well. There may be some truth in these sources, but because much contained in them was suspect, they were not included in the Canon of Sacred Books of the Roman Catholic Church and are often in

contradiction to the teachings that have emerged in our Catholic Tradition under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Encyclopedia has this to say about these apocryphal sources:

The chief sources of information on the life of St. Joseph are the first chapters of our first and third Gospels; they are practically also the only reliable sources, for, whilst on the holy patriarch's life, as on many other points connected with the Saviour's history which are left untouched by the canonical writings, the apocryphal literature is full of details, the non-admittance of these works into the Canon of the Sacred Books casts a strong suspicion upon their contents; and, even granted that some of the facts recorded by them may be founded on trustworthy traditions, it is in most instances next to impossible to discern and sift these particles of true history from the fancies with which they are associated. Among these apocryphal productions dealing more or less extensively with some episodes of St. Joseph's life may be noted the so-called "Gospel of James," the "Pseudo-Matthew," the "Gospel of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary," the "Story of Joseph the Carpenter," and the "Life of the Virgin and Death of Joseph."

Reference: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08504a.htm>

From these apocryphal works comes the idea of St. Joseph as an old man, an attempt to "protect" the virginity of Mary by presenting Joseph as merely a custodian or guardian in the background rather than as a mature young man, husband to Mary and father to Jesus. These sources cast Joseph as a widower with other children from a previous marriage in order to explain the term "brothers of Jesus" in the Scriptures, but these authors did not adequately understand the Hebrew language and culture of that time and the use of the term "brothers and sisters" for members of the clan, the extended family, which was so revered in those days, a term we interpret as "relatives" or "cousins" in our own language today. It is understandable that some eastern churches would more readily accept such views as they live in cultures where old men often marry very young girls, and where there is a married clergy and, perhaps, for many, a greater difficulty in grasping **the very concept of perpetual virginity within marriage as essential ideas with respect to Mary and Joseph whose unique missions in the salvation of all mankind would invite and obtain their total consecration to this purpose ordained from all eternity.**

Furthermore, we are mindful that artists do not always depict historical reality but express ideas in the way in which they represent a person. Hence, many in the early centuries wished to express Joseph's wisdom and grace as the putative father of Jesus, mirroring the attributes we associate with the heavenly Father, the Ancient of Days, who was often depicted likewise as a gray haired elderly man to show His Wisdom and eternal nature, while in truth, God is ageless. Other early Christian artists, to refute that idea of a very old, gray haired man, went to the other extreme to depict Joseph as a very young man. Neither of these views are compatible with what has emerged through the years of study and reflection, in both the East and the West, as the more credible

and suitable view of Joseph in line with our Catholic Tradition and the revealed purpose of God – that of a mature young man of about 35-40, what one might consider “old” in terms of Mary’s tender age, a man well able to endure the tremendous hardships of his mission of safeguarding the honor of Mary’s virginity, hiding her miraculous conception of Jesus, and of providing protection for Jesus and Mary during the Hidden Life of Jesus, especially on the rugged journeys to Bethlehem and back, during the flight into Egypt through rough and barren land, often plagued with robbers, and on the return trip to Nazareth, to the enduring labor of providing for his family within his modest means. How much more fitting is this idea of Joseph, who had himself vowed his life to God, to a true understanding of the glory of his singular privilege as Virgin-Father of Jesus, husband of Mary, Mother of God, favored with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit the moment after his conception when he was cleansed from original sin and its concupiscence, giving him a holiness next in degree the Mother of Jesus. Mary need have no fear for her virginity, for God had chosen for her a man who would honor her virginity with his own. What seems impossible to man is always possible to God.

Reference: (Edward Healy Thompson, M.A., *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, Chapter XX, “Joseph’s Age at the Time of the Espousals,” Tan Books, 1980, pgs. 132-141.)

The Catholic Encyclopedia cites St. Augustine, Julian and St. Thomas on the virgin marriage of Mary and Joseph.

This marriage, true and complete, was, in the intention of the spouses, to be virgin marriage (cf. [St. Augustine](#), "De cons. Evang.", II, i in P.L. XXXIV, 1071-72; "Cont. Julian.", V, xii, 45 in P.L. XLIV, 810; [St. Thomas](#), III:28; III:29:2).

If other holy persons called to special missions in the history of God’s people were totally consecrated to God and lived lives of perpetual virginity, why should it not be so of both Mary and Joseph whose mission was greater than any others’ and whose holiness was unsurpassed, save by the Sacred Humanity Himself? There is no holiness greater than to do the Will of God. When God gives a mission, He also gives much favor and the necessary grace to those called so that they might fulfill those missions in complete accord with His desire and His glory. Who could have been more desirous of the will and glory of God, next to Jesus, than Mary and Joseph? Can we even imagine the grace, the purity and holiness, the divine wisdom that was bestowed on these two creatures chosen by divine predilection to participate most intimately as co-redeemers with the Redeemer in the plan of salvation for all mankind?

In spite of the mystery and hiddenness surrounding Joseph and his role in the plan of salvation, many in the early Church expressed clearly the idea of the inseparable bond of marriage between Mary and Joseph, stating that what God had joined, no one could separate. Mary’s holiness stemmed from Jesus and Joseph’s stemmed from his intermediacy with Mary. The three were inseparable in the plan of salvation and together form the Hypostatic Order of grace. God chose to bring salvation to the world through the family which His creative design fashioned with a father and a mother to mirror the inner life of the heavenly Trinity itself. That redeeming family,

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, form the earthly trinity and restore what Adam and Eve had lost for us in the Garden of Eden precisely by becoming God's new paradise on earth where He walked again among men, not in spiritual intimacy alone, but in the flesh. That Holy Family in Nazareth, that sanctuary of holiness, would be a bit of heaven on earth for God's Beloved Son Who would be shaped and formed in His Sacred Humanity by his Mother and His earthly Father. The closer one is to God, the greater is one's holiness. No creatures were closer to God than Mary and Joseph, and none holier than they. Hence, Mary and Joseph are the greatest saints, exalted above all angels and men in the order of grace, for Mary bore God in her very womb and Joseph stood in the place of the heavenly Father over Jesus during his hidden life on earth.

As the mother of God, Mary transcends in dignity all created persons, angels and men, because the dignity of a creature is the greater the nearer it is to God. And of all created things after the human nature of Christ, which is hypostatically united with the Person of the Logos, Mary is nearest to the Triune God. As a true mother she is related by blood to the Son of God according to His human nature. Through the Son she is associated intimately also with the Father and the Holy Ghost. The Church honours her on account of her position as Mother of God, and on account of her high endowment with grace deriving from her position as daughter of the Heavenly Father and Spouse of the Holy Ghost. In a certain sense (secundum quid) Mary's dignity is infinite, since she is the mother of an Infinite Divine Person.

(Dr. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Tan Books, 1974, pg. 197.)

Is any other creature closer to Jesus and Mary than Joseph, and therefore closer to God after them? Surely Mary and Joseph's privileges of total virginity and unprecedented holiness are the necessary favor befitting the nature of their sublime and singular vocations. Thus, on the one hundredth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's August 15, 1889 encyclical *Quamquam Pluries* promoting devotion to St. Joseph, Pope John Paul II in *Custos Redemptoris*, given at St. Peter's in Rome on August 15, 1989, declares:

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.

This favor to Joseph to be **cleansed from original sin immediately after his conception** is his singular privilege, precisely because he was chosen to be the legal and Virgin-Father of Jesus, given heaven's authority over the Sacred Humanity during Jesus' hidden years. Joseph was fashioned to be the shadow and perfect image of the

heavenly Father. Joseph's favor was lesser than the Virgin Mary's whose Divine Motherhood merited **preservation from original sin at the first moment of her conception** because she would literally give her flesh to that Sacred Humanity and carry the Son of God within her virginal womb. So sublime a call from God as was given to these two, would demand an equally sublime and total surrender to the will and ways of God for mankind's salvation and God's own glory. Joseph and Mary came together at God's command, totally vowed to God and choosing to remain so throughout their marriage by His grace and will and their free choice. As we ponder Joseph's role, greater even than the Baptist's who was cleansed from original sin in the womb of Elizabeth during her sixth month at the visitation of Mary, pregnant with Jesus, we should not wonder that Joseph's favor would be greater than the Baptist's and that Joseph should be cleansed from original sin earlier than the Baptist was. Is it not fitting that Joseph, one with Mary as her spouse, should share in holiness similar to Mary's? It is no surprise that Joseph, too, should be filled with the Holy Spirit, divine wisdom, purity and holiness of a degree that would correspond in like fashion to Mary's, for Joseph's vocation was so intimately tied to hers, even though it was humbled in light of her favor. Can we continue to separate those two Hearts, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, from that third Heart, the pure Heart of Joseph, if we truly understand how, together, they form the earthly trinity of love that most perfectly incarnates the Love of the Most High Triune God?

To describe the life and the glories of Joseph is to describe at the same time the life of Jesus and the glories of Mary; for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are so intimately united, that it is impossible to speak of one without treating of the others. These three dear names—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—form that triple heavenly alliance which can never be broken. ...Giovanni di Cartagenatreat(s) of the order of the Hypostatic Union, and says that...in this order the first place is held by the Humanity of Christ, which is immediately united to the Person of the Word; the second place is held by the Blessed Virgin, who conceived and brought forth the Incarnate Word; and the third place is held by St. Joseph, to whom was committed by God the special care, never given to any other, of feeding, nursing, educating, and protecting a God-made-man!...He, as constituted head of the Family immediately belonging to the service of a God-Man, transcends in dignity all the other saints; wherefore he is happily established in an order which is superior to all the other orders in the Church.

(Edward Healy Thompson, M.A., *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, Tan Books, 1980, pgs. 1-9.)

Regarding Joseph being cleansed from original sin and sanctified before birth, Edward Healy Thompson goes on to say.

From Holy Scripture we also learn that some souls through the divine predilection, as those of Jeremias and of the Baptist, were sanctified before they saw the light of day. Now, what shall we say of Joseph? Since in dignity and holiness he is inferior to Mary, we cannot

assume with any certainty that God granted to him the same privilege as to her; and the Church has never made any utterance on the subject. Still, Joseph surpasses all the other saints in dignity and sanctity; we are, therefore, free to conjecture that, although this is not signified in Scripture, he must have been sanctified before his birth earlier than any of them, for all the holy doctors agree in saying that there was no grace conceded to any other saint, except Mary, which was not granted to Joseph. As Mary, above all, was nearest to Jesus, so Joseph was nearest to Mary; and for the sake of Jesus, and also for Mary's sake, we may justly conclude that to Joseph must have been conceded a privilege second only to hers. ...

St. Joseph then, we see, is always, in the opinion of the Doctors of the Church, held to be, next to the Blessed Virgin, the purest and the most holy among creatures, and worthy, for the sake of the Divine Son and His Mother, to be liberated and purged from original sin immediately after his conception. And this doctrine, professed by great doctors, and tacitly approved by the Church—a doctrine become familiar to preachers in their pulpits, to theologians in their academies, and to sacred writers in their works—may be considered as generally held and believed by devout Christians. (Edward Healy Thompson, pgs. 41-47.)

Many saints through the ages have understood the importance of St. Joseph's role in God's plan of salvation, his journey through the hidden life into glory, and have inspired the Church herself to proclaim *his glories*. St. Joseph's greatest glory is to have done the will of God and to have learned the "Secret of Secrets" of the interior life -- the Indwelling Presence of God. No wonder it was he who revealed that "Secret of Secrets" to Sister Mildred, and so we offer it again for your reflection. These words are recorded in a letter from Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil to her spiritual director, Father Paul F. Leibold, on April 12, 1958, describing St. Joseph's spiritual counsel to her during his first appearance on the eve of his feast day, March 19, 1958 and again thereafter.

Like His Holy Spouse, St. Joseph also never ceases to remind me of my first duty, the first duty of every soul, especially for the chosen, of living with God in the interior castle of our hearts. So on March 30th, 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 living with Him Who is within you and has made of your soul His Kingdom. There are many who know this Doctrine, but few to whom God reveals its secret operation. 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 this mysterious workings of the Divine Secret must strive to cultivate in *silence* and *humility* this love for the Eternal Being within them. We [the Holy Family] 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.”

May St. Joseph, our dear spiritual father, write these words in our hearts, on our minds and in our souls! May he pray a constant prayer for each of us, his spiritual children in the Mystical Body of Christ, to be granted *this secret of the interior life*, that great gift of *the Indwelling Presence of God* that will make of our hearts living sanctuaries, tabernacles in our own flesh for the Infinitely All Holy and Almighty God! May St. Joseph protect us, too, from the malice and hatred of men just as he protected Mary and Jesus from the malice and hatred and evils of their own day.

St. Joseph, embodiment of our heavenly Father’s love, pray for us!

**Copyright © Contemplative Sisters of the Indwelling Trinity,
Fostoria, Ohio, 2010**