

# **The First Wednesday Devotion in Honor of St. Joseph**

**My child, I desire a day to be set aside to honor my fatherhood.**

**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. The Holy Trinity desires thus to honor me that in my unique fatherhood all fatherhood might be blessed.**

**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. [our emphasis]**

**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, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, OH, Pgs. 28-29)**

These words were spoken to Sister Mildred Neuzil on the eve of St. Joseph's feast day, March 18, 1958, one and a half years after Our Lady's first appearance to Sister under the new image of Our Lady of America®. The next evening, Sister was favored with a unique and marvelous vision of the glorious St. Joseph.

**He seemed suspended, as it were, a short distance above what had the appearance of a large globe with clouds moving about it. His head was slightly raised, the eyes gazing upward as if in ecstasy. The hands were in a position similar to that of the priest during the celebration of Holy Mass, only they extended upward somewhat more. The color of his hair as also of his rather small and slightly forked beard seemed a very dark brown. His eyes resembled in color the hair and beard. He was clothed in a white robe that reached to his ankles. Over this he wore a sort of cloak which did not come together at the throat, but covering the shoulders and draped gracefully over each arm, reached to the hem of the robe.**

**His appearance, though quite youthful, gave at the same time the impression of rare maturity combined with great strength. He seemed a bit taller than medium height. The lines of his face appeared strong and purposeful, softened somewhat by a gentle serenity. I also saw his most pure heart at this time. Moreover, I saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovering above his head.**

**Standing sideways, facing each other, were two angels, one on the right, the other on the left. Each carried what appeared to be a small pillow in a satin covering, the pillow on the right bearing a gold crown, the one on the left, a gold scepter. The angels were all white, even their faces and hair. It was a beautiful whiteness that**

**reminded me of the stainlessness of heaven. Then I heard these words: “Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor.”**

St. Joseph stated, as he was appointed by God to be the special guardian of God’s Son on earth, he was also appointed to be the special protector of the Holy Father who is head of that same Son’s Mystical Body on earth. He wanted the Holy Father to know of this special protection so it would console and encourage him. He further stated:

**During the war, [WW II] little daughter, it was I who saved him from death at the hands of his enemies. [Pope Pius XII from the Nazis] Continually I watch over him and the Church, and I desire this to be acknowledged for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. (Diary, Pgs. 29-31.)**

Then on March 30, 1958, St. Joseph appeared to Sister to explain the First Wednesday devotion the Holy Trinity wishes to establish in his honor alongside the First Friday and First Saturday devotions. The Trinity has chosen the Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph to bring true peace to the world. He wills that we imitate, love and honor them, and pray for peace.

**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. (Diary, Pgs. 31-32.)**

Present with Joseph were Mary and Jesus. This is a rare occasion where Jesus appeared as a boy 15 or 16 years old, a teenager. Jesus spoke especially about the sanctification of the family while Mary and Joseph spoke about the family and the Divine Indwelling

**St. Joseph speaks of his heart, so long hidden and unknown. Why?** The early Church suffered from persecution and heresy attacking the full humanity and the full divinity of Jesus. The Church refuted these heresies by defining the doctrines of the hypostatic union of Christ’s two natures in His one Divine Person and by defining the Trinity as three distinct Persons consubstantial in the one Godhead. More heresy ensued regarding Mary’s singular privileges, including her role as Mother of God. The Council of Ephesus in 431 confirmed what the Church already believed, that Mary is indeed Theotokos, God-bearer, and that as Mother of the Sacred Humanity, she is mother of the person, not merely His human nature. Since Jesus is a divine person, she is thus truly Mother of God, the Son of God. These doctrines, the Incarnation and the Trinity, are the central doctrines of our Faith from which everything else takes its meaning. Christology and Mariology flowered in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, but the devotion to St. Joseph as a vital part in our redemption story remained obscure. Although the Church understood the intimate relationship of Joseph to Mary and to Jesus in the earthly trinity that mirrored the heavenly one, formal recognition and veneration of his privileged

position was slower to come to maturity within the Church. Josephology is a modern phenomenon quite fitting to God's hierarchy: first Jesus, then Mary, then Joseph.

Our Blessed Lady spoke to Venerable Mary of Agreda in these words:

**“My daughter, although thou hast described my spouse, Saint Joseph, as the most noble among the princes and saints of the heavenly Jerusalem; yet neither canst thou properly manifest his eminent sanctity, nor can any of the mortals know it fully before they arrive at the vision of Divinity. Then all of them will be filled with wonder and praise as the Lord will make them capable of understanding this sacrament. On the last day, when all men shall be judged, the damned will bitterly bewail their sins, which prevented them from appreciating this powerful means of their salvation, and availing themselves, as they easily could have, of this intercessor to gain the friendship of the just Judge. The whole human race has much undervalued the privileges and prerogatives conceded to my blessed spouse and they know not what his intercession with God is able to do. I assure thee, my dearest, that he is one of the greatly favored personages in the divine presence and has immense power to stay the arms of divine vengeance. ... From now on, during the rest of thy mortal life, see that thou advance in devotion and in hearty love toward my spouse, and that thou bless the Lord for thus having favored him with such high privileges and for having rejoiced me so much in the knowledge of all his excellences. In all thy necessities thou must avail thyself of his intercession. ... That which my spouse asks of the Lord in heaven is granted upon the earth and on his intercession depend many and extraordinary favors for men, if they do not make themselves unworthy of receiving them.”**

(Venerable Mary of Agreda, *THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD*, Vol. III, Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, IL, Pgs. 167-168.)

As early as the 800's Joseph was **revered as the educator and guardian of Jesus**. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century St. Joseph was **honored on March 19<sup>th</sup>** in certain countries and by 1621 that celebration was extended to the whole Church. **St. Joseph's name was added to the ancient Litany of the Saints. On December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX**, the same Pope who defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, **declared Joseph the universal patron and protector of the Church**. The Roman Missal and Breviary celebrated Joseph as Spouse of Mary and Patron of the Church on the **third Sunday after Easter**, a feast later moved to the preceding **Wednesday** and changed to **the solemnity of St. Joseph**. In 1955 Pope Pius XII, however, abolished that feast for the Church as a whole, though it is still celebrated in some countries, and established the **feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1<sup>st</sup>** to counteract the communists' May Day or Labor Day celebrations, in effect confirming St. Joseph not only as the **patron of workers but also as patron in the battle against communism**. **Pope Leo XIII's 1889 encyclical Quamquam Pluries on Devotion to St. Joseph consecrated the month of March to St. Joseph** and fostered an understanding of St. Joseph's holiness next in kind to Mary's. Pope John XXIII added Joseph's name to the Canon of the Mass. St. Joseph is truly a man wrapped in silence, as not one word he uttered is recorded in Scripture and little is said about him. While the Church has always recognized Mary's pre-eminence above the angels as Virgin-Mother of Jesus, it has been slower to recognize Joseph's dignity above the angels as Virgin-Father of Jesus. In nature, angels, as pure spirits, are higher than human

creatures of body **and** spirit, but Mary and Joseph's unique roles in the Messianic work of Jesus places them both above the angels in the order of grace and dignity. In **Redemptoris Custos, Guardian of the Redeemer**, St. John Paul II extols the splendor of Joseph's position next to Mary in the hypostatic order of grace. Mary and Joseph were the two essential human beings needed to bring God into our world and into the human family. Jesus needed a mother **and a father** in His earthly sojourn **according to the decree His heavenly Father ordained for the human family**. As Mary is spiritual mother of the Church, the Mystical Body of Jesus, so Joseph is spiritual father of the Church and of the Mystical Body. The Church recognizes Joseph as the protector of the family and guardian of virgins for he protected the Holy Family and guarded the two most sublime virgins ever known, Jesus and Mary. He is patron of workers because he ennobled labor providing for the Holy Family. He is patron of the dying because who could better aid us than he who died in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

**“Some saints are privileged to extend to us their patronage with particular efficacy in certain needs, but not in others; but our holy patron, St. Joseph, has the power to assist us in all cases, in every necessity, in every undertaking.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) “Our Lord would have us to understand that as He was subject to St. Joseph on earth—for St. Joseph, bearing the title of father and being His guardian, could command Him—so now in Heaven Our Lord grants all his petitions.” (St. Teresa of Avila)**

In his beautiful book, **JOSEPH, SHADOW OF THE FATHER**, Father Andrew Doze describes Joseph's role as the shadow of the Father, equivalent to the cloud in which God was present to His Chosen People in the desert while remaining hidden. Joseph is the sign of the Father's Presence in that paradise on earth, the little home of Nazareth. He is the Face of the Father for Jesus and Mary to contemplate, the one through whom, with headship in the Holy Family as the Father has headship in the Holy Trinity, the Will of the Father on Jesus' behalf would be carried out. In the creation story, on the 4<sup>th</sup> day, the middle of the week, God made the sun and the moon and the stars, those great luminaries so essential for human existence that nations often worshipped them. Joseph is the one the Father chose, that splendid Light in our vast darkness, the one who clouds and hides and conceals the great mysteries surrounding Jesus and His Virgin-Mother until the appointed time to reveal them. Joseph is in the middle of God's saving action as surely as Wednesday is in the middle of the week.

Is it any wonder then, that St. Joseph should tell Sister Mildred that God and Our Lady wish that he, so long hidden, should now be exalted? Surely God wants this First Wednesday devotion to the pure heart of St. Joseph to thrive, completing that trinity of devotions: First Friday to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, First Saturday to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and First Wednesday to St. Joseph!

**“Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor.”**

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