

Meditations: Third Sunday of Saint Joseph

Third reflection for the seven Sundays of Saint Joseph. The topics are: Saint Joseph, Jesus' teacher; Jesus learned the Law of Moses from Joseph; Joseph experienced the tenderness of God.

WATCHING children grow up is one of life's greatest joys. Saint Joseph experienced this joy when seeing how Jesus "increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (*Lk* 2:52). The principal mission of fathers is to prepare their children

so that they, in turn, may find and develop their own mission in life. Through his tender care, Joseph helped Jesus to take his first steps in life. During both his hidden life and public life, “Jesus must have resembled Joseph: in his way of working, in the features of his character, in his way of speaking. Jesus’ realism, his eye for detail, the way he sat at table and broke bread, his preference for using everyday situations to give doctrine – all this reflects his childhood and the influence of Joseph.”[1]

“In the synagogue, during the praying of the Psalms, Joseph would surely have heard again and again that the God of Israel is a God of tender love.”[2] And that was how he dealt with Jesus as his father. The Holy Patriarch most likely did not accompany his son when the coming of God’s Kingdom was made known publicly: when many disciples began

following Him, during the miraculous cures, or when the crowds listened spellbound to the words of the man he had seen grow up. Saint Joseph's role in raising Jesus took place in the discreet atmosphere of the family home, a hidden role but so fruitful and filled with love. "Jesus who is man, who speaks with the accent of a particular district of Israel, who resembles a carpenter called Joseph, is the Son of God. And who can teach God anything? But he is also truly man and lives a normal life: first, as a child, then as a boy helping in Joseph's workshop, finally as a grown man in the prime of life."[3] We see Joseph's tenderness reflected in his Son, who grew up in his home and so greatly resembled him.

TEACHING the law of Moses was both an obligation and a privilege for the father of a family in Israel. Joseph had the unique task of

teaching the Messiah the history of Israel and the faith of the Covenant. Mary and her spouse saw that Jesus was a child like so many others, but they also realized that all the mystery of God dwelt in Him. They were entrusted with the responsibility of calling the second Person of the Blessed Trinity made man “Jesus” and teaching him the traditions of the Chosen People. The prophet Hosea writes: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son ... I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love ... I bent down to them and fed them” (*Hos* 11:1-4). Christian tradition has seen in this prophecy a reference to Christ, but it can also be seen as a reference to Mary and Joseph. God’s love for Israel is compared to the love of a father and a mother for their child. It was God who always watched over his Son,

but He did so through the Holy Family. God is the one who teaches, but He does so through men.

Pious parents in Nazareth passed on to their children the first rudiments of the faith: “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and reject not your mother’s teaching for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck” (*Prov 1:8-9*). The child Jesus engraved on his heart the teachings and instructions he received from Joseph and Mary. This is what today we call “family catechesis” – parents passing on the faith through their example and words. “The home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbor.”[4] It is in the intimacy of a family where God, imperceptibly, first enters to form part of the children’s life. Those first prayers and examples of piety that we inherit

always remain with us in the depths of our soul.

MARY AND JOSEPH not only taught Christ the customs of the Mosaic Law. In discovering the mystery of God in their Son, they realized that they themselves would learn a lot from Jesus. Saint Luke in his gospel tells us twice that Mary kept in her heart and meditated on the deeds and words of her Son. How important it is to learn how to watch and listen, as our Lady and Saint Joseph did!

Seeing Jesus, how often the Holy Patriarch must have reflected with amazement: how good God is! How loving and tender! How patient and near to us! Patience and understanding are key characteristics that every father – and in general, every teacher – needs, especially when facing their own defects and those of others. “We

must learn to look upon our weaknesses with tender mercy. The Evil One makes us see and condemn our frailty, whereas the Spirit brings it to light with tender love.

Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us.”[5]

We need to learn to see all the positive things in ourselves and in others, for that is how God draws close to us. “God’s truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us. That truth always presents itself to us like the merciful father in Jesus’ parable (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). It comes out to meet us, restores our dignity, sets us back on our feet, and rejoices for us, for, as the father says: ‘This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’.”[6] Nothing is more effectively spurs us to strive to improve our conduct than another person’s encouragement, a kind

word, understanding in the face of our weakness.

Saint Joseph learned from his Son, who was God, to see the world with compassion and tenderness. As Saint Josemaria said: “Joseph had a place deep in Jesus’ heart. Mary was his Mother, whom He loved madly. So let us have a great devotion to Saint Joseph, a tender, refined, affectionate devotion. We call him our Father and Lord: so let us go to him as children, constantly! And through him, to Mary, dialoguing with both of them. Have you seen those representations of the Holy Family with the Child in the center, our Lady to the right and Saint Joseph to the left, all three holding hands? Well, this time we are the ones who take hold of the hands of Mary and Joseph, so they will bring us to Jesus.”[7]

[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 55.

[2] Francis, Apost. Letter, *Patris corde*, no. 2.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 55.

[4] Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Amoris laetitia*, no. 287.

[5] Francis, Apost. Letter, *Patris corde*, no. 2.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family get-together, 27 September 1973.