

With a Father's Heart: In Joseph's Workshop

In this year of Saint Joseph, here are some personal reflections on how Joseph and Jesus would have worked alongside each other, when Jesus was an adolescent.

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Joseph opens the door to his workshop. The pleasant scent of fresh wood shavings welcomes him. A small vase with flowers is on the

bench, beneath the window. Joseph smiles. Mary never fails to provide a loving touch.

The carpenter puts on one of the two leather aprons hanging by the door. Then, laying hold of a large wooden plank, he places it on the work bench. His expert eyes run over the two square meters of lumber. He has been working at this trade for many years, but he is still moved by the possibility of transforming a piece of wood into a door or a cradle. It is as though Yahweh deigned to let him share in his work of Creation.

With a bit of charcoal, he makes some marks on the board. After hesitating a moment, he rounds off the corners of the rectangle he has drawn. Susanna has a small son, so a table with sharp edges could be dangerous. Jesus himself when a young child had almost hit his forehead running near the work

bench. But Joseph had managed to grab him before he hit one of the corners. Recalling this scene makes him smile: a carpenter, protecting the Son of God. Yahweh must have a sense of humor.

The workshop door opens and his Son enters, carrying a pile of wood. After greeting his father, Jesus leaves his load at the back of the room, not forgetting to set aside some firewood Mary had requested for the kitchen today.

Then Jesus takes the second apron and begins working. Joseph discreetly raises his eyes from his work. The Child is now almost so tall that he doesn't need an extra knot to tie the apron around his neck. The carpenter sighs: how quickly these fifteen years have gone by! It seems only a short time ago when Jesus was taking his first steps, and now he was

almost ready to replace him in the workshop.

Jesus sits down at a small bench and begins to sand down pieces of wood. As he works, he wrinkles his brow, concentrating on his job. Joseph smiles to himself, recalling how Mary's face often has the same expression when she is working.

The morning goes by quickly. A few hours after noon the door opens again. Joseph and Jesus both look up from their work and see Mary watching them with love in her eyes: "Dinner is ready." Both quickly hang up their apron; after hours of hard work these words are very welcome. "There are many good reasons to honor Saint Joseph, and to learn from his life. He was a man of strong faith. He earned a living for his family – Jesus and Mary – with his own hard work" (*The Forge* 552).

In the afternoon, Joseph and Jesus return to the workshop. Even though it is still August, the workshop is chilly. Father and Son continue with their work, side by side. At one point Joseph says: “Better to do it this way; it’s easier.” The angels watching over them in the workshop are surely amazed at this mystery.

The shadows from the tools lengthen as the last rays of the sun enter through the open window. Joseph puts away the pieces he has been working on. In a few days, Susanna’s table will be ready. Jesus continues absorbed in his work. After hanging up his apron at the door, Joseph walks over to his Son. As he watches Jesus working he is overcome with emotion. Long-treasured memories pass through his mind: Mary’s joyful look when he told her about that first dream with the angel; the defenseless Child lying in the manger in Bethlehem: the first time Jesus

called him *abba*, “father”; the arrival of the Magi; taking the Child for a walk along the Nile; the day they found Jesus in the Temple after searching for three days.

The carpenter, with expert eyes and hands hardened by years of work, smiles at the work of God made man. He smiles at his Son. The carpenter from Nazareth has spent years working with wood. He is an expert in the construction of doors and tables, and knows exactly how to cut and polish each piece. But in these last fifteen years he has learned from his spouse a much greater secret. He has learned to treasure everything that happens to his family in his heart, the tender heart of a father.

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