

Meditations: Second Sunday of Saint Joseph

The second reflection for the seven Sundays of Saint Joseph. The topics are: Saint Joseph, beloved father; model for fathers; and patron of the family.

CHRIST'S PRAYER in Gethsemane shows us the nearness and power of God: "*Abba*, Father, for you all things are possible!" (*Mk* 14:35). We can consider how Jesus, years before, would have addressed Joseph, his father on earth, in the same way: *Abba*, Poppa, Dad. Thus the

patriarch, in his humanity equal to ours, is in a certain sense an icon of the fatherhood of God. This is something popular piety has understood down through the centuries, and artists too have represented Saint Joseph with a face like God the Father's.

Saint Josemaría pointed out that God himself was the first to show Joseph a special love. When preparing Jesus' earthly father, as he did with Mary, God chose a special man, a just man whose holiness attracted others and filled his surroundings with peace. "Sacred Scripture tells us very little about Saint Joseph. It seems that he had a great desire to remain hidden, and God granted him this beautiful virtue ... Immediately after Our Lady, I am sure that Joseph comes next in holiness. And Saint Joseph has dealt with Our Lady and the Child God so closely that even the liturgy becomes – how shall I put it – affectionate.

Saint Joseph is adorned with marvelous virtues. He must have been charming, with a character filled with fortitude, with strength and gentleness at the same time.”[1]

It is very significant that in the genealogy of Jesus Christ given us in Saint Matthew's gospel, the thread uniting the generations is fatherhood: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, etc. But in the last link, the evangelist breaks the pattern by saying: “Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus called Christ was born” (*Mt* 1:16). Saint Joseph's fatherhood does not come from begetting Jesus, but from his identity as the husband of the Virgin Mary. Saint Joseph has “always been venerated as a father by the Christian people”[2] precisely because he was the beloved spouse of our Mother. The beauty and greatness of marriage is the

foundation for his paternity. And that father and husband, beloved by so many of the faithful, can ask us: *Do you trust in my care for you? Do you trust in my desire to bring you closer to God's love?*

“JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus” (*Mt 1:20*). These brief words of the evangelist reveal three things: first, that the divine choice has a personal character (manifested in the use of the proper names “Joseph” and “Mary”); then, the relationship that will unite them (“your wife”); and, third, the responsibility God confers on the patriarch (“you are to name him”). In Mary and Joseph’s life everything is related to Jesus; everything is ordered towards him. Their marital love means that they

look at their Son together, in order to share as father and mother in the work of redemption. Most Christians live their faith precisely in this way, within marriage, because marriage is a vocation, a way to look at and go towards Christ.

On one occasion, a widowed mother asked Saint Josemaría how to fill the void left by her husband's absence.

“Be very devoted to Saint Joseph,” the founder of Opus Dei replied.

“Saint Joseph brought forward the family of Nazareth, and he will bring yours forward too. Get a small image of Saint Joseph; have devotion to him, and piously light a candle to him from time to time, like our mothers and grandmothers did. All the old devotions are still relevant; not one of them is out of date.”^[3]

Centuries ago, Saint Teresa encouraged all souls to trust unreservedly in Saint Joseph: “I would like to persuade everyone to

be devoted to this glorious saint, because of my great experience of the good things he obtains from God.”[4]

The holy patriarch, who received the mission of raising the Son of God, who took hold of his hand and accompanied his first steps in so many areas of life, can be a support for all families and every apostle. Saint Joseph taught the Child Jesus how to relate to other people, how to work, how to listen to Sacred Scripture in the synagogue every Sabbath... “Joseph’s mission is certainly unique and unrepeatable, because Jesus is absolutely unique. And yet, in his guardianship of Jesus, teaching him to grow in age, wisdom and grace, he is a model for every educator, especially every father.”[5]

SAINT JOSEPH has his own unique and irreplaceable role in the Holy Family. "The incarnation of the Word in a human family, in Nazareth, by its very newness changed the history of the world. We need to enter into the mystery of Jesus' birth, into that 'yes' given by Mary to the message of the angel, when the Word was conceived in her womb, as well as the 'yes' of Joseph, who gave a name to Jesus and watched over Mary."[6] The patriarch, through that special call to form the family of Jesus, learns to be a father and helps prepare the Son to fulfill his mission. And he is always at his spouse's side, supporting Mary in her task of being the mother of God. Hence Saint Joseph is also the patron of the birth and growth of our own families.

"The family is certainly a grace of God, through which shines forth what He himself is: Love. An entirely free love that sustains boundless

fidelity, even in times of difficulty or dejection.”[7] As Saint John Paul II pointed out, the future of humanity passes through the family. For it is in the family where the foundation for a happy life is built – although God can use other paths, because each person is unique. So we ask Saint Joseph, patron of the family, to help us to live and show others its beauty, following the example set in Nazareth.

“Do not be afraid to invite Jesus to your wedding feast, to invite Him to our home, that He may be with us and safeguard the family. And we mustn’t be afraid to also invite his Mother Mary! When Christians marry ‘in the Lord,’ they are transformed into an effective sign of God’s love. Christians do not marry for themselves alone: they marry in the Lord for the good of the entire community, of society as a whole.”[8] Each day we address Saint Joseph,

spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
with this petition: *God made you
father and lord of all his household.
Pray for us!*

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[1] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family get-together, 10 July 1974.

[2] Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 1.

[3] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a family get-together, 26 June 1974.

[4] Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Book of My Life*, 6, 7.

[5] Pope Francis, General audience, 19 March 2014.

[6] Pope Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Amoris laetitia*, no. 65.

[7] Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 28 December 2008.

[8] Pope Francis, General audience, 29 April 2015.

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