

Faith Alive!

Reflections on Spirituality and Spiritual Life

SAINT JOSEPH: THE MYSTERY AND ENDURING RELEVANCY

Who is this man, Joseph of Nazareth, one of the most significant figures of the New Testament? We recognize his image in statues, artwork, and stained glass, often as an elderly man wearing a robe and carrying a flowering staff in one hand and a small child in the other. Sometimes he is depicted as a carpenter with the tools of his trade. One can find these images in churches, on medals and holy cards, in children's stories, and in depictions of the nativity scene. He is called saint, protector, guardian, father, laborer, man of deep faith and courage, and faithful servant. There is even a popular superstition that burying a statue of him in the yard of a house on the market will facilitate, if not guarantee, its sale. Everyone seems to know who Saint Joseph is and to believe that there is much written about him in the Bible

The truth is, there are very few references to Saint Joseph in Scripture. Not a single spoken word of his is reported, there is no mention of him prior to his betrothal to Mary, and, except for the early years of the life of Jesus, there is no other mention of him, even concerning his death. We are told that Saint Joseph accepted his role as father, protected and defended the child, provided for Him and His mother, taught Him a trade, and educated Him in religious observances. Saint Joseph's story in Scripture ended when Jesus began to preach and teach. He was not a witness to the crucifixion, and, his purpose having been fulfilled, most probably had died by then.

And yet, over two thousand years later, Saint Joseph remains one of the key figures

of the New Testament. Theologians, scholars, historians, popes, religious and laity alike have written extensively about him and pray to him for everything from a happy marriage and the blessings of children to comfort in affliction and a peaceful death. Although so little is actually known about him, it is clear why the Father chose him to be the guardian and protector of His Son, Jesus Christ, and His mother, Mary.

In order to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, the Messiah had to have a human heritage. Joseph, being of the house of David, passed that descent to Jesus, again in fulfillment of the prophecies.

The Gospels differ in the accounts of the birth and early life of Jesus. Matthew and especially Luke provide many details about Saint Joseph, but the Gospel of Mark makes no mention of him at all. John's Gospel refers to Saint Joseph by name only twice and does not deal directly with the conception and birth of Christ. Mark associates Jesus with the town of Nazareth and the title of carpenter. Since all of the other Gospels associate Joseph with Nazareth, it is an indication of the connection between Saint Joseph and Jesus. More than likely, Joseph would have taught Jesus his trade, as would be customary.

John's Gospel places emphasis on the fact that it would be unlikely for the Messiah to come from such humble parentage and from a place like Nazareth. John does not discuss whether Saint Joseph was Jesus' real father, but does indicate that the child raised as the son of Joseph of Nazareth was the Son of God.

Matthew and Luke differ in their accounts of the conception of Jesus and the annunciations by the angels to Mary and Joseph of what the Father was asking of them. They also differ in their chronologies of when the visit of the magi, the flight into Egypt, and the death of Herod occurred. They do, however, both agree that the birthplace of Jesus Christ was Bethlehem and that He was raised in Nazareth.

Matthew's Gospel makes Saint Joseph a key figure, "a just man" (Mt. 1:19). He is mentioned by name or as a father by Mary repeatedly. Although he is never directly called Mary's husband, Joseph is presented as the protective father of Jesus.

Christians are familiar with the story of the Annunciation to Mary and of the angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph in a dream. But closer reflection on those separate, extraordinary events points out what faith and courage it must have taken to accept what was being asked of them. Mary was asked to accept being the mother of God; Joseph was asked to accept a pregnant wife who is bearing the Savior. It must have seemed overwhelming. And yet they both abandoned themselves to God's will and lived quiet, humble lives, without perhaps truly understanding what their lives were to be.

Saint Joseph is the greatest example of fatherhood in all of history. He accepted his role as the guardian and protector of the Son of God and His mother. His covenant with God was the fulfillment of the one made to Abraham. Saint Joseph bridges the Old and New Testaments. "...God [gave Joseph], through Mary, His own beloved Son to be *his* son also. For if Mary, his spouse, gives her son to him, it is so that He be his son also. Mary gives to Joseph all that the father has given to her" (Philippe, 2010).

He serves today as the example of what a husband and father should be. The accounts

in Scripture of the life of Jesus Christ point to Saint Joseph's strength, courage, faith, hard work, and love of family, qualities that hold great relevance in today's complicated and troubled world. We should turn to Saint Joseph as we live out our lives of faith. We can ask for faith and courage in the face of trials we do not fully comprehend. We can ask for the grace to accept God's will. We can ask for blessings of our labors and, when our time on earth comes to a close, we can ask for a peaceful death.

As evidence of Saint Joseph's importance as patron of the Universal Church, on May 1, 2013, Pope Francis directed that his name be included in Eucharistic Prayers 2, 3, and 4 of the Mass.

- Written by Kathleen Gilmour

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Scriptural References

Little is known about St. Joseph. There are sixteen references to Joseph in the Gospels. The Scriptural references are as follows:

- Matthew 1:16; 1:18-25; 2:13-15; 2:19-23; 13:55
- Mark 6:13
- Luke 1:27; 2:4; 2:16; 2:22; 2:23; 2:41-52; 3:23; 4:22
- John 1:46; 6:42

What scripture says of him is that he was the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.

For Further Study

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Feast Days for Saint Joseph

March 19th - Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin

May 1st - Saint Joseph the Worker

Patron Saint

Saint Joseph is the Patron Saint of the Catholic Church, families, homes, fathers, workers, pastry chefs, the dying, and several countries.

Prayers through the intercession of Saint Joseph

There are many different prayers and translations of the prayers to Saint Joseph. For your reflection, here are a few of the prayers:

Memorare to St. Joseph

Remember, O most pure spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, my great protector, Saint Joseph, that no one ever had recourse to your protection, or implored your aid without obtaining relief. Confiding therefore in your goodness, I come before you. Do not turn down my petitions, foster father of the Redeemer, but graciously receive them. Amen.

Protector of Homes

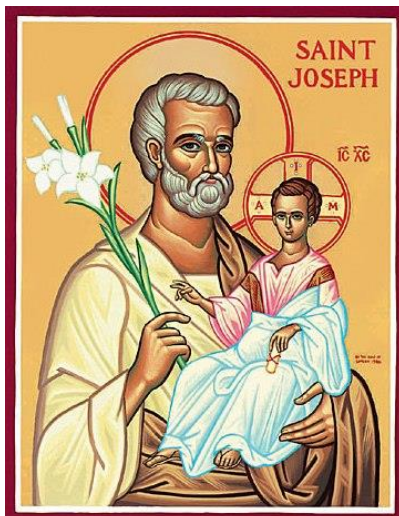
St. Joseph, protect our home. Pour forth from heaven blessings on our family. Remain in our midst. Help us to live in love and harmony, in peace and joy. May the wholesome fear of God strengthen us that virtue may adorn what we do and our way may lead to heaven.

To you this day I give the key to our dwelling place. Lock out all things that could do us harm. Lock my home and my loved ones with me in the hearts of Jesus and Mary. This I beg of you, that our days may be like your days in the holy home at Nazareth. Amen.

For Purity

Saint Joseph, father and guardian of virgins, to whose faithful keeping Christ Jesus, innocence itself, and Mary, the virgin of virgins was entrusted, I pray and beseech you by that twofold and most precious charge, by Jesus and Mary, to save me from all uncleanness, to keep my mind untainted, my heart pure, and my body chaste; and to help me always to serve Jesus and Mary in perfect chastity. Amen.

(Manual of Prayers for the Pontifical North American College, 1998)



For Employment

Dear Saint Joseph, you were yourself once faced with the responsibility of providing the necessities of life for Jesus and Mary. Look down with fatherly compassion upon me in my anxiety over my present inability to support my family. Please help me to find gainful employment very soon, so that this heavy burden of concern will be lifted from my heart and that I am soon able to provide for those whom God has entrusted to my care. Help us to guard against bitterness and discouragement, so that we may emerge from this trial spiritually enriched and with even greater blessings from God. Amen.

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