

ST. JOSEPH: GUARDIAN OF THE REDEEMER

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

We have just a few weeks left in this marvelous Year of St. Joseph. As you know, that year ends on December 8. It has been wonderful meditating on different aspects of the life of St. Joseph and taking advantage of insights of some great, great authors. In this podcast, we will pray using the text from St. John Paul II from 1989 - the Holy Father wrote an Apostolic exhortation that he entitled *Guardian of the Redeemer*. The subtitle is *On the person and mission of St. Joseph and the life of Christ and of the Church*. What follows is a condensation of some key insights in the document. Hopefully, these minutes of prayer together will be the stimulus for you to download the Apostolic exhortation and work your way through it as a way of bringing to a close this Year of St. Joseph.

We can take a look at three key themes: the obedience of faith, work as an expression of love, and the primacy of the interior life. Before we dive into the obedience of faith, it's worthwhile pointing out the goal that the Holy Father had in writing this document. He wanted to offer us some reflections concerning the one into whose custody God entrusted his most precious treasures. The goal is not only for us to turn to Joseph with greater fervor and to invoke his patronage with trust, but also to keep before our eyes his humble, mature way of serving and of taking part in the plan of salvation. That stated goal helps us tremendously to focus on the fact that we- each one of us has as our main mission to continue the work of the redemption. Everything else in our life needs to contribute to that all important goal.

Right away, the Holy Father points to the obedience of faith at the heart of Our Lady's pilgrimage of faith, a pilgrimage that was joined by Joseph. Mary preceded all of us on this pilgrimage. It's a very powerful image, to imagine life, going through so many different episodes, the life of the Holy Family in our own life, episodes where, at times that faith is absolutely necessary because we can end up seeing a lot of darkness. When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, the moment of the Visitation, Elizabeth exclaimed, "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." If Elizabeth said of the Redeemer's mother, *blessed is she who believed*, in a certain sense this blessed- this blessedness can be referred to Joseph as well, since he responded positively to the Word of God when it was communicated to him. Joseph is the first to be placed by God on the path of Mary's pilgrimage of faith, and he joined that pilgrimage through his attitude of obedience and total acceptance of God's will. We read in the very first

chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel: "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife."

Now, we often have to reflect on the fact that these scenes are so familiar to us that we could all too easily take them for granted. That's why, in our own prayer, we have to use our imagination in order to appreciate how truly heroic this attitude, this reaction, of Joseph was, this attitude of obedience and total acceptance of God's will. He woke from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, took Mary as his wife, and in this way he showed a readiness of will like Mary's. With regard to what Joseph- what God asked of him through the angel. What Joseph did united him in an altogether special way to the faith of Mary. The Second Vatican Council teaches us: "The obedience of faith must be given to God as he reveals himself. By this obedience of faith, man freely commits himself entirely to God, making the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him."

Now, obviously, that's an awful lot to read. One reason why it's important for each one of you to download this document and read it at your own speed, because in this passage, the Holy Father quotes the Second Vatican Council at a key moment in this document of explaining the essence of the obedience of faith, that when God reveals himself, the only response on the part of the human being that makes any sense is to obey. And by that obedience of faith, we commit ourselves entirely to God, making the full submission of our intellect and will to God who reveals. This statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth. We know that it's one thing to say spiritual things or to think spiritual things, but it is quite another to follow through with deeds.

St. John Paul points out that the gospels do not record any word ever spoken by Joseph. However, the silence of Joseph has its own special eloquence. At those moments, when he was told God's will by an angel, he said nothing. Instead, he simply did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. Thanks to that silence, we can understand the truth of the gospel's judgment, that he was a just man. In our own prayer we can ask Joseph to help us because, so often, when we are asked or confronted- confronted with something- a difficult situation, we can end up simply complaining, becoming bitter about a whole series of human responses whereas we know from our own prayer together, it's far more interesting for us to step back, pray about those situations, and ask the Lord to help us to- to grow in this or that virtue through them.

The Holy Father then turns to work as an expression of love. Work was the daily expression of love in the life of the Family of Nazareth. The Gospel specifies the kind of work Joseph did in order to support his family. He was a carpenter. Let us use our imagination to picture that life, day after day for so many years, there in that modest workshop in Nazareth - Joseph passing on to Jesus all of his knowledge as a carpenter, Joseph and Jesus enjoying family life with Our Lady, with Mary. "Human work, and especially manual labor, receive special prominence in the gospel. Along with the humanity of the Son of God, work too has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation and has also been redeemed in a special way. At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption. In the human growth of Jesus, in wisdom, age and grace, the virtue of industriousness played

a notable role, since work is a human good which transforms nature and makes man, in a sense, more human. The importance of work and human life demands that its meaning be known and assimilated in order to come closer to God, to- to participate in his salvific plan for man and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives.”

How important it is that we discover the meaning of work. That it's not just getting things done in order to get them done, but it is our way, as the Pope says here, to come closer to God, to participate in God's salvific plan to deepen our friendship with Christ in our life. “What is crucially important here is the sanctification of daily life. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies. He is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things - it is enough to have the common, simple, and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic.”

Well, finally, the primacy of the interior life. This subtitle rings true, naturally, especially if we think that St. Joseph was referred to by Teresa of Avila as the father of the interior life, the master of the interior life. The Holy Father says, “The same aura of silence- same aura of silence- that envelops everything else about Joseph also shrouds his work as a carpenter in the house of Nazareth. It is, however, a silence that reveals in a special way the inner portrait of the man. The Gospels speak exclusively of what Joseph did. Still, they allow us to discover in his actions, shrouded in silence as they are, an aura of deep contemplation. After all, St. Joseph was in daily contact with the mystery, hidden from ages past, who dwelt under his roof. This explains, for example, why St. Teresa of Jesus- Teresa of Avila, the great reformer of the Carmelites, promoted the renewal of veneration to St. Joseph in western Christianity.” It was, by the way, St. Teresa who said *St. Joseph, my father and lord*, a phrase that St. Josemaria loved.

“The total sacrifice that Joseph lived, surrendering his entire existence, to the demands of God's will, that sacrifice becomes understandable only in the light of his profound interior life. It was from this interior life that very singular commands and consolations came, bringing him also the logic and strength that belonged to simple and clear souls, giving him the power of making great decisions, such as the decision to put his liberty immediately at the disposition of the divine designs.”

Now, you may be thinking that the Holy Father's style was very dense, and that is true - all the more reason to take your own- to get your own copy of this document and make your way through it, because there's so much here. For example, in this final passage that we just read, thanks to our interior life, to a- an ongoing prayer life, we acquire great simplicity. We end up seeing with greater clarity those things that are really and truly important and we acquire the capacity to put aside those things that may be appealing, but really, in the final analysis, have no interest at all to God.

Well, we finish by turning to St. Joseph - we've been talking about him and to him during all this meditation. But Joseph, we ask you, we ask you to help us in these final weeks of this year dedicated to you. Help us to grow in this attitude of obedience of faith. Help us to turn our work every single day into one long, extended

prayer. And you, the master of the interior life, intercede for us so that we come to really and truly grow on the inside.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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