

OBEDIENCE AND LOVE FOR FULFILLING THE WILL

OF THE FATHER IN ST. JOSEPH

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From the recount of salvation history since the Old Testament God began to prepare His people's hearts for the fulfillment of his promise of the coming Messiah. From the tribe of Judah, down the lineage of David, God chose Saint Joseph to be a participant of His great plan of salvation, to be the guardian of the mysteries of the Incarnation, to know the unfathomable secrets of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In the first two chapters of the Gospel according to Mathew, the apostle shows how St. Joseph brings his descendants to the promised fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. "The husband of Mary,"¹ Joseph, is present "when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.....for thus it has been written through the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"² Joseph is also present in the flight to Egypt where he took refuge with Mary and the baby Jesus.³ We also learn that St. Joseph fulfills God's desire of making him a co-participant in the plan of salvation by completing the significant task of officially inserting the name of 'Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth' in the registry of the Roman Empire and thus he can claim to "what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazorean',"⁴ thus showing the world that our Savior of the world was of the human race. Also, St. Joseph was an eyewitness when Jesus shed blood in the ceremony of the circumcision, where he gives Jesus his name, the name which had been given to him by the angel and which proclaims his child's mission as Savior. It is this model for fathers, husbands, priests and religious, patron of the universal Church and of workers whom God chose to be a custodian of God's treasures- the Immaculate Virgin Mary and the Word made flesh Jesus Christ, making him the second most important saint after our Blessed Mother, Queen of all the saints. It is St. Joseph who is closest to Jesus and our Blessed Mother and who, in his roles as spouse of the Mother of God, protector and guardian of Christ and the Church, and custodian of the Two Hearts gives testimony to the obedience in and love for fulfilling the will of the Father.



God entrusted to St. Joseph of Nazareth the "safekeeping of the Eternal Word, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary."⁵ God adorned St. Joseph with all the graces he needed to offer himself in total obedience to God's divine plan and thus fulfill his vocation of husband of the Mother of God and foster father of Jesus at the service of the Church. Although he did not take part fully in the mystery of the Incarnation, he was the "wise and faithful servant, whom the Lord has put in charge of his household"⁶ and who, with obedient docility, accepted the will of the Lord completely in the eyes of faith since God's plan for his life went beyond human understanding. Before the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to reveal God's will for him, Joseph was determined to avoid denouncing his wife in public. In his audience that took part in the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Servant of God John Paul II explains this "just" characteristic of St. Joseph as an "attitude of total openness to the will of the heavenly Father. He awaited the call from on High and in silence respected the mystery, letting himself be guided by the Lord."⁷ When the angel of the Lord appeared to him and asked him to be the husband of Mary even though it seemed to go against the law, Joseph listened attentively and "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife,"⁸ echoing in a silent and simple way Mary's fiat in the Annunciation, the decisive moment for all of humanity. In those few words Joseph's reality changes and he begins his silent journey of everyday service as the responsible, humble and faithful husband capable of a chaste and supernatural love for his wife, Mary, and guardian of the Redeemer and Savior of the world yet to be born, leaving for all of humanity a model of life in faith.

St. Joseph was indeed full of faith because he openly submitted himself to obediently accept what he had longed to see but had not seen and longed to hear but had not heard⁹ until he was privileged to see and hear when God chose to reveal it to him. It is this kind of faith, a harmonious synthesis of the virtue of obedience

that brings St. Joseph to the generous docility of his flesh, to offer himself completely to the will of the Father and thus show not love of himself but love of God and love of and for the other. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Custos* which was dedicated to Joseph, the Guardian of the Redeemer, Servant of God John Paul II explains that "Through his complete self-sacrifice, Joseph expressed his generous love for the Mother of God, and gave her a husband's "gift of self." Even though he decided to draw back so as not to interfere in the plan of God which was coming to pass in Mary, Joseph obeyed the explicit command of the angel and took Mary into his home, while respecting the fact that she belonged exclusively to God.¹⁰ In his own "Annunciation" without saying a word, St. Joseph simply takes action and thus cooperates in the great mystery of salvation. What a movement of love to the extreme that made St. Joseph accept God's mystery of wanting the Mother of God to be virgin and at the same time be married to St. Joseph, a man here on earth. As our Mother foundress has taught us:

"Every heart open with humility and with a generous availability to the designs of the Heart of God is the foundation upon which great works of love and grace are built. The Lord chooses, throughout the history of the Church, humble and simple hearts to bring about his designs. The only thing that God needs to enter into history and to powerfully carry out its plan of salvation is a heart totally opened to the will of God... The fiat of the human heart is the only necessary condition for God to be able to carry out great works of grace in each moment of history."¹¹

And what graces of obedience and faith that God granted St. Joseph to understand this in his heart.

Just as St. Joseph was obedient to the Father and showed love in fulfilling His will as the chaste husband of the Mother of God, St. Joseph also lived obediently and lovingly in his task, entrusted to him by God, of protecting and safeguarding Christ and his Body, the Church. After he gives God his fiat in taking Mary as his wife, St. Joseph is left with her care and that of the Redeemer who is only an infant. In the next dream that St. Joseph has, the angel directs him to take his family and flee since the child's life was in danger of being killed.¹² Joseph does as he is told and flees to Egypt where the angel of the Lord appears to him in a third dream and directs him to Nazareth, the town that would witness the careful upbringing of the Redeemer by his foster father St. Joseph.¹³ Once again we see how St. Joseph denies himself, allows himself to be guided by a mysterious plan that his intellect does not understand and that does not go with his will, thus offering himself out of love and obedience for the Other. It is in the poverty of our will where we find our richness, as John the Baptist reminds us that we must decrease so that He may increase.¹⁴ It is this richness that St. Joseph found daily during his upbringing and daily devotion of the Savior alongside his wife Mary, the Mother of God. It is because St. Joseph so lovingly and obediently persevered in this mysterious mission, providing for all of the necessities of his family, that Pope Leo XIII proclaimed St. Joseph as the paternal protector of the life of the Church, the earthly Family of God, in his encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* on August 15th of 1889, feast of the Assumption of Our Blessed Mother. By doing this, the Vicar of Christ acknowledged that God had put St. Joseph, the holy patriarch in charge of his household, the Church.

Once St. Joseph had settled with his family in Nazareth, both Mary and Joseph are left "at the heart of the mystery hidden for ages in the mind of God, a mystery which had taken on flesh: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us'(Jn 1:14)"¹⁵ Although St. Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus, his virginal fatherhood shows in a greater way the importance of his role in Jesus' upbringing for the hidden thirty years of Jesus' life in Nazareth. Scripture teaches us that Joseph is the father of Jesus because he is Mary's lawful husband. Even though Mary conceived virginally through the action of the Holy Spirit Jesus is the son of Joseph and Mary as is evident when Jesus stays behind in the temple in Jerusalem after the Passover feast: "When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"¹⁶ In this simple exchange between Mother and Son Joseph's vocation is revealed, that of his "fatherhood." Mary refers to Joseph as the father of Jesus but Jesus reminds both of them about the priority of God the Father to whom Jesus refers in his response to his Mother. Joseph, then, as foster father of Jesus realizes this and recognizes his role of dedicating his life to serve the Son of the Father and his Mother, Mary, becoming one of the first disciples of Jesus. This is the mission that he continues to carry out for Christ's mystical Body, the Church, interceding for Her and providing his care and attention for Her needs in obedience and love for the Father. As Servant of God John

Paul II explains: "His fatherhood is expressed concretely in his having made his life a service ... to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it; ... in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house."¹⁷ And this is the same fatherly love that God shared with Joseph and that Joseph returned back to God in serving His only-begotten Son, in being obedient to what God himself asked for during the thirty years in his hidden life in Nazareth, in denying himself so that he could faithfully and lovingly serve the Word made flesh and Mary, the Mother of the Church. As Servant of God John Paul II asked: "Like every child, Jesus learned about life and how to act from his parents. How could we not think, with deep wonder, that he must have developed the human aspect of his perfect obedience to the Father's will particularly by following the example of his father Joseph, "a just man" (cf. Mt 1:19)?"¹⁸ What rich fruit from St. Joseph's obedience of being given the wisdom from God to be left in charge of Jesus' upbringing, to direct him and nourish him to the dignity and excellence of He who left him in charge even though God did not need him. Saint Francis de Sales explains that:

"There is no doubt that St. Joseph was gifted with all of the graces and all of the gifts merited by the charge that the eternal Father wanted to give him as temporal and domestic administrator of our Lord and as head of his family, composed of only three persons who represented the mystery of the most holy Trinity, not because there exists a point of comparison, with exception made to our Lord, who is one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas the others are mere creatures, but that it is a trinity here on earth that represents in one way or another the Holy Trinity."¹⁹

So to speak of St. Joseph's obedience is synonymous with the obedience portrayed by Jesus to their same Father who wished to begin revealing the importance and fruit of obedience to St. Joseph even before the Word was made flesh. What a mystery from our loving God the Father! From the moment that St. Joseph receives his own "personal Annunciation" and carries out his mission daily with fidelity and love, St. Joseph shows us how to be custodians of the Two Hearts. God entrusted to St. Joseph's faithful keeping the only begotten son of the Father along with Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. As the years of Jesus' hidden life pass by, the Son of God remains hidden from the world, only Mary and Joseph realize that they are living daily with the mystery of God made Man. Others see him as "the carpenter's son"²⁰ who remained hidden in the shadow of Joseph, the man on earth in whom God confided. As then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI spoke in one homily:

"Only if we know how to lose ourselves, if we give ourselves, may we find ourselves. When this occurs, it is not our will that prevails, but that of the Father to which Jesus submitted himself: 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.' (Lk 22:42).... This is what St. Joseph has taught us, with his renouncing, with his abandonment, that in a certain sense foreshadowed the imitation of the Crucified Jesus, the paths of fidelity, of the resurrection, and of life."²¹

It is this effect of denying himself which is the fruit of his obedience that drives St. Joseph to contemplate Jesus and Mary with a pure and selfless love required for his vocation to safeguard and be a custodian of the Hearts of the Savior and his Mother. Servant of God John Paul II highlights that "Joseph, in obedience to the Spirit, found in the Spirit the source of love....And this love proved to be greater than this "just man" could ever have experienced within the limits of his human heart."²² It is in this school of the house of Nazareth where St. Joseph was blessed to experience firsthand lessons on discipleship, contemplation, Mary's maternal intercession and a silent rejoicing that comes from obedience to the very source of all Good found living alongside him. In the house of Nazareth, there was a constant exchange of love: Joseph influenced Jesus and God Himself, source of love and in the person of Jesus, influenced and nourished St. Joseph in his unconditional service to Jesus and Mary. And how did this constant exchange of love come about? St. Joseph first became a custodian of the Heart of the Mother of God, Mary, taking her as his wife even if it seemed contrary to the law. God counted on him to provide for her and take care of her and he did this so lovingly in the eyes of faith and obedience, renouncing his will to live this faith daily even before the Word was made flesh. So it is as if God wanted him to be the first recipient to receive the maternal intercession from Mary our mediatrix so that, in communion with her heart, she could prepare him for the union with the unknown Sacred Heart of her son and thus be one heart united in an alliance of love. As Servant of God John Paul II asked: "...are we not to suppose that his love as a man was also given new birth by the Holy Spirit? Are we not to think that the love of God which has been poured forth into the human heart through the Holy Spirit molds

every human love to perfection?"²³ Since Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit and since according to St. Louis Marie de Montfort, "The more the Holy Ghost finds Mary...in any soul, the more active and mighty He becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul, and that soul in Jesus Christ."²⁴ Thus, St. Joseph, being filled with love from the Holy Spirit through Mary, had to have formed an extremely close and loving union with the Immaculate Heart of Mary and at the same time with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. His human love that he could give to Jesus and Mary had to have been molded to perfection as he showed in his self-denial and docile obedience to the Father through his unconditional service and fidelity to the alliance he had with the Two Hearts. As St. Francis de Sales explains the mystery of the marriage of St. Joseph and Mary and which highlights his role as custodian of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, the grace of love that St. Joseph received from the Holy Spirit makes him a participant of all the goods his wife Mary possessed and which made them grow marvelously to perfection. Because he dealt with Mary continuously he had to possess her virtues to so high a degree that no other creature had reached, and so St. Joseph was that creature who came closest to looking like Mary.²⁵ So his heart had to have resembled the Heart of the Mother of God and that of the Sacred Heart of her Son.

Alas, St. Joseph exhibited, like his spouse Mary, a life full of faith in God whom he allowed to guide his entire life, a life hidden in the silence of the house of Nazareth, the same style of life that God himself as the Word made flesh chose in his earthly existence. Like Mary, Joseph believed in the divine plan of God that would be fulfilled through their willing cooperation. Like Mary, he was privileged to bear God in his hands, to kiss him, to dress him, and to watch over him.²⁶ Like Mary, his heart was in total union with the Heart of Jesus and nourished by an alliance of love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is this contemplative heart of St. Joseph centered on the Two Hearts, in union with the Two Hearts, and at the constant service of the Two Hearts which should be a model for us to help us harmoniously link prayer with our many daily activities. In the words of Mother Adela "To have a truly contemplative heart requires that we discover the mysteries of love, wisdom, mercy, and purification that are hidden under the ordinary appearances of the events and situations that arise in our lives."²⁷ And St. Joseph persevered so lovingly in his daily devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, a devotion hidden under the ordinary activities of raising and protecting God the Son within the simple and humble confinements of the house of Nazareth. As Servant of God John Paul II explains:

"Work was the daily expression of love in the life of the Family of Nazareth. The Gospel specifies this kind of work Joseph did in order to support his family: he was a carpenter. This simple word sums up Joseph's entire life. For Jesus, these were hidden years, the years to which Luke refers after recounting the episode that occurred in the Temple: 'And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them' (Lk 2:51). This "submission" or obedience of Jesus in the house of Nazareth should be understood as a sharing in the work of Joseph. Having learned the work of his presumed father, he was known as "the carpenter's son." If the Family of Nazareth is an example and model for human families, in the order of salvation and holiness, so too, by analogy is Jesus' work at the side of Joseph the carpenter."²⁸

So Jesus learned obedience from St. Joseph and St. Joseph in return learned obedience by obeying the Father in the person of Jesus. What a model of total docility to the divine will, of obedience, and of love for fulfilling the will of the Father for us, especially now during Lent when we can imitate St. Joseph's silent yet active interior life that takes us away from the noise of ourselves and directs us towards the Almighty so that He can enter our hearts and communicate his Word. May we learn from St. Joseph the harmony between meditation of the Word and our daily tasks with a contemplative heart. May we imitate the unity of the Holy Family held strong by fidelity to the alliance of love manifested in their constant communion of Hearts so that we can indeed be ardent witnesses of the immense love of God and as Servants go deep and serve in the areas most needed by our mother Church. May St. Joseph and Mary constantly lead us to our own "personal annunciations" that the Lord asks of us daily, especially now during Lent when a profound conversion of heart knocks at our door with the freedom to give our fiat and joyfully respond in the words of our Mother foundress "Let it be done." May we imitate St. Joseph by renewing our desire to be obedient to and in love with the divine will, to be prompt in fulfilling it generously and lovingly with an undivided heart so that one day we may hear "Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord"²⁹, greeted by our loving Savior, our most Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph, their humble and abnegated custodian.

St. Joseph, custodian of the mysteries of the Incarnation, pray for us!

¹ Mt 1:16

² Mt 2:1,5-6

³ Mt 2:13-14

⁴ Mt 2:23

⁵ John Paul II, General Audience, 19 March 2003

⁶ cf. Lk 12:42

⁷ John Paul II, General Audience, 19 March 2003

⁸ cf. Mt 1:24

⁹ prayer to St. Joseph for priests, Daily Roman Missal, p.2194

¹⁰ *Redemptoris custos*, n.20

¹¹ Mother Adela, "The Two Hearts have Designs of Mercy for us"

¹² cf. Mt 2:13-14

¹³ cf. Mt 2:19-23

¹⁴ cf. Jn 3:30

¹⁵ *Redemptoris custos*, n.15

¹⁶ Lk 2:48-49

¹⁷ *Redemptoris custos*, n.8

¹⁸ John Paul II, 21 March 1999

¹⁹ Spiritual Talks, n.19

²⁰ Mt 13:55

²¹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, homily 19 March 1992

²² *Redemptoris custos*, n.19

²³ *Redemptoris custos*, n. 19

²⁴ True Devotion to Mary, p.1

²⁵ Spiritual Talks, n.19

²⁶ prayer to St. Joseph for priests, Daily Roman Missal, p.2194

²⁷ Dichos de Mother Adela, Vida de Oración, p.4

²⁸ *Redemptoris custos*, no.22

²⁹ St. Bernadine of Siena, sermon, Divine Office Reading, 19 March, p.1722

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