

# ST. JOSEPH'S TITLES

(By Rev. Albert Power, S.J.)

## 1.—ST. JOSEPH

The Litany opens by calling him “Saint.”

It is because he is a Saint we have the right to invoke him—viz., one dear to God; one who has lived his life well and won the prize of existence, and hence now in possession of God; and one about whose possession of God we have certainty, so that we can legitimately hope for his help. But, since canonized saints are to help us not only by prayer, but by the example of their lives, our devotion to them includes two things: praying to them in heaven and studying their virtues when on earth, with a view to imitation. As the artist is ever turning back to his model or the landscape he is painting, so should we turn constantly to those exemplar lives of the saints, as we build up, day by day and act by act, the temple of our soul to please the eye of the Master Architect.

Now, in saints' lives, as in the life of every individual, two forces are incessantly at work moulding the supernatural character. God's grace and man's co-operation; the Master offering His help to elevate and strengthen the human will and enable it to elicit supernatural acts; the creature using this gracious help and freely turning it to good account, by eliciting the sublime acts which this special aid makes possible. We scan the life-history of our heroes and note lovingly, on the one hand, the marks of God's special favour, the signs of His special providence over them; and on the other we see how these favours were used—how the saints practised the virtues that constitute the adornment of life.

We, too, must practise these virtues as best we may, and are wonderfully helped in our efforts by the example of those that have gone before and been victorious in the struggle.

No one should be better able to teach us to love Jesus than St. Joseph, who knew Him so intimately. The lesson of learning to love Jesus is the one great lesson we have to learn, the pearl of great price for which all else must be sacrificed. We want no ordinary love, but a generous, wholehearted devotion to Him, not from selfish motives, but for His own sake, because of what He is. This devotion means that we have a strong sense of who He is, and that, as we kneel by the crib, or travel with Mary and Joseph across the desert, our hearts are burning to think that this Babe is our Maker.

Our whole being is crying out for God. We may not recognise the fact, but down in the depths of our soul we have a thirst for God, for the strong living infinite God, that no finite thing can satisfy. When in our desperate efforts to find comfort in creatures, we pour out our hearts on some person or pursuit or pleasure in this world, we are striving to allay the gnawing of that hunger in our hearts for the Infinite God. Just as starving wretches in a besieged city try to satisfy their hunger on leather or other things unfit for human food, so we, blind to the fact that the strong living God alone can nourish us, turn to earthly pleasures for relief. But they will never satisfy us. Let us realise how this hunger and thirst for God is pursuing us night and day; let us pause and reflect what a wonderful thing it is that we, poor finite, petty creatures, should be so bent on possessing the Infinite Beauty! This hungry soul is myself; it is I who can never be satisfied until I possess God; and that hunger which we so misinterpret here below, will, if left unsatisfied, be our hell hereafter.

Filled with these thoughts, we stop and think. This Babe whom St. Joseph is so solicitous about; this Babe whose eyes are looking into mine with such tenderness and love; the Babe born in poverty, a poor woman's Son, being hurried across the desert from the persecution of an earthly king, is the infinitely beautiful God, the God I am longing for, the God who alone can make me happy, the God whom I am in existence to serve and love and glorify.

St. Joseph's office is a noble one: to stand on guard at the entrance to the court where Jesus gives audience to His friends! To St. Joseph's hands is committed a noble task—that of presenting Jesus to the world, of protecting Jesus for us!

## II—ILLUSTRIOUS SON OF DAVID

During long ages the prophecy was handed down that the Messiah was to spring from the seed of David, the great

hero-king to whom the Jews looked back with such pride. Joseph was of the royal blood of David, and, as legal father of Jesus, handed on to Him as Foster Son, all the rights he himself inherited.

Mary, too, was of royal lineage, and through her the blood of David actually flowed in Christ's veins. Perhaps king David's chief claim to be remembered gratefully by men is this: that for nigh three thousand years he has taught the world to pray. No aspirations ever penned by man, probably, have been so widely and so fruitfully used as the hymns of the Royal Psalmist; and if to pray aright is to love God aright, and if to love God aright is to fulfil the object of our existence, then David, more than most men, has contributed to the final and essential welfare of mankind.

### **Prayer the Tonic of Life**

All things are promised to prayer; and it is within the reach of all; like the atmosphere, essential and yet always available, unless we ourselves put obstacles in the way. In spite of the fact that fresh bracing winds are blowing on land and sea—free for all to enjoy—a great many people die from want of oxygen. If fresh air is breathed, it inevitably cleanses and purifies the blood. Give yourself the chance of enjoying copious supplies of pure air by going out on mountain or ocean, and it does its work silently, imperceptibly, but surely. So with prayer. God's presence works even such purifying, exhilarating, elevating effects on the soul if we do not hinder that work by shutting out His influence. Like pure air His grace works silently, imperceptibly, but most efficaciously.

Turning to pray is for the soul what going for a long walk across mountains is to the body and its life. Our spiritual being breathes deep draughts of nourishing, cleansing, strengthening air on God's mountains. We frequent these glorious elevated solitudes so seldom and so unwillingly! We take our souls for long walks so rarely! Yet our soul needs these excursions if its life is to be vigorous; it needs the bracing views it gets from those spiritual heights, the buoyancy to be derived from that clear, clean atmosphere. That is how saints thrive—by taking constant long walks of this kind; they live ever on the move, ever out on the mountains, shunning the corrupted, tainted city air like a pestilence—i.e., the corrupted air of physical pleasures and sin. To them such exercise becomes an absolute need, just as to Sir Walter Scott long rambles across mountains and moors were a necessity of his physical being, and to those glorious rambles we owe his wonderful stories. Just so the spiritual pedestrian, the lover of spiritual mountain climbing, the soul that is ever dreaming of God's heights, acquires a marvellous power of arresting men's attention, of weaving into fascinating forms the romance of God's love for the human soul.

### **111.—LIGHT AMONGST PATRIARCHS**

*Lumen Patriarcharum*. A man may be called a Light to others when through his virtues, wisdom, elevation and strength of character, he exercises a beneficent, healthy influence on them. His effect is like that of sunshine: he draws out and develops the good qualities in others, causing flowers of the soul—of imagination, mind and heart—to bloom and fill the world with their fragrance. Sunshine kindles beauty on land and sea. So a man of God, one whose heart is a lamp to others because it is filled with light at the furnace of God Himself, produces beauty in those he influences.

That is why we call St. Joseph **Lumen Patriarcharum**—a shining light amongst the forerunners of Christ. Himself of the blood of Abram and Isaac and Jacob and David, he was one of the great pillars in that long line of God's servants who lived looking for Jesus. Moses led the Israelites, God's people, through the desert to the Land of Promise; Joseph led another community, that was in a more special way God's people, through the desert of life. Nay, Joseph led God Himself through the desert to the Land of Promise, that is, to the hearts of His faithful ones; a land to be conquered by Jesus, this other Josue, by hard fighting and a bitter struggle.

### **IV.—SPOUSE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD**

St. Joseph was the Spouse of God's Mother, but by a wonderful anomaly also Guardian of her Virginity. Just as in Mary are combined miraculously two seemingly incompatible things, motherhood and virginity; so in Joseph, to be Mary's husband and yet shield of his wife's virginity. He was spouse of a Virgin-Mother.

It was a marvellous position for a man to occupy, and we know a little of what it meant for St. Joseph. He was constantly thrown into circumstances that called for the exercise of blind, heroic trust in God. The story of his doubts and hesitation (in St. Matthew, chap. I.), which it required a special revelation to dispel; of the journey to Bethlehem

and the flight to Egypt, shows how his position as Mary's guardian as the man to whose loyalty God entrusted His most precious jewel, demanded the most heroic exercise of the virtue of hope.

The month of March, in lands north of the Equator, is the opening of spring, the ever-recurring childhood and youth of the world, when all that is bright and laughing and beautiful in nature is displayed, and the world hangs out its brightest banners to celebrate the triumphal entry of new life into the chilled limbs of earth. The miracle of Spring, of this leaping up into joyful activity of the numbed things of Winter, is a type of Christianity, an image of the intense life that came coursing into the veins of men and women when the trumpet call of Christ, the clarion bugle-note of His coming, rang through the world; when all the icy, frozen region of sin and death woke to the almost incredible possibility of this new life of grace, of summer days of heavenly love, and a golden harvest of merit, in place of the dreary monotony of sin and self-indulgence. New horizons began to open out, self disappeared because God came on the scene; and the day that Joseph's heart throbbed with emotion because Mary became his bride, was the beginning of the revolution like the first call of the birds, the first soft, rippling breeze that told that Spring was nigh.

Mary is wedded to Joseph; presently she will be God's Mother, and then Spring time is mellowing towards Summer. So St. Joseph is the great herald of our salvation, to whom the Immaculate Maid who holds in her hands the destiny of the human race, is given in charge.

#### V.—FOSTER-FATHER OF THE SON OF GOD

Foster-father of God's Son; the visible representative of the real Father, God. When a father sends his son to be educated abroad, he appoints a tutor to take his place, to be **in loco parentis**; so when the Eternal sent His son into creation to be trained in a life of poverty and misery, He selected a tutor for Him—a man to take His own place—and that man was St. Joseph. What a dignity! Educator of the Son of God!

When we feel a certain repugnance to the poor, the miserable, the diseased, a great tonic lies in the thought that it was just these whom Jesus made His friends; it was to these He was kind and gentle and merciful; it is for being good to these He will reward me. What matter how I feel? Our views are so wretchedly confined, hedged in by the rampart of sensible things that presses on our souls—shutting off wide views as effectually as a dungeon wall cuts off the view of heaven with its myriad flying stars. And we so often accept these cramped views as the whole truth.

How little idea has the slum-bred child of what the universe—its own universe—the universe which it has a right to live in and to contemplate—really is like! Even so, hedged in by the routine and chatter of our daily lives, we go on from year to year passing final judgment on one another, ignorant or careless of the true position of our fellow-men in God's eyes and God's plans. The coarse, the degraded, the leprous, the outcast, that are sometimes so repulsive to us, enshrine immortal souls, and are so dear to God that He died for them.

It is the work of prayer to drag us out of this narrow box of thoughts which we build for ourselves, and bring us out into the light of God and make us take supernatural views of our existence. Jesus came into the world to tear to pieces the false tapestries which we weave for ourselves, to pull down the theatre of vanity about our ears and let the light of day into our souls. He had a strong grasp of the central heart of existence and wanted to bring us to get a grasp of it, too. Idolatry is the outward expression of this tendency of man's soul to build up a sham world of its own and dwell therein contentedly, oblivious of the real facts of existence. The external history of man is an ever-changing, ever-flowing replica in matter of the movements of the soul.

#### VI.—HEAD OF THE HOLY FAMILY

“And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.” Luke ii., 51.

This little household circle is to be the model for all time of family life. Father, mother, and children knit together in bonds of Christian charity are to look back to this group for their spirit; and the head of the house is Joseph.

We measure the confidence we place in others by the value of the things we entrust to their care.

If we send away jewellery or other precious things, we select trusty persons to be our messenger. Parents will give beloved children into the keeping of those only on whom they can implicitly rely. Measured by this test, how God trusted St. Joseph, placing under his care the greatest and most valued of His treasures: Mary, His best-beloved Spouse, and Jesus, His Son!

A breath from a life full of confidence is balm to our souls—like the fragrance from the Spice Islands borne to sailors on ocean breezes, suggesting endless vistas of delightful shady groves and luscious golden fruit. So a touch of this great Trust opens up new worlds to our souls.

This explains the power of such books as “The Story of the Little Flower of Jesus”; it thrills the soul like the first touch of Spring after a long, hard winter; it sets vibrating in our hearts the chord of love. We turn as inevitably to this light as the flowers to the sunshine; we drink in words that speak of God as greedily as the desert drinks in rain, or a lover drinks in the praise of his beloved. Words about God affect us if they can pierce through the rind of our worldliness and get at our hearts. Often evil habits, strong passions and multiplied sins bury the poor soul, and the light of God’s love beats down on it in vain: but beneath the hard surface the living soul is thirsting for its Eternal Love; and when the mass of sin is cleared away, the soul leaps up to welcome God’s word and listen to news of Him as the poor exile snatches at a letter from home.

#### VII.—JOSEPH MOST JUST

Jesus was laid in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. His enemies sneered: “This seducer said He would rise in three days.” What little reputation He had that morning in official circles in Jerusalem! And yet this was just before the Resurrection! When He was reduced to nothing, when He was made a laughing-stock by His enemies, then He was about to win His greatest victory. No wonder the saints loved humiliation, loved to be crushed and despised in this world, knowing that it is the road to supernatural triumphs. So universal and inexorable is the law of suffering that Jesus Himself had to obey it. “Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground dieth, itself remaineth alone.” (John xii. 24.) The ordinary accompaniment of sanctity is suffering and humiliation; to be laughed at and be made little of in this world was often the lot of God’s best friends.

In the hour of humiliation it is consoling to contemplate the utter annihilation of Our Lord as He lay still and silent in the tomb, allowing His enemies to do their worst. Quietly, on the third day, He asserts Himself.

So we, if we remain quiet and hope for His assistance, shall experience His glorious help. Do not shrink from the cross: you must be crushed if you are to do great work for God. This is the secret that explains the strange problem of life’s sufferings. To solve this problem, which had baffled the world’s wisest heads, Jesus came; and He solved it not by subtle speech, but by the silent testimony of His life. We grasp the meaning of it all when we contemplate Him lying dead in the tomb, and hear His enemies’ scornful, triumphant words: “This seducer said He would rise from the dead.” And this seducer was Our Lord and Our God!

#### VIII.—JOSEPH MOST PURE

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.”—Matt. v., 8.

Jesus gave us the Blessed Eucharist as a sacrament fitted to our lowly, exiled, suffering state here below. He is present there in a state of humiliation and seeming annihilation; He would sympathise with us, put Himself on a level with us. We are outcasts from God, plunged in the miseries of a world of sin, and to be in keeping with this state He hides Himself under the appearance of bread and wine. He thereby calls our faith into play in a very active way, since we must exercise our faith to worship Him there.

Then, too, He teaches us lessons of great importance—above all, the lesson that the great works of His service do not call for display of our own abilities, that self-annihilation and trust in Him are the means to succeed in His work, that God works through means that seem utterly inadequate to bring about His triumphs. So that, if you are poor and wretched, then realise deeply your own poverty and misery, keep it ever steadily before you, and God will use you for His work, just as He takes a little bread and wine and by transforming it works the wonders of grace in men’s souls. Hence everything that tends to humble you is for your good, and, helps to make you a pliable instrument in God’s hand. He is the artist, we the brushes; and just as Michael Angelo can only succeed on the supposition that his brushes are perfectly quiescent and responsive to his slightest touch, so, unless we are perfectly obedient to grace and divine inspirations, we spoil God’s work. What kind of picture would Raphael himself produce if the brush began to assert itself and move according to its own sweet will!

Holiness results from perfect obedience to divine inspirations.

## IX.—JOSEPH MOST PRUDENT

“Get wisdom, because it is better than gold.”—Prov. xvi., 16.

God has confided gold to the safe keeping of hard rocks. To get gold men must toil to crush the quartz and tear from it the shining secret that fiery ages long ago confided to its sure embrace.

The real gold of life is union with God; and this gold also God has buried out of sight, and to win it we must toil. Hard rocks have to be crushed, deep mines dug, much labour gone through, before this treasure is won.

Lives of saints are the romance of the gold-digging of God’s love. Their labours, austerities, strivings, are but the manifestation of the thirst for heavenly treasure that was driving them on. Jesus Christ is the Master Miner. He summons us to come and dig for this treasure. “Forget everything else, and set your heart on this alone. Father, mother, home, wealth, comfort, ease, life itself—stake all on this great venture.”

We so often think to win easily and without toil that which the saints paid so dearly for! The union with God which they enjoyed we too would have; but the heat of the day, and the hard work which they had to face, we shrink from; the road they travelled is too sharp and stony for our delicate feet.

## X.—JOSEPH MOST COURAGEOUS

What courage he had! A man entrusted with a very valuable diamond to bring it safely across the sea will feel the responsibility of his charge. St. Joseph was entrusted with God’s Royal Diamond, and was told to guard it well, and, lo! scarce had it come into his keeping when robbers are on the track; they have heard of the booty and are devising measures to seize it. A royal despot with armies at his back is seeking the life of the Child; and St. Joseph is bidden to protect it. What a responsibility! The life of the world’s Saviour, the life of supreme importance for the universe put into my keeping (so might Joseph reflect), and I, a weak, helpless man! What can I do against Herod?

And he is told to cross the desert in flight. That desert is a hard one even for strong men to face; Joseph must convey the delicate Mother and the new-born Babe across it! What faith, what lion-hearted courage the man had!

How grateful we should be to him for his tender care of these two Friends of ours! We are touched by kindness shown to someone we love—to our mother, for example. So should we be grateful to Joseph, and often thank him for his fidelity to our two best Friends. Perhaps that is why devotion to him is so pleasing to Jesus; Jesus is grateful to Joseph, and likes us to help Him to discharge His debt. How Mary leaned on Joseph in her weakness and trouble! How she turned to him in her weariness and sorrow, and never found him wanting! How well he understood her! What a life it was—of friendship and intimacy with God’s Immaculate Mother!

## XI.—JOSEPH MOST OBEDIENT

“Joseph arose and took the Child and His mother by night and retired into Egypt.”—Matt. ii., 14.

Our Lord’s answer to the query: “Who, thinkest thou, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?” is this: “Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. xviii.)

Jesus’ answer to that question is a momentous one for us. We all want to be “great” in the kingdom of heaven; and Jesus says that for this we need—not wealth, talents, learning, success, fame—but simply to humble ourselves like children. All His doctrines and sacraments fit into this teaching. They demand submission, childlike confidence, putting ourselves with simple faith into His hands. The devotion of Catholics has developed along those lines; witness the tender, child-like spirit of devotion to our Mother Mary that is so flourishing in the Church. Who need be discouraged if all that is required for “greatness” is self-abasement? The poor, the suffering, the tempted, the helpless, all find comfort here; and it was for me Jesus spoke those words: “He that shall humble himself is the greater,” and he makes the lesson simple for all by taking the concrete example of a child.

The characteristics of childhood are innocence, trustfulness, simplicity. By God’s grace even sinners can return to the innocence of heart and thought of childhood. The fire of God’s love can purge and cleanse the mind, the imagination, the affections, and make them once more pure as molten gold. What a thing for us to sigh after and long for! What a spur to our efforts to love God more and more!

The second characteristic of childhood is trustfulness and humility, absence of leaning on self, consciousness of weakness, and complete trust in father and mother. A third characteristic is simplicity, absence of deceit, respect for

others, freedom from jealousy or hatred.

This lesson of the necessity of becoming children if we would be great in His service, Jesus has taught by His own example. He became a Child literally for our sakes. Kneeling by the Crib we should think of His words: "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child." How He emptied Himself and humbled Himself like a child! And He wants me to do this, wants me to pray to Him in this spirit, to pray to Him with the simplicity and directness of a child talking to its mother.

## XII.—JOSEPH MOST FAITHFUL

"Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" —John xxi., 15.

To Peter, to broken-hearted Peter, how the question must have sounded, "Lovest thou Me?" How well Jesus knows how to comfort and lift up the broken heart! How Peter's soul must have leaped up as it were from death to life, when he heard this question from Jesus. To have the chance of answering it meant so much to Peter, who a little while before had denied his Master. What an opening Jesus gave him! And, then, when his answer comes, "Lord,, thou knowest that I love Thee," Jesus says:

"Feed My lambs. Take charge of My Church. Go and work to save souls."

Our joy is that we too can save souls for Him—we too can feed His flock—and He calls us to do so. How differently Peter felt after this morning interview with Jesus (his morning's meditation—the best he ever made, I fancy!) How swiftly his desolation had vanished after a few loving questions from Jesus, or rather one piercing question asked three times!

To each one of us Jesus puts that same wonderful question, "Dost thou love Me?" What we call "examination of conscience" is really an effort to answer that question. Life, in fact, is the repetition to us constantly of that question by God; every temptation to sin involves that question, the voice of conscience saying ever, "Dost thou love Me?" If we sin we cannot say "Yes" to that question. But if we do love Him, and can say truthfully, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee," then comes back the injunction, "Feed My lambs, guide them on the road to heaven, pasture them, help them—My lambs—the little ones of My flock. So you will be doing kindness to Me, and atone for infidelity in the past."

How hard Peter worked for the rest of his life to carry out this injunction! What a spur it was to his soul, that ringing word of Jesus, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep"! It kept Peter travelling about the world looking for the lost sheep of Christ in order to feed them. What did he care for difficulties, or suffering, or death, when the scene of that bright summer's morning on the shores of the Lake of Galilee came surging back to his memory? How often he sat down to think of these words: "Simon, dost thou love Me?" to dwell on the tone of voice, the tenderness, the flashing look of love in Christ's eyes, the intense fire of mercy that burned in His words! How overwhelming it all must have been to poor, broken-hearted, desolate Peter. We sometimes think the miseries of life so great that no consolation could make up for them! Yet a moment like this atoned for every bitter hour of Peter's life! And such a moment is awaiting us, perhaps in this life, and certainly in the next, if we are faithful to Him.

## XIII —MIRROR OF PATIENCE

"Make not haste in the time of clouds. Wait on God with patience. . . . Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy sorrow endure and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation."—Ecclesiasticus ii., 2-5.

God has promised to hear us if we pray, and He cannot break His word. What He says, that He will do most assuredly. This reflection consoles us when we feel utterly dry and desolate and barren, like a whole Sahara concentrated into one little soul! When one is in that state, and contrasts the fervent acts of love, of charity, of zeal, of desire for heaven, of faith, that should be our occupation, it is rather frightening! But then comes the thought, stealing like a rain-cloud up from the edge of the quivering desert, that God has pledged Himself to help if we turn and ask; and, after all, no matter how we feel, we can ask, and the more utterly abandoned and Sahara-like we feel, the more reason we have for appealing to His mercy.

Yes, that thought comes like a cool breeze or a shower of rain to a thirsty land, and to that thought I can always

return. It consoles us to think that the same infinite Love that is working to bring the lily to its perfection, working in His great studio to paint the myriad flowers that strew this earth of ours, using loving diligence with the least little plant that is waxing in the depths of an African forest, working day and night ceaselessly and restlessly and lovingly, that same infinite activity is at work in my soul, and wishes to beautify my soul even as He beautifies the lilies. Look at the flowers and see there the evidence to which He Himself appeals, of His loving solicitude. It is surely a great thought that He will purify, adorn, brighten my soul if I allow Him, make me a pearl beyond all price in His own eyes, polish and perfect me by the fire of His grace; will burn away all the filth and dross, all the stench and evil, and make me—even me—fragrant and pure and pleasing in His holy presence.

#### XIV.—LOVER OF POVERTY

“And they came with haste: and they found Mary and Joseph and the Infant lying in the manger.”—Luke ii., 16.

The stable is indicative of the great secret of Christianity, for there we find on the one hand absolute poverty, cold, hunger, wretchedness; and on the other hand, God Himself made man. So it is ever; the road to God is through lowliness, poverty, mortification, humbling oneself; it is to the meek and the simple He manifests His Divine Countenance; just as on Christmas Day He drew the veil of heaven for the wondering eyes of a few poor shepherds.

If we upholster our minds with the rich cushions of pride and self-esteem and are afraid of the hard wood of humility and simple truthfulness, then Jesus leaves us to enjoy our comfort alone, without His company. He fares poorly; and if you would have the benefit of His conversation you must be content to share the hardships of His life; and it is in Jesus' company you find Joseph, and therefore in poverty and suffering and humiliation, and so you must lower yourself if you want to be admitted to His friendship. St. Joseph teaches us to get rid of our pride; else we cannot be his friend; you will be too grand for him, you will not be at your ease with him—nor with Jesus.

#### XV.—MODEL OF ALL WHO LABOUR

The toiler who wishes to save his soul must imitate in St. Joseph the eight virtues mentioned in the last six titles of his Litany:

Justice in dealing with others,  
Chastity and temperance in home-life,  
Prudence—in avoiding extravagance, and in providing for the education of his children,  
Fortitude in bearing the troubles of life,  
Obedience and loyalty to his employers,  
Contentment with his lot in life.

#### XVI.—GUARDIAN OF VIRGINS

“Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty; for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore.” —Psalm xlv., 11, 12.

The following titles tell us of St. Joseph's life in Heaven, just as the previous titles form a kind of summary of his life on earth.

By his chaste life on earth he has won the right to be especially the Guardian of Virgins. He who guarded safely amidst the world's storms the purest of Virgins; he whose virtue was so excellent that to his care this holy flower was entrusted by God, has power to guard and protect against temptation all those that love this superb virtue of Chastity.

#### **Love Makes the Heart Pure**

Let us try to understand the supreme importance of loving God. This is the occupation God has destined for us. We try to think out plans for our future, but this is the real occupation that will satisfy and perfect us. The Babe of Bethlehem mutely appealing to our pity is the summing up of God's attitude to us, and the visible representation of the statement, “God is love.” Life is given us to bring home that fact to our consciousness. Yet we busy and distract ourselves with creatures, instead of simply using them to help us to understand this great truth. Creatures are like the blackboards and maps in the schoolroom—means of instruction, symbols whence we may learn something about

God's beauty and greatness. Just as a map of Africa leads me to have some knowledge of the shape, size, and order of that vast country, though we know how different a coloured print is from the continent itself, a splash of green from the waving primeval forests where the lion and the jackal prowl; so creatures are a kind of map giving us a faint concept of God. God is the great reality, creatures an accidental manifestation of Him lasting a few years and then passing away. Do I realise this and so look on creatures?

#### XVII.—MAINSTAY OF FAMILIES

Literally, Pillar of families. He is a strong column on which families can rest as upon an unshakeable foundation. Trust in him, recourse to his intercession, is a sure source of strength for the Christian family. If a father or mother chooses St. Joseph to be in a special way the patron of their household, if they have recourse to him in every necessity, they will find him a friend on whom they can rely—a column of support in their hour of need. So, too, religious families or communities will find in him a sure source of strength in their troubles.

#### The Sweetness of Home

A little of the milk of human kindness makes life so sweet to others. The cause of all the bitterness in the world is the want of this milk of kindness. As want of food creates hunger and misery of body, want of kindness creates starvation and misery of soul. It is so easy to slip into the short, sharp, bitter, sneering style; our hearts are so easily swept by storms of impatience, like inland seas amidst a ring of mountains, beautiful in repose, when the rainbow light is sleeping on their blue waters, but so easily tossed and roused to white fury by sudden squalls that race down from the hills. To keep our hearts always smiling, to have the sunshine splendour always radiant on the hills of the soul—that is not easy. We must often pray, often turn to the King of Peace, to the Child that came to bring peace and joy and charity into the world, and, weeping at His cradle, to ask Him for love, intense love, for His poor suffering brethren, out of pity for whom He became a Baby. For the strong, overpowering thing in history is this (and we must insist on it in spite of the outcry of the world), that God became a Babe, and wants the fact to be published to the four quarters of the world, and told in trumpet tones from every pulpit, and rung forth in noisy clamour from every tower and steeple. The great God is before me as a child, and I can pray as a child to Him. I can come as a child to a child, and feel when talking to this Child that I am doing the thing for which I was created—namely, worshipping my Creator.

How delicate, tender, playful men become with little children! How the whole world unbends in presence of a little child! What is this strange power of a little child over all human hearts? Poets (Wordsworth, for example) say it is because a baby comes straight from heaven and has the light of heaven still shining in its eyes—is waking up from its dream of angels!

Whatever the explanation may be, God knows well the influence a little child exercises, and so He came to us as a child, to claim our adoration. I must bring this fact home to myself. When worldliness is breaking round me, or shutting me in like a fog, or care or worry of any kind is eating away my peace of heart, I must come back ever to this central fact, that God has become a baby for me; that to think about that fact is my chief business in life. It is such a check to pride and worldliness and haughty self-conceit, this devotion to the Babe of Bethlehem! And it kindles the fire of charity so intensely in our souls. When we meet the poor we are kind to them, because we do not want to be hard on the Babe of Bethlehem. We refuse nothing; we try to be gentle and kind to all, lest we be cruel to this little Babe of Bethlehem. Children are the flowers of the moral world, with all the beauty, indescribable tenderness, and power to move of flowers; and God became a baby flower to win my heart. How gently he woos me, coming down to me in the midst of angels' songs and asking me to love Him.

#### XVIII.—SOLACE OF THE AFFLICTED

Thou hast not forgotten the long, dreary road,  
When Mary took turns with thee, bearing thy God.

—Father Faber.

St. Joseph can comfort the sorrowing, because he has suffered. The story of his life is meagre in details, but it tells of sorrow all through, as is the case always with near friends of Jesus.

St. Joseph knows the sorrows of life; and because he has learned from Jesus the secret of charity for the miserable, he is pre-eminently our refuge and consolation in trouble. Experience proves his right to this blessed title.

Trust God, cast your care upon the Lord—is the constant exhortation running through Holy Scripture. He is ever whispering to our hearts: “It is I, fear not.” We may be crushed by a sense of our own impotence and insignificance in the universe, but this quiet voice stealing through the turmoil of creation gives us courage, telling us that, weak as we are, we can count on His boundless strength.

“Behold the lilies, how they grow. They labour not, neither do they spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field ... God doth so clothe, how much more you, O ye of little faith.” Hinting that we, too, must let God work for us. He loves us and wants to take on Himself the duty and pleasure of working for us, of making His creation serve us and beautify us.

Beauty is the outward sign of perfection of organism. He wishes to perfect us, and make us fair in His eyes. We are vessels in the hands of the potter, and must undergo rough treatment at times, be burnt or baked it may be, but all to make the final result more beautiful and more lasting. The clay vessel is useless until it has tasted the fire. Our furnace is tribulation, humiliation, without which we remain soft, useless clay. How differently men would spend life if they took these views of the world!

#### XIX.—HOPE OF THE SICK

Ponder on the fact that St. Joseph was the one man selected to preside at the central scene in history—the entrance of God Himself as Man into the visible creation.

No wonder, then, if the Church feels great reverence for this man, and believes he is powerful to assist us by his prayers. If Jesus chose his arm to support Him in His infancy, what graces will He not lavish upon him? Jesus is generous and grateful; what, then, shall Joseph have for reward? Joseph’s dignity will only be properly appreciated by intense faith and men often spend their lives without intense faith.

Ruysbroek says: “The whole universe is the ring of our espousals bestowed upon us by God,” and if my Bridegroom is the Jeweller who has shaped this ring and studded it with precious stones for me, surely I may lean confidently on Him Who has had the skill and the will and the affection to give me that gift. The ceaseless changing hues of nature, the flashing radiance of spring, the rich beauty of summer, the soft mellow glories of autumn, the cold whiteness of winter, are but the glistening of this jewelled ring as He turns it in His hand, flashing it to show me its facets in order to win my smile of approval. To gain this smile from me He made the world; for He made the world that through it I might praise Him; and the subtlest and most delightful Praise is surely the smile of approval breaking like dawn on the face of one we love. Think of God looking to me for that! It is only explicable on the same principle as we explain a grown-up man or woman longing for a smile from their child. We say it is love—that solves the puzzle.

So to wipe away my tears, to hush my sobs, to smooth my face and bring the sunshine of laughter into my life, Jesus is a baby in the arms of St. Joseph. Joseph’s business is to present this great Child-God to the world, that the world may be won by His beauty and leave everything for Him.

Now, if God looks for my approving smile, and is soliciting me for my praise, day by day, it is no harm for me to hunger after His smile, and to feel lonely and wretched about it. He won’t blame me for that! But that is the meaning of a life of prayer. Prayer is simply trying to see His face and catch a glimpse of His smile, out of love. It is the lover’s pining after his beloved—we serenading God (as B. Suso serenaded Our Lady). The world loses its firm solidness for God’s lovers. To them it is a barrier and a hindrance, because it obscures their view of Him, as daylight effaces the stars.

When that is our state of soul, fear disappears; death is merely an incident, and the whole material world and all its attractions a passing gift of Him.

St. Joseph must help us to see this point of view. We want him, who held Jesus so firmly in his arms, to let us hold Him, too; to get us audiences frequent and close with the Divine Child, that we may see His smile and live for Him alone. “The health of the soul consists in the love of God.” (St. John of the Cross.)

## XX.—ST. JOSEPH, PATRON OF THE DYING

St. Joseph has a unique claim to the position of patron of a happy death, since he died the most blessed of deaths, assisted by Jesus his Judge, and Mary, that Judge's Mother. The soul nearing the end of its pilgrimage has special difficulties to face: weariness, heaviness, despondency arising from sickness; attacks of demons, who are more earnest and persistent when death approaches, in order, if possible, to make the soul relax its grip upon God just when it is about to enter into possession of Him for ever. This weakness of physical nature and strength of spiritual foes call for special assistance. Hence these two titles of St. Joseph, Hope of the sick, Terror of demons.

## XXI.—PROTECTOR OF HOLY CHURCH

As Patron of a happy death, as the saint who by his prayers secures that supreme grace for his clients, he is the Protector of Holy Church, guarding her interests at the moment which is of greatest importance in the life of her children, keeping ward and watch at the portal between time and eternity, and snatching from destruction the souls that at that narrow gate are in risk of being torn from the Church for ever.

During the years that God's Church may be said to have consisted of only three members, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, St. Joseph was evidently its Protector; he guarded the seed whence the world-wide (or Catholic) Church was to spring up later on. In Mary's womb was formed the first beginning not only of the physical Body of Jesus, but also of His Mystical Body, of which we are the members. And St. Joseph, since his death, has by his prayers and intercession been protecting this Mystical Body, has acted as heavenly Patron and Protector of the Church of Christ.

## EPILOGUE

"Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee upon the waters." (Matt. xiv., 28.) They thought it was a ghost, and Peter dimly seeing Jesus doubts if it be He, and asks for a sign—a miracle—to prove he is not wrong.

So, often in life, we doubt if it be really Jesus we see or no; wonder if the voice calling us, the inspiration, comes from God; and sometimes the test we apply is this: we walk on the waters at His bidding, and our not sinking shows that He is nigh. And when Peter cried out, immediately Jesus caught him and said: "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" Without delay Jesus helps him. So I must lean on Him, and in spite of the obscurity of time, which makes it hard to see Him, reach out to Him by faith. Even thus Jesus comes to us, too, in our storms—suddenly and yet dimly, demanding a certain ready act of faith on our part. We must risk something, must be daring, to reach Him; sometimes we have to risk life itself, as Peter did, and then, when we take the plunge, when we step away from the boat of creature comforts on to the unstable dancing waters of faith, we feel His strong hand and hear His strong, cheering voice in the gloom, and know in very truth it is He, and no ghost. What music that voice made in Peter's ears on that stormy night!

The tossing sea for me is the round of daily life with its ups and downs, and my walking on the waves consists in boldly facing my duty for His sake. I see Him dimly across the waters of time, and to reach Him I am trying to walk these waves; it is for His sake I am doing my work; these never-ceasing rolling waves of duty are the floor across which I want to reach Him. He, too, is walking that sea of duty, and by His strength I shall succeed in keeping afloat; and if the wind is strong then, if I call, He will at once reach out and hold me in His strong grasp. Interior "recollection," a life of prayer is just this peering through the gloom to catch the form of Jesus; at times we see Him, then again He is hidden; but in every circumstance of life I must keep on trying to see Him.

How cold and desolate Peter would have felt if Jesus were not there, if it had been merely an imagination, a phantom on the waters! What a bleak and hopeless thing life is—a barren tossing waste of waters—with no Jesus nearing in the gloom! And how the black is turned into gold, and the sullen, stormy night to a radiant, streaming summer's morning, when Jesus speaks! How we forget the storm and the misery when we have Him in the boat with us!

And the glorious thing is that He wants to be with me, and He wants my soul to be His Bride, with my heart fixed on Him in every change and chance of life. And so, at every turn of the road of life, I have Him, in the Blessed Sacrament or in the poor—dimly shadowed forth in either case—walking across the sea of time, to be reached by an act of faith. For the same impulse that drove Peter out on the sea will help us to plunge, as it were, through the

sacramental covering, and reach Jesus hidden in that sacred blackness, or else to pierce through the thick obscurity of poverty and rags, and behind that veil find Jesus Himself living for us in the poor. It needed courage on Peter's part to cry out, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee upon the waters," so it needs courage to pierce the shroud of bread and wine, or of rags and poverty, nakedness and homelessness, sickness and misery, that hides Jesus from us. By these two veils, the sacramental veil and the veil of poverty, Jesus tests our faith. If you ask why, I ask, Why this scene in Galilee? Why the dim, sudden apparition barely discernible in the gloom, the stealing form that frightened His friends and led to Peter's tremendous leap? It was, I take it, to stimulate Peter's will, to rouse the man to a sublime act of faith. And Christ's plan of living in the Blessed Sacrament and living hidden in the poor and homeless and the naked, helps to rouse our will, and spur us on to strong acts of faith. The Blessed Sacrament and the poor are two touchstones testing the souls of men, two rocks on which we either suffer hopeless shipwreck or get firmly anchored so as to belong to God and possess Him for ever.

### **THE LITANY OF ST. JOSEPH**

(Approved by Pope Pius X., March 18, 1909.)

Lord have mercy on us.

Christ have mercy on us.

Lord have mercy on us.

Christ hear us.

Christ graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven,

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

God the Holy Ghost,

Holy Trinity, One God,

Holy Mary, Pray for us

St. Joseph, *etc.*

Illustrious Son of David,

Splendour of Patriarchs,

Spouse of the Mother of God,

Chaste Guardian of the Virgin,

Foster-father of the Son of God,

Watchful Defender of Christ,

Head of the Holy Family,

Joseph most just,

Joseph most pure,

Joseph most prudent,

Joseph most courageous,

Joseph most obedient, Pray for us

Joseph most faithful, *etc.*

Mirror of patience,

Lover of poverty,

Model of all who labour,

Glory of family life,

Preserver of virgins,

Mainstay of families,

Solace of the afflicted,

Hope of the sick,

Patron of the dying,  
Terror of demons,  
Protector of Holy Church,

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,  
Spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,  
Graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,  
Have mercy on us.

V. He hath made him master of His house.

R. And ruler of all His possessions.

#### LET US PRAY

O God, who in Thine ineffable providence didst vouchsafe to choose Blessed Joseph to be the Spouse of Thy Most Holy Mother, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may be worthy to have him for our intercessor in Heaven whom on earth we venerate as our Protector. Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.

Nihil obstat:

F. MOYNIHAN,  
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur:

\* D. MANNIX,  
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.

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