

ST. JOSEPH'S DIGNITY AND SPIRITUAL GREATNESS

By Rev. Albert Power, S.J., M.A. (1930)

I. SAINT JOSEPH

GOD'S plan in the Incarnation was to become a man, one of ourselves, and by living amongst us to show us how to sanctify our lives. Now social life is founded on the family. We do not come into the world as independent units, each standing by himself, with no essential relationship to others. We are members of a family, sprung from, and therefore dependent upon, father and mother. The tie that binds the family together is the tie of love. That is the invisible bond, stronger than steel, that welds the human race into a social system. Family affection plays the part in the moral world that gravity or molecular attraction plays in the material world. Without the cohesion which molecular attraction gives, the world would be mere chaos; cohesion is essential to order, and order is essential to proper development and existence. When Jesus came to found His supernatural system (or religion), it was to be based on the natural order, and, therefore, He, too, would be a member of a family. He might have appeared on earth, as Adam did, created directly by the hand of God, with no ties of blood to link Him to the race. But so He would not have been in the full sense one of ourselves, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone; nor would His plan of coming to win us by human tenderness, and the irresistible appeal of generous, unstinted affection have been realised. We are not easily won; we do not easily believe people's protestations; we judge people by their lives—their acts, their conduct—rather than their words. It would not have been easy for Jesus to convince us of the tenderness and depth of His human affection had He appeared other than as a loving son and member of a human family.

The Child's First Duty. Moreover, Jesus came to observe in its perfection the great precept of the law: "Honor thy father and thy mother." This is the shape in which the ever-pressing and universal precept of charity first comes into play in the individual human life. The child's first conscious duty is to its parents; after them it comes in contact with the rest of the world. Hence, the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue, which is the first of those dealing with our duties to our fellow-creatures, is the pivot of human society, which no individual that reaches the use of reason can escape. Hence, it was essential that Jesus should observe this commandment perfectly. This is why St. Joseph plays such an essential part in carrying out Our Lord's scheme of redemption. St. Joseph helps us to know more perfectly the human side of Christ. Our Lord has two natures, and the Divine Person came to manifest Himself to us in His double nature both as God and as man. It is necessary for us to know Him under both aspects. If we neglect His divinity we profit no more by His life than by that of any other merely human hero whose virtues attract us. If we neglect His humanity we lose the chief argument for trusting His mercy, since He became man in order to be our friend, to sympathise with us, and to share our trials and sufferings which He could not do as God.

Christmas Bells. Now, by knowing St. Joseph, by understanding his position in Christ's family, we learn better and more deeply how humanly tender and loving Jesus is. We can think of Jesus apart, and independently of all others, because He is God, all-sufficient and infinite. But we cannot think of St. Joseph, at least as the object of religious reverence, except as the intimate friend of Jesus and Mary. Moreover, St. Joseph is connected exclusively with the child life of Jesus. When Jesus has come to man's estate Joseph is no longer there. Hence, devotion to St. Joseph fixes our attention on the infant and child life of Our Lord. Now, it was a part, and one of the most astounding parts, of the great scheme of salvation which the Incarnation unfolded, that God was to appear in the midst of a sin-laden world as a little Babe, born in poverty and suffering and humiliation, and this apparition of God as a child was to occupy the attention of mankind for all time to come. Ceaselessly, until time shall be no more, the Christmas bells are to ring out and remind us that God was born in a stable, became a little weeping Babe, was carried about at His Mother's breast, was wrapped in poor swaddling clothes, and lay shivering in a manger. I say this extraordinary scene is to rivet men's attention; they must never be allowed to forget it, or to forget the details of the scene, because this scene was part of

God's scheme for teaching men to trust Him, "*Dic animae meae, sales tea ego sum,*" prays the Psalmist: "Do thou, O God, whisper to my soul; I am thy salvation," and this whispered word is God's supreme message to the sin-laden soul. It is also the glorious lesson of the Nativity and infant life of the Divine Word. His baby lips repeat these sweet and comforting words to each of our souls, "*Sales tea ego sum.*" In spite of sin, in spite of oppressive temptation, amidst the storms of the world's hatred and the devil's persecution, I who am Omnipotent, I am thy Salvation, thy Strength, thy Comfort."

His First Disciples. God's way is to use human instruments to do His work, both natural and supernatural. Though He alone makes the corn to grow, and fills the grape with wine, and the rose with beauty and fragrance, still man must till the ground and labor strenuously if he would profit by the stores which earth holds in safe keeping. In like manner, human instruments are required to sow and to reap the harvest of the spiritual world. Later on, when grown to man's estate, Jesus will choose a few fisher folk and constitute them His Apostles, to carry His message of peace to the great, wide world as heralds of the living God, inviting men to His heavenly banquet. But at this earlier stage of His work His chosen instruments, His sole companions and friends, are Mary and Joseph. Later on He will extend the circle of His friendship, since all His conquests are made by affection; but as a child He must first of all play the part of the dutiful son. He will appeal first to children, and teach them how to walk perfectly. The child is father to the man. "Salvation depends chiefly on the education of the child," says the Ven. Pere Baudouin. The world's history is shaped by its teachers. Get into your hands the training of the children of a nation, and you have that nation's future in your keeping.

The Model Child. So Jesus of Nazareth was, first and foremost, the model child. His public life, the part He played as a citizen, as a member of His nation, as a preacher to the public, lasted but three years. His private life as child and man, living the ordinary obscure life of a country village artisan, lasted thirty years. In the history of the earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth the story of His Passion and Death is the part that has most occupied the attention of the world. But the story of His infant and child life must also be kept vividly fresh in men's minds, and St. Joseph is, with Mary, God's chief instrument to bring about this result. Devotion to Mary and Joseph secures the constant pondering over these scenes; and this constant meditating on the story of Christ's coming amongst us is ever educating our souls for the life of direct intercourse with God which is to be our destiny hereafter.

God's Ways. We are being trained to know God better through the Child Jesus in His relationship to His parents. We see God there holding intercourse with His creatures, and our ideas about God are moulded by witnessing that intercourse. It is so unlike what men expected! The angels' song, resounding over the hills of Bethlehem, and bidding the poor to rejoice because glad tidings have come, gives us the keynote of Christ's teaching. The lesson is being driven home that the road back to God is through poverty and suffering and humiliation; that God loves the poor, that riches and pride and self-sufficiency are hindrances to intercourse with Him; that when the Infinite God came to soften the hard heart of the pagan world, when He came to purify the sensual heart of the pleasure-loving world, when He came to humble the pride of the domineering lords of earth, His wisdom could devise no surer method than the foolish way of suffering and poverty and self-annihilation. His infinite power could find no more efficacious way than to exhibit Himself in a state of utter weakness, dependent for everything upon His own creatures, His very life trembling in the balance from the ruthless jealousy of an earthly despot. Devotion to Mary and Joseph keeps ever strongly before us the fact that the way to success in God's Kingdom is not the way to success in earthly kingdoms: it emphasizes the principle so definitely enunciated by Jesus in later life: "Whosoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." This, then, is St. Joseph's place in Christ's plan. In order that Jesus may be a perfect Son, St. Joseph is to act as His earthly father, and in order that the memory of the infant life of Jesus may be kept ever fresh in men's minds, they are to go back in loving reverence to study the place St. Joseph held in the affection of the Divine Child.

The Art of Prayer. Those aiming at perfection of soul have other strong reasons for cultivating devotion to St.

Joseph. If you would acquire proficiency in any art or science, you consult those that are already expert in that art or science. And the more difficult and high the subject matter, the more necessity there is for a skilled guide. Now, the art which those that aim at perfection are bent on acquiring is the sublimest of all arts, the art of prayer; the science which is their business in life is the supreme science whose subject matter is the Being of God. Consequently, they need to have experienced guides, and, after Mary, none is more expert in this science than St. Joseph, since none lived in such close, direct and constant intercourse with the God-Man. Hence, if we are wise, we shall constitute ourselves his pupils, we will enter his school, and seek his direction. The example of the saints encourages us to do this. They practised devotion to St. Joseph, and glorious results were the reward of their love and, reverence for him.

2. ILLUSTRIOUS SON OF DAVID

From long ages the prophecy had been 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 his adopted son all the rights which he himself inherited.

Mary, too, was of royal lineage, and through her the blood of David actually flowed in Christ's veins. 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. And that splendid work St. Joseph has carried on under the New Dispensation since he is pre-eminently the Patron of Prayer.

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 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 sufficient oxygen. If fresh air is breathed, it cleanses and purifies the blood; and we have but to take measures to place ourselves within its sphere of influence by going out on mountain or ocean, and it does its work silently, imperceptibly, but surely. So with prayer. God's presence and influence work even such purifying, exhilarating, elevating effects on our souls if we do not hinder that work by shutting out His influence; and, like pure air, His grace works silently, imperceptibly, but most efficaciously.

Turning to prayer is for the soul what going for a long walk on the mountains is to the body and its life. Our spiritual being, the supernatural, elevated, highest life of our soul, 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 corrupted, tainted 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 books. Just so the spiritual pedestrian, the lover of spiritual mountain climbing, the soul that is ever dreaming of God's heights where the blue heaven is so grand, gets the power of arresting men's attention, of weaving into attractive forms the romance of God's love, from these excursions in the realm of prayer.

Prayer in Desolation. But the mountains are not always dipping their heads in liquid blue; the grey clouds often settle down, wrap the earth closely like a mantle, and then mountain climbing is not so pleasant! But the bracing air is there all the same; though filled with mist, its purity and cleansing power are not lessened. No wonder St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, and those that have trod the heights are enthusiastic about prayer. We fools, that burrow in some dark hovel and hide our heads from the blue sky and our lungs from the clean air and then wonder it is not well with us! How vast a multitude pass from the cradle to the tomb, and never know that there is a material world of mountain scenery and fresh bugle winds and blowing flowers—a world of forest and lake covered with radiant green in spring,

with rich gold in summer and autumn—live and die buried in human traps and pits of squalor and filth and vice! But how much greater is the multitude that in like manner pass through life to the tomb and hardly realise that there is a world of prayer where every soul created can bask in the sunshine of God's love, can taste the sweets of His presence, can draw vigor from the bracing winds of His grace, can feast their souls on the flowers of infinite variety that spring up at His smile!

The saints were wise! The world notes only the blows of the discipline, and the macerated, fast-worn features, but knows nothing of the soul's secret food, of the manna that to the saints is sweeter a thousand times than all the gross pleasures this life can afford.

The backwoodsman in Texas or Canada does not work harder than the mechanic in a steel factory in Sheffield; the difference is in the atmosphere that each breathes: the one all the time drinking in air that is like champagne, the other filling his lungs with steel dust. So the difference between saint and sinner. Exteriorly they both do the same amount of work (or perhaps the sinner slaves more), but what a difference in the spiritual atmosphere! The saint at every breath draws in deep draughts of the strong air of God's love, and feasts his eyes at every pause in his work on the sunlit plains of God's beauty; the sinner fills his soul with the poison that envelops the sinful pleasures of this world. Mortification means the effort necessary to get away from the haunts of worldliness and climb the mountains to the fresh air of God.

3. SPLENDOR OF PATRIARCHS

A man is called Light on account of the beneficent influence he sheds around by his virtues, learning, or other qualities. His effect is like that of light—viz., to draw things into being, to cause the flowers of the soul or heart or intellect to bloom and give forth fragrance. Light produces beauty on land and sea, and so a man of God, a man 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. He makes their lives beautiful; the hard, rugged places become softened and mellowed by his presence, and under his benign influence the flowers of grace spring up, which make the poor, barren lives so gracious and fragrant. That is why we call St. Joseph *Lumen Patriarcharum*. He is a shining light amongst the forerunners of Christ, himself of the blood of Abram and Isaac and Jacob and David, one of the great pillars in that long line of God's servants who lived looking for Jesus; and if 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. And if Jesus turned to Peter for consolation in the Garden, how often must He have turned to Joseph during the long years of His youth and manhood?

God's Saints. Those heroes of Jewish history were men on whom God showered His spiritual gifts; they were saints: and amongst those saints Joseph of Nazareth stands pre-eminent.

Now, in the saints' lives, as in the life of every individual, two forces are constantly at work in the process of moulding the supernatural character—namely, God's grace and man's co-operation; the Master offering His help ceaselessly to elevate and strengthen the human will and enable it to elicit supernatural acts: and 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 favor—the exterior signs of the special providence exercised over them by God; and on the other we see how these favors were used—that is, how the saints practised the virtues that constitute the adornment of life.

These virtues we, too, have to practise as best we may, and we are helped in our efforts most of all by the sight of those that have gone before and been victorious in the struggle. No one ought to be better able to teach us how to love Jesus than St. Joseph, who knew Him so intimately.

Our Thirst for God. Our whole being is crying out for God. In the depths of our souls there is a thirst for 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 for the Infinite God that is deep down in our hearts. Just as starving wretches in a besieged city will 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 is the bread to nourish us and satisfy our hunger, turn to earthly pleasures for relief. But they will never satisfy us. What a wonderful thing it is that we, finite 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.

The Babe Divine. 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; this Babe born in poverty, a poor woman's Son, hurrying across the desert in terror of Its life before an earthly king; this Babe 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. That is our Christian faith Surely 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! And he is rightly called Splendor of Patriarchs. The Old Testament Patriarchs looked forward to the future Messiah—the Anointed of God whose coming would bring deliverance to His people. But the Patriarch St. Joseph actually ushered the Messiah into the world, was chosen to be His closest and most intimate friend, to share His secrets, to co-operate with Him, as no one else except Mary His Mother ever co-operated, in the work of saving mankind from sin.

4. SPOUSE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

St. Joseph was Spouse of God's Mother—i.e., her earthly spouse, with the title of husband; 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 her 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 what it meant for St. Joseph. He was constantly thrown into circumstances that called for the exercise of heroic and blind trust in God. If we reflect on the story of his doubts and hesitation as told in the first chapter of St. Matthew, which it required a special revelation to dispel; on the story of the journey to Bethlehem and the flight to Egypt, we shall see how his position as Mary's Spouse, as the man to whose loyalty God entrusted His most precious jewel, demanded the most heroic exercise of the virtue of hope.

God leaves no one without a friend: and so Mary had hers—and Joseph was the chosen man. What a dignity! what purity, truthfulness, goodness, love of God must have filled his heart to make him a fit companion for her!

But it was not only during her lifetime on earth that St. Joseph was guardian of the Virgin Mary—he has continued his work of defending her honor ever since in the life of the Church: that is a part of his duty as Patron of the Church.

We know how the saints have spoken of the importance in our lives of devotion to Our Lady; how they regard this devotion as a sure mark of predestination, and the absence of it as a very dangerous state of soul. Thus, to take one example, we read: "Among all the virtues upon which St. Francis Borgia laid stress in regard to novices, devotion to the Blessed Virgin stands out most prominently. He considered this devotion an infallible mark of predestination in the Society of Jesus. Those novices who were wanting in this devotion he viewed with no hopeful eye. Francis had during his whole life cherished the tenderest affection for the Queen of Angels. 'In all that I try to do for Jesus Christ, in all that I ask of Him I invariably look in a certain sense to Mary also,' he said. There was not a single shrine of Our Lady in Europe at which Francis at some period of his life had not offered a lamp with heartfelt devotion. Not long before his death, in spite of the entreaties of the Pope (Pius V), he had himself carried in a litter to Loreto. He said, 'I have received so many and such signal favors that even if I had to crawl thither, it behoves me before I die to go once more to her shrine to hang there an ex voto in token of my gratitude.' ”*

Since therefore St. Joseph wishes to benefit souls, he leads them gently and sweetly to the practice of this devotion to Mary. And who should be able to do this more perfectly—since he himself was the first of the human race to be filled with this devotion? To him first of all was divinely revealed the overwhelming dignity to which Mary had been raised. "Joseph, Son of David fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife—for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." So the truth flashed home to him. God is coming in person to save the world and

Mary is miraculously His Mother. Just as a few days later the Holy Spirit inspired Elizabeth to recognise Mary's dignity and salute her as "the Mother of my Lord"—and to cry out "Blessed art thou amongst women"—so God's angel revealed to Joseph the fact of Mary's divine Motherhood—and forthwith there sprang into being in his heart that fire of devotion to the Maiden of Nazareth that has blazed so brightly in the world ever since. To nourish and propagate that fire is a duty of the Catholic Church; but in discharging this duty she is nobly assisted by St. Joseph.

5. CHASTE GUARDIAN OF THE VIRGIN

A multitude of the heavenly army praising God and saying Glory to God in the highest. St. Luke ii., 14.

The precious second Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel gives us a brief glimpse of St. Joseph actively discharging his duties as Spouse and Guardian of the Virgin Mother. There we see him standing on guard by the Manger where the world's Treasure lies—whilst Heaven's gleaming armies of bright spirits are heralding His Presence to the astonished country folk.

This burst of heavenly light and angel song that broke so abruptly on the Bethlehem shepherds that winter night, has been a never ceasing source of joy to the world ever since.

It was a revelation—a rolling back of the gates of time—a breaking in of the spiritual world in order to put us in possession of certain facts: or rather of one supreme fact, namely, that the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, is born into the world. And this is the central fact of existence for me too: namely, that unto *me*—for my use and benefit, for my eternal welfare, for the benefit of my soul—has come into the world through a human Mother, a Saviour, a Divine Ambassador, whose definite purpose is to save me for Himself.

Do I realise this: that Jesus is pursuing me in order to catch and hold me as His own *forever*? He wants to fold me in His arms, to clasp me to His Sacred Heart—as He clasped St. John at the Last Supper—and to be my Friend for all the blissful ages of eternity.

The Good Shepherd. Jesus compares Himself to the shepherd seeking the lost sheep—the woman searching in the dust for her lost coin. The woman's silver groat is of so much value to her because she is poor. My soul is dear to Jesus; so many refuse to love Him—He has had such terrible losses in the matter of the gold of love. Again He says:—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert (that those bitten by serpents might be healed by gazing upon it)—so must the Son of Man be lifted up (on the cross) that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."

Hence the Angel's message: Fear not, because I bring tidings of great joy: *Your Saviour is born*: A Saviour who is God's Anointed One, the Lord of Heaven. Lo! infinite Strength has come to rescue you from your weakness. Light Eternal has come to dispel your darkness: Divine Mercy to wipe away your sins. For this Saviour is God's Holy Son, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Feeding the Hungry. Lo! I was hungry—hungering for peace and happiness—and Jesus comes to feed me with His own Body and Blood.

I was thirsty—tormented in the hell of my own desires and passions—and Jesus comes to give me a delicious water that will spring up in my soul unto life everlasting.

I was naked, and He comes to clothe me with the radiant robe of sanctifying grace and to make me resplendent in God's house, as being God's honored Guest.

He has shoes too for my feet, to enable me to dance lightly with His friends to the music which He provides: and a golden ring on my finger as token and pledge of his pardon and affection.

I was a stranger, wandering without home or shelter—cast out of Paradise with Adam: and He comes to take me into His own heavenly home that I may share the warmth and brightness, and all the comfort and happiness of His Father's establishment.

I was sick of soul and this heavenly Physician (as He styles Himself) has come from His heavenly home into this poor cabin of a world in order to visit me and nurse me back to health.

And the Angel at Bethlehem, standing at the gate of heaven (the shepherds saw the light streaming through the

open door) announces sweetly and gently the arrival of the Great Physician.

And behold! I am the shepherd listening to this announcement—I am the sick soul thrilled with joy at the news.

Jesus is beginning in His cradle to practise the charity which He preached so strenuously all through life to the poor and suffering.

I was in prison—enslaved by sin and passion and self-seeking—cooped up in the narrow limits of petty, worldly desires and vanity—and Jesus has come to liberate me, to break my chains, to lead me into the open, to expand my soul, and bid me set my heart on God Himself as my possession. Surely then He is a Saviour, coming to take my soul and transfer it to regions of light, health and freedom.

“ *Glory to God in the Highest.* ” And then to prove that He is the Lord Messias, God in Person come on earth—the angel hosts troop down to praise God, and to thank Him for sending Jesus. “ Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will.”

Christmas is surely a time of thanksgiving. For if I feel joy (the joy which the angel announced) that to me a Saviour is born, who is God Himself come to my relief, then surely I will praise and thank Him for this Gift?

And I praise God (with the Angels) because in coming as Saviour, Jesus is glorifying His Father, restoring to God the honor of which He was robbed by Adam’s sin, and all that it involved. Jesus has come to set things right at last—to make ample atonement to God’s offended majesty for the injury and insult done to Him by sin.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

High and infinite though God be (*in excelsis*) still an adequate atonement is now being made for all the glory of which He was robbed. Do I realise the infinite atoning value of each act of worship of the Heart of Jesus? Just as on earth the affection and tenderness of a very dear and valued friend may make up for the harshness and cruelty of many others so—one act of Jesus, the beloved Son of God, can atone for the sins of a world: and His acts are offered up in atonement for my sins and negligence. And as a result of this great Atonement—once we know of it and accept it by faith—Peace comes to the souls that are favored by God.

In terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Man is created to praise God. Do I thus praise God for the Incarnation? For the fact that Christ’s coming means glory to God and peace on earth? The angels teach us how to praise, and my life should be a constant hymn of thanksgiving for the good news delivered by the Angel at Christmas.

6. FOSTER-FATHER OF THE SON OF GOD

When a father sends his son to be educated abroad, he appoints a tutor to take his place and to be a father to his son, so when the Eternal sent His Son into creation to be trained in a life of poverty and suffering, 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!

Joseph is the plenipotentiary entrusted by God the Father with His own parental authority over Jesus. The mysterious relationship between Father and Son in the Trinity is beyond all that we can conceive or imagine. The Father is truly Father, although His nature is identical with that of the Son. But in the case of the Man Jesus Christ we understand better what God’s parental authority over Him means. God is the Father of us all, since He created us out of nothing. But in the case of Jesus the parental relationship is something infinitely more wonderful, since the Person Jesus is actually the Son begotten by the Father from eternity. Jesus the Man could say “ My Father “ in a sense different from all other men. Into the interior heart of that mystery we cannot penetrate; but what we can and do say is this: that parental authority, so wonderful, so mysterious, was delegated to Joseph the Carpenter of Nazareth; so that Joseph was *in loco parentis*, acting as Father to Jesus.

Peter’s Authority. To Peter Jesus committed full power to rule the Church, His mystical Body; but to Joseph God committed full power and authority to rule Jesus Himself, the Head of the Church. Yet what a wonderful power that Petrine authority was—to be the Master of all them that believe! What, then, was it to be the heavenly appointed Ruler and Master of Jesus?

Priest's Office. Again, the Church holds the priest's office in such reverence because he handles the Body of Jesus; he commands that the bread be made the Body of Jesus, and the command is fulfilled. Was not Joseph's office and authority just like this? He, too, handled the sacred Body of Jesus; he, too, carried Jesus about, cared for Him, issued commands about Him, and his commands were obeyed.

Specially Beloved by God. Joseph was specially loved by God. That alone is a strong reason for his being to us also an object of love and veneration. And that Joseph was specially beloved is very clear from the whole story of his life.

He was chosen, he of all possible creatures, for the sublime office of being Mary's Spouse and acting Father to Jesus. The bond between Jesus and Mary was unique; they were bound by ties of blood; she was His Mother; her blood ran in His veins; and He was God. We might have thought, perhaps, that this sacred intimacy between earthly Mother and divine Child was too sublime for any other creature whatsoever to be allowed to share in it; that the human relationships of Him who was God must be straitly and strictly confined to that one peerless and Immaculate Virgin who was His Mother. Yet we know that He willed to share the intimacy of that wonderful family life with one other; one soul was privileged to enter into that little family circle and be treated as completely belonging to it, and that one was Joseph, the husband of Mary the Virgin, the friend and intimate companion of Mary the Peerless. Surely that choice is a sign of God's love for him?

Honored by Jesus. Joseph was loved by Jesus as a father by his child. Joseph was in His heavenly Father's place, and Jesus was a perfect Son. Hence, Joseph received from Him who is God all the love and reverence due from the most dutiful of children to the most honored and loved of fathers.

Think of what that means! We know the intensity with which loving children are devoted to their parents. Well, multiply that a millionfold, and it may convey some idea of Jesus' devotion to His Foster Father, St. Joseph.

7. ZEALOUS DEFENDER OF CHRIST

Who came and took the Child and His mother by night and retired into Egypt. Matt. ii., 14.

Jesus was dependent on St. Joseph for His safety amidst dangers innumerable; it was to St. Joseph's fidelity and prompt obedience Jesus owed His escape from Herod; it was to St. Joseph's assiduous care He owed His safety amidst the dangers of the desert road to Egypt.

It seems strange to talk of defending Omnipotence, just as it seems strange to talk of pitying God; yet we know that Our Lord so humbled Himself as actually to crave our sympathy. He made Himself so poor and weak as to need our services; and so, too, He needs a defender. He is a baby, and someone must carry Him; is threatened by murderers, and someone must think and act for Him; and the arms that shielded Him in His hour of danger were those of St. Joseph.

Hence we owe a deep debt of gratitude to St. Joseph for saving for us our great treasure, Jesus; we owe him love for his splendid fidelity to our great Friend.

Joseph, I say, protected the life of Jesus and His Mother by fleeing with them to Egypt—away from Christ's enemy Herod. But he also saved the life of Jesus in his own soul by fighting against sin—that is by keeping his soul pure, by resisting the temptations to sin in which life is so woefully prolific.

The Herod of the Soul. We too must flee temptation in order to save the life of Jesus within us, we too must retire with Him clasped in our arms into the desert of prayer and penance, lest the Herod of passion, of pride, sensuality, avarice, destroy the Child and His grace within us.

Herod thus stands for all the forces that tend to drive Jesus out of our lives, summed up under three heads:—The World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

The World has its heart set resolutely on the good things of life—the things that appeal to the natural man and tend to obscure the supernatural.

The Flesh has its passions all aflame—eager to secure the things that gratify them.

The Devil is ever urging to despair, blasphemy, contempt of God, denial of truths of faith. He attacks especially the three theological virtues which directly unite the soul to God; and seeks to drive God out of the soul—hence he undermines Faith, filches away Hope, extinguishes Charity.

And to escape this Herod we must steal away in the darkness of night, under cover of prayer—and escape into a land where Herod cannot reach us.

Seven Deadly Sins. The seven chief passions (or “deadly sins” as they are called) may be grouped thus:—covetousness and envy; pride and anger; lust, gluttony, sloth. Covetousness or avarice is an inordinate desire of or hankering after the goods of this world. Envy is sadness arising from regarding another person’s good as a grievance or misfortune to yourself. Pride is an inordinate desire to excel others. It involves a certain rooted conviction of one’s own superiority—a wrong estimate of one’s position; just as humility means a true estimate of one’s own nothingness, weakness, misery, and sinfulness.

Pride is nourished by reflecting frequently on the supposed advantages that go to constitute this superiority, such as family, worldly rank or position, riches—or else personal qualities such as beauty, talents, accomplishments, or one’s achievements in the past.

And pride shows itself in presumption, over-weening ambition and vanity, or desire to display one’s qualities.

Anger is a commotion of soul rising up to resist an attack on something that one values and fears to lose. So that anger is rooted either in pride or in covetousness. If a man is poor in spirit and humble he will not easily get angry; because he sets little store on those things (riches and reputation) attacks on which provoke anger.

Lust, gluttony and sloth refer to bodily gratifications—the seeking of sensual pleasure or unduly shrinking from exertion and pain.

Hence the three great virtues opposed to these seven passions are Poverty of spirit or detachment from worldly goods; Humility and a childlike spirit; Self-denial practised to secure self-control. And those virtues are constantly and strongly inculcated by Our Blessed Lord:—“Blessed are the poor in spirit. He that humbleth himself like this little child is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven. He that will come after me must deny Himself. Blessed are the clean of Heart.”

By fighting constantly and vigorously against these evil tendencies in your nature, you are imitating St. Joseph in his office of “Zealous Defender of Christ” since you are saving the life of Jesus within your soul from the machinations of those aggressive foes that are for ever trying to destroy Him.

8. HEAD OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Modern paganism tends to disintegrate family life. Its worst social cankers are divorce and race suicide (abortion—Ed.), and those are such hideous evils just because they strike at the root of family life; since family life is founded on the stability and permanence of the marriage bond: and this bond itself is in existence to safeguard the child. The child is the world’s chief treasure, the most precious jewel in the casket of life. And the safeguarding of children, the restoring of children to their rightful place as the flowers of the moral world, the treasure best worth having and holding and protecting of all earth’s treasures—that was an essential part of Christ’s plan for the regeneration of human society. Callous disregard of child life—which led to the abominable practice of exposing unwanted children and other forms of child murder—stamped the decadent society of Christ’s time. And against all this intolerable state of things He set up His Church—as a bulwark for the protection of children—as a living teacher that would for ever instruct mankind in the meaning and value of the child.

Christ’s Love for Children. And how wonderfully Jesus has spoken about children! What stern threats He utters against those that scandalise them! How tenderly He presents to the world a little child as the model which all must imitate who would win God’s favour!

But then, He was not content with merely speaking wonderful things about the sanctity of childhood and the reverence due to children. He would emphasise the lesson and appeal to us still more forcibly by something far more extraordinary—He becomes a Child Himself!

Christ's Family. Now, the child connotes the Family: and so Jesus of Nazareth, when He comes into His own creation to set right what human wilfulness has set so terribly wrong, comes as a Member of a Family. And His Church, faithfully interpreting His mind and heart, keeps telling the world about His Family. That is what Catholic devotion to Mary the Mother of Jesus, and to Joseph His Foster Father and head of the Nazareth household, means.

Nay, more; the Church bids us understand that this supreme Family—the Exemplar to which wedded life must conform—will actually open its ranks to receive us, if we will, so that we can be adopted as friends or members or intimate associates of its daily life.

The Sinner's Welcome. Moreover, we have another startling thing to say about this Family of Jesus of Nazareth. In St. Luke's Gospel Our Lord depicts for us in vivid language the homecoming of the repentant sinner—of the man who has offended God deeply by an evil life and now is sorry and seeks reconciliation. The picture which Jesus places before us is that of a family celebrating with feast and song and dance the prodigal's return; and this, He tells us, is significant of the joy in heaven when a sinner is converted. But in actual fact the family that rejoices to welcome home the poor sinner is the Family of Jesus Himself. It is He who comes forth with eager eyes looking for the repentant prodigal: it is He who folds him in His arms with a warm embrace of welcome and gentle words of forgiveness: it is He who bids a feast be spread and all His friends and servants rejoice to welcome back the straying soul.

A family it is—as we all know to our joy—that creates for us an atmosphere of welcome, happiness and friendship. For a family means a group of people bound together by ties of love. And when they welcome you they open their ranks to give you a share in that blessed, glorious thing of which they are the lawfully appointed guardians in this grim world of ours—viz., Love. When family life wanes, then love also departs. Conjugal love, love of children, parental love, fraternal love—all have their natural home in the family: and outside of the family as safeguarded by Christian marriage, they tend to wither and die.

The Church's Function. Now (as we have said above), the Catholic Church enshrines the memory of the Family of Jesus, and keeps it forever fresh before the world. No other family life has ever been thus made eternally youthful and ceaselessly present to the consciousness of mankind. And this Family is kept thus because of the overwhelming fact that it is through this Family that God comes into our lives, to help us to make a right use of the gift of existence, and to dispose aright of the awful treasure committed to our keeping—viz., our immortal soul.

The Family of Jesus is to receive me and keep me in touch with God: and therefore Mary and Joseph have to play a definite and permanent part in my life, since they, with Jesus, constitute the Divine Family. When God became Man He took up our life as it is—not a far-away, isolated kind of human existence, but simply took up life as He found it, and as we find it.

Now, all men move in the sphere of family life. We do not live as hermits—but in groups. And even the hermit's life is possible only because family life is all around to make the world habitable for him. The exception proves the rule. Just as the fact that millions of workers are toiling ceaselessly to produce the necessaries of life, makes possible the secluded life of student or professor. Each individual of us is linked up with golden cords of love to our own friends and blood relations: and the whole great world is a web of social connections and mutual dependencies and twining charities of every kind.

His Earthly Presence. And Jesus came into this system, and in asking to share our life and our affections He will have us visit His own Family and love those dear friends whom He loves with all the ardor of a perfectly faithful and dutiful soul.

Hence we can appreciate the dignity conferred upon St. Joseph when he was appointed Head of this Family that is to be, for all time, the model of perfect family life.
