

THE GLORIES OF ST. JOSEPH

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INTRODUCTION

It is no uncommon idea, even among Catholics, that the devotion paid to St. Joseph and the loft estimate of his prerogatives now prevailing in the Church are innovations of modern times and that they have no precedent in antiquity. But this is far from the case. In the writings of the Church Fathers are to be found prolific germs and even explicit statements of doctrine, which sufficiently show how deep in the consciousness of the Church lay the belief of St. Joseph's exalted dignity and sanctity, and how definite a shape it had taken in the early ages.

If to some it may be a matter of surprise that so much attention is paid to one whom is scarcely mention in Scripture, and if it is also a wonder to them that the Holy See has assigned him the glorious title of Patron and Guardian of the Universal Church, this can only be that they have paid scant attention to St. Joseph's role in the economy of redemption.

TO DESCRIBE the life and glories of St. Joseph is to describe at the same time the life of Jesus and the glories of Mary; for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are so intimately united, that it is impossible to speak of one without treating of the others. These three dear names—Jesus, Mary, Joseph—form that triple Heavenly alliance which can never be broken.

In order to understand the greatness of St. Joseph, we must look very far back, for his greatness did not begin with his birth, for it began with his predestination, Predestination, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is the Divine preordination, from eternity, of those things which, by Divine grace, are to be accomplished in time. Now, the most compassionate Lord God had, in the admirable dispositions of His Providence, from all eternity, preordained the ineffable mystery of the Divine Incarnation to repair the fall of Adam and save his descendants from eternal ruin. This mystery hidden in ages was to be revealed in the fullness of time. The Eternal Word was to assume human flesh and to offer Himself as a voluntary victim to expiate the sins of all mankind. This mystery, then, was to be accomplished in Jesus; it was predestined that Jesus, who according to the flesh was the Son of David, was in truth the Son of God, that it was preordained that one day that human nature was to subsist along with the Divine Nature, in order that the sacrifice of Jesus might have an infinite value to satisfy worthily the Divine Justice. And this is what is called the eternal decree of the Divine Incarnation.

Now, in this decree is comprehended, not only the mystery itself of the Divine Incarnation, but also the mode and order in which the mystery was to be accomplished, and consequently, those persons who were principally and more immediately to have a part in it, for according the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, the eternal predestination includes not only what is to be accomplished in time, but likewise the mode and order according to which it is to be accomplished: that the Most Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ was to be taken, but without sin, from that same human nature which had sinned in Adam: that It was to descend from the blood of Abraham, to be of the tribe of Juda and the race of David, and that the Body of Jesus was to be formed by the power of the Holy Ghost in the pure womb of the Immaculate Virgin, Mary; and therefore Mary, after Jesus, was immediately comprised in the decree of the Divine Incarnation, and from eternity predestined to be the most august Mother of the Son of God.

But in order to conceal this mystery of love from the world until the appointed time had come, and to safeguard at the same time the reputation of the Virgin Mother and the honor of the Divine Son, God willed that Mary, by a marriage altogether Heavenly should be espoused to the humblest, the purest, and the holiest of the royal race of David, one therefore expressly predestined for this end; a virgin spouse for the Virgin Mother, who at the same time should be in the place of a father to the Divine Son. In the Divine mind Joseph was the one chosen from amongst all others. Joseph held the first place. Joseph was, after Mary, comprehended in the very decree of the Incarnation

PART ONE:

ST. JOSEPH INCLUDED IN THE ORDER OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

WHATEVER God disposes is disposed in a marvelous and perfect order. Wherefore the Church which Jesus came to found on earth imitates the Heavenly Sion. As in Heaven there are angelic hierarchies, and in these ranks there are diverse orders, so also on earth there is a hierarchy of grace, and in that hierarchy are included various orders or

ministries, which, according to the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, excel each other in proportion to their approximation to God. The highest of all these orders, whether angelic or human, is the order of the Hypostatic Union, in which is Christ Jesus, God and Man. By the Hypostatic Union is meant that the Eternal Son of God, in His Incarnation, assumed human nature, and united it to Himself in Personal unity; in other words, that in the one Divine Person of Jesus Christ, the two Natures, the Divine Nature and the Human Nature, ever distinct in themselves, became inseparably and eternally united.

If a wonderful order is displayed in all the works of nature, an order supremely perfect is displayed in all the works of grace, especially in the great work of the Incarnation. Among these orders of grace some precede the mystery of the Incarnation, others follow it. Among those which precede it the most remote is the order of the Patriarchs, chosen to prepare the progenitors of Jesus down to St. Joachim and St. Anne. To some of these, as to Abraham and to David, it was expressly revealed that of their blood and of their family, the Savior of men should be born into the world. The next is the Levitical and sacerdotal order, preordained by God to figure in all its rites the Priesthood of Jesus, His Church., His Sacraments, the Bloody sacrifice of the Cross, and the Unbloody Sacrifice of the Altar. The third is that of the Prophets, destined to foretell and announce to the world, so many centuries before the coming of Jesus, His Birth of a Virgin, His country, the place of His Nativity, His flight into Egypt, His Apostles, his preaching, miracles, His Passion and Death, his Resurrection and glorious Ascension into Heaven. Greater than all these Prophets was John the Baptist, because destined and preordained to be the immediate Precursor of Christ, and to point to Him as being actually present on the earth. . . These are the orders which under the Old Law preceded Jesus.

Others succeeded Him, and these are the various orders or ministries of Holy Church, which form the ecclesiastical hierarchy, beginning with the Apostles, who were to render to the whole earth and to all ages their solemn testimony to the Divinity of Jesus Christ; they were to announce all His Doctrine, His Law, His Sacraments; they were to found and spread His Church throughout the world, so that all might attain salvation. And, as the Apostolic order was nearer than any other to Jesus, even so, says St. Thomas Aquinas, did the Apostles receive greater grace than any other saint in the other orders of the Church.

Now, above all these orders rises supreme the order of the Hypostatic Union. All the other orders, including the angelic, are subordinate and subject to it; for this reason, that Jesus is the beginning, the author, and the head of this order, and on Jesus, as Sovereign Prince, depends every hierarchy, every sacred principedom in Heaven and on earth, since Jesus is the end of the whole law [Rom. 10:4] . . . Jesus is the sole and true source of salvation to all men. By faith in Him Who was to come all were saved who lived justly from Adam until His day; and all those who have lived and shall live justly since His coming have been and shall be saved by Him alone. . . all the various orders of grace circle, from Him alone receiving light, virtue and power to fulfill faithfully the holy offices to which they are ordained; and so much the greater or less grace and dignity do they receive as they are more or less approximated in their ministry to Jesus, the author of grace, just as one who is nearer to the fire participates more largely in its heat. It is clear, then, that the order of the Hypostatic Union transcends and surpasses the other subaltern orders, even as the sun transcends the inferior stars.

Now, Joseph by Divine predestination was placed in this sovereign order. Three only composed it—Jesus, Mary, Joseph. Jesus is true God and true Man; Mary is true Mother of God and Mother of men; Joseph is true spouse of Mary and putative father of Jesus. Jesus is the principal subject of the Incarnation, and the author of the Redemption of the world; Mary is the immediate co-operatrix and, so to say, the executrix of the Incarnation itself; Joseph, the faithful depository of these two most precious pledges, was to provide that this sublime mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption should be brought about with the greatest possible congruity, so that the honor of the Mother and of the God-Man, her Son, should remain intact.

That Joseph should be comprised in this supreme order is not a mere devout opinion or the fruit of pious meditation, it is a sure decision of the soundest theology. Suarez, that eminent theologian, after having spoken of the Order of the Apostles, upon which he said the greatest grace was conferred, goes on to say: “There are other ministries appertaining to the order of the Hypostatic Union, which in its kind is more perfect, as we affirmed of the dignity of the Mother of God, and in this order is constituted the ministry of St. Joseph; and, although it be in the lowest grade of it, nevertheless, in this respect, it surpasses all others, because it exists in a superior order!” [1] Thus spoke Suarez, the

learned theologian of Granada, about three hundred years ago, when the opinion of the faithful respecting St. Joseph and the devotion due to him had not been so openly and generally displayed.

But the doctors who followed spoke still more clearly. Giovanni di Cartagena, contemporary of Bellarmine and Baronius, and very dear to Pope Pius V for his piety and science, out of the numerous learned homilies which he wrote, devoted thirteen to the praises of Joseph. After having spoken of the Apostolic order, he passes on to treat of the order of the Hypostatic Union, and says that in its kind it is more perfect than the other, and that in this order the first place is held by the Humanity of Christ, which is immediately united to the Person of the Word; the second place is held by the Blessed Virgin, who conceived and brought forth the Incarnate Word; the third place is held by St. Joseph, to whom was committed by God the special care, never given to any other, of feeding, nursing, educating, and protecting a God-made-man! [2] After Cartagena comes P. Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani, highly praised also by Benedict XIV, who, almost two centuries ago, wrote thus of St. Joseph: "He, as constituted head of the Family immediately belonging to the service of a God-Man, transcends in dignity all the other Saints; wherefore he is happily established in an order which is superior to all the other orders in the Church." [3]

We might adduce other doctors of high authority, but we will proceed to consider some of the legitimate consequences which flow from this doctrine.

1. It is an exceeding honor to Joseph "to be comprised in the same order wherein are Jesus Himself, the Son of God, the King of kings, and Mary, Mother of God and Queen of the universe, to be united with them in the closest relations, and enjoy their most entire confidence. The nobles of the earth deem themselves to be highly honored in being brought into near association with monarchs of renown, holding the foremost places in their courts, and being the most trusted in their councils. What, then, shall we say of Joseph, who, placed in the order of the Hypostatic Union, was destined by God, not only first in His court and the closest in His confidence, but even to be the reputed father of the King of kings; to be, not only the confidential friend, but the very spouse of the most exalted of all the empresses in the universe? Next to the Divine Maternity, no honor in the world is comparable with this.

2. To be comprised in the order of the Hypostatic Union implies being, after Jesus and Mary, superior to all the other Saints, both of the Old and the New Testament; and the reason is clear: for, this order being superior to all the other orders in the Church, it follows that whosoever has a place in this order, albeit in its lowest grade, as Joseph has, ranks before all who are even in the highest grade of a lower order, such as that of the Apostles, which is the most eminent among them.

3. It follows that Joseph is superior, not in nature, but in dignity, to the Angels themselves, since the orders of Angels are subject to the order of the Hypostatic Union, subject to Jesus, their King and their Head, subject to Mary, their Queen; hence, as the Apostle declares, when the Eternal Father sent His Divine Son upon earth He commanded all the Angels to adore Him. [4] And on account of Jesus the Angels became subject also to Mary and to Joseph: thus we find them hastening gladly to serve them, to warn them, to console them; and were they not sent expressly from Heaven to act as attendants on Joseph, at one time to assure him that his Spouse has conceived the Son of God Himself; at another to make known to him the plot of Herod, so that he might place the Virgin and her Divine Son in safety by flying into Egypt; and, again, to announce to him that now he may joyfully return into the land of Israel? [5]

4. We conclude that Joseph was comprehended in this order because he was truly the head and guardian of this Divine Family. To rule and govern this august family belonged of right to Jesus, who was God. Mary and Joseph, exalted as they were in dignity, were, nevertheless, only creatures; but Jesus willed to give an example of the most perfect humility. It was His will to magnify our Saint, and to concede to him this high glory, making him the head and guardian of His family; so that Joseph had rule and authority over the Son of God Himself and over the very Mother of the Son of God. And Joseph, being thus destined to be the head and guardian of Jesus, the head and guardian of Mary, became at the same time the patron and guardian of the Church, which is the spouse of Jesus and, in a manner, the daughter of Mary. Whence [St.] Pius IX, of blessed memory, in proclaiming Joseph Patron of the Church, did not so much confer a new title of honor upon him as affirm and declare this his most ancient prerogative, which had not before been so expressly promulgated by Holy Church.

5. It follows that Joseph was comprised in that order and in that family the highest representation which it is possible to conceive, inasmuch as he was made the very representative of the Divine Father, Who alone has the right

to call Jesus His Son, having begotten Him from all eternity; and yet that same God, Who by the mouth of Isaias [6] protested that He would never give His glory to another, that God Who, in communicating to the Word and to the Holy Spirit His Divine essence, does not in any wise communicate to them His Divine paternity, was so generous to Joseph as to concede to him His glory, and communicate to him His name and His paternity; not actually, for that was impossible, but so that he should be in His place and stead, and should be called the father of Him who was the Divine Word, and that the Word Himself should call Joseph by the sweet name of father, so that he might with true joy appropriate to himself that passage in Holy Scripture:

“I will be to Him a father and He shall be to me a son!” [7] Herein we see manifested the great love of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity for our Saint and the confidence They reposed in him; for the Eternal Father committed wholly into his charge His well-beloved Son; the Divine Son delivered Himself entirely to his care and to his will; the Holy Spirit consigned and committed to him His most immaculate Spouse; so that this Holy Family, of which Joseph became the head, was another Triad on earth, a resplendent image of the Most Holy Triad in Heaven, the Ever-Blessed Trinity: Joseph representing the Eternal Father, Jesus representing and being in very truth the Eternal Word, and Mary representing the Eternal Love, the Holy Spirit. This thought is borrowed from the Doctor of the Church, St. Francis de Sales. “We may say”—these are his words—“that the Holy Family was a Trinity on Earth, which in a certain way represented the Heavenly Trinity Itself.” [8]

6. Finally, it follows that Joseph, in that he was comprised in that sublime order, superior to that of all the other Saints, must as a natural consequence have been predestined to receive greater gifts and graces than all the other Saints, that he might be made worthy to be so near to Jesus and Mary, and fitted to discharge most faithfully those high ministries to which he was elected. Hence the pious Bernardine de Bustis makes this bold assertion: “Since Joseph was to be the guardian, companion, and ruler of the Most Blessed Virgin and of the Child Jesus, is it possible to conceive that God could have made a mistake in the choice of him? or that He could have permitted him to be deficient in any respect? or could have failed to make him most perfect?” The very idea would be the grossest of errors. When God selects anyone to perform some great work He bestows upon him every virtue needful for its accomplishment.” [9]

Let us rejoice, then, with our most loving Patriarch that he has been exalted to so sublime an order, and has obtained such grace, power, and dignity as none other, after Jesus and Mary, has ever received, to the glory of God, Who made him so great, and for our profit and that of the whole Church.

PART TWO: THE GLORY OF JOSEPH IN HEAVEN

GOD proportions His graces to the office with which He entrusts a man, and his glory in Heaven will be proportioned to the fidelity with which he has discharged it. If this be true, and it is undoubtedly true, what must be the glory of Joseph! To whom was ever committed an office which for its sublimity could be compared to that for which our Saint was chosen? and who can question his faithful correspondence with the high graces which he must have received in order to its due discharge? Well, therefore, may we address him, as do the United Greeks in one of their hymns, by the singular epithet of “more than a Saint,” or, rather, as “pre-eminently a Saint,” by the super excellence of the graces he received from Heaven and his perfect correspondence with those graces. So far, then, from its being rash to hold that Joseph surpasses all the Saints in glory, even as he exceeded them in grace, the learned Suarez is of opinion that it is a belief both full of piety and in itself most highly probable. Many other eminent ecclesiastical authorities might be quoted in support of the same view, but the name of Suarez may suffice to warrant our conviction of what recommends itself even to our natural reason. Moreover, if it be once conceded that Joseph, being specially associated with the mystery of the Incarnation, was constituted in a higher order than any other, however exalted, in the hierarchy of the Church, namely, that of, the Hypostatic Union, it follows that no comparison can be attempted him and other Saints, because he possessed a different and more eminent kind of sanctity.

And this is no new opinion in the Church. We need not wonder, then, if the Blessed Veronica of Milan [10] when rapt in ecstasy and raised in spirit to behold the glories of the empyrean, distinguished the incomparable Joseph exalted above all the blessed; nor if a celebrated doctor of these later centuries [11] should have written that Jesus Christ denied the first seats in His kingdom to the ambitious pretensions of His disciples, James and John, [12]

because these places were reserved for Mary and Joseph; and was it not meet, indeed, that the Son of God should keep those nearest to Him in Heaven who had been nearest to Him on earth? We cannot well conceive that it could be otherwise. “Was there ever any pure creature,” says St. Francis de Sales, “so beloved of God or who better deserved that love than our Lady or St. Joseph?” [13] All the Fathers of the Church are agreed that the Joseph of Genesis was a type of the most pure spouse of Mary, and that his brilliant exaltation over his brethren was a shadow of the glory of the second Joseph, and a kind of prophecy of what was to occur in his case. Is not this implicitly to concur in the doctrine of Suarez and of those other eminent authorities who expressly affirm the elevation of Joseph above all the Saints in Paradise? Finally, the Church herself in her offices appears to favor and accredit this truth, by calling Joseph the honor and glory of the Blessed; [14] words which imply his superiority.

But this superlative glory of Joseph’s soul, although constituting his substantial and essential beatitude, is by no means all that appertains to that beatitude. Man being composed of a united soul and body, the happiness and glory of Heaven are promised to the body as well as to the soul, and form no inconsiderable portion of it. Now, we have every reason to be persuaded that Joseph truly rose from the grave, and, if so, that his body also shines with a luster and enjoys a bliss surpassing that which the bodies of other Saints shall ever enjoy. It is of faith that many bodies of the Saints arose with the Incarnate Word, and that they appeared to numbers of persons in Jerusalem, [15] giving them undoubted proofs that they were truly risen. Moreover, it is the opinion of St. Thomas and of well-nigh all the Doctors that these Saints were not subject to death any more, but, after having for some time communicated on earth with the disciples of the Son of God, they, when the forty days were expired, followed Him in His Ascension to render His entrance into Heaven still more brilliant and glorious. It seems scarcely necessary to allude to the idea entertained by some as possible, that these Saints returned into their tombs after rendering their testimony. With all respect to those who have favored this notion, among whom are some honored names, not only is it to our mind in every way repulsive, but it seems to destroy the value of the testimony itself, seeing that their bodies were to return to dust. Dismissing, then, a conjecture unworthy, as it appears to us, of the goodness of God and of the great work which Jesus had achieved when He rose triumphant from the grave and, ascending into Heaven, led captivity captive, [16] and displayed the trophies of His victory in these first children of the Resurrection, let us ask ourselves who of all the ancient Saints were likely to form a portion of this chosen band. St. Matthew, wholly occupied in relating what immediately regards our Lord Himself and in establishing our faith in the principal mysteries which concern Him, has neither specified the number of those who were called to share the Redeemer’s triumph over death, nor given the name of anyone among them; he simply says that they were “many.” We, therefore, naturally conclude that certain great patriarchs and prophets of the Old Law must have been thus chosen. But which of these patriarchs or prophets, however magnificent the promises made to them or declared by them, however high in the favor of God they may have stood, could be compared for greatness and dignity with Joseph, to whom it was given to be a father to Him Who is the God of all the patriarchs and prophets, and to feed, support, and protect Him Who created and sustains all things? Could these ancient Saints be selected for the glory of the Resurrection and Joseph left in the tomb? But, more than all, how can we believe that this loving Savior, Who gives life to whom He will, [17] and therefore had the power to choose whom He would to share His glory in body as well as soul, can have called from their graves this multitude of His servants and friends and omitted His dearly-loved father? Impossible! No proof seems required to establish a fact which, so to say, proves itself by its simple statement.

Isolano, among the Oriental traditions which he collected, gives a touching instance of the love with which Jesus spoke of Joseph while on earth, saying to His disciples, to whom the knowledge of His Divine origin had already been revealed: “I conversed with Joseph in all things as if I had been His child. He called Me Son, and I called him father; and I loved him as the apple of My eye.” These and similar legends represent, if they do no more, the current opinion in the East in days near to the Gospel times. We gather from them more or less of evidence confirmatory of our conviction that Jesus did not regard His apparently close relationship to Joseph as a mere shield or mask, but recognized a real relationship therein, which, though not of the natural order, was none the less endearing. And, if we are to credit the revelations of Saints, in Heaven this relationship still endures, and He still calls Joseph father. Appearing one day to Marina de Escobar, accompanied by the Saint, He said to her: “See, here is My father, and whom I regarded as such upon earth; what think you of him?” It was, we might almost say—if it be permitted to do so

without irreverence,—as if He were proud of him, proud of having had him for a father on earth, and desirous to show this holy soul his glory. The Bollandists also relate how Jesus appeared one day to St. Margaret of Cortona, and told her He took great pleasure in her devotion to His foster-father, Joseph, who was most dear to Him, and expressed His wish that she should every day pay him some special act of homage. [18] The heart melts with tenderness at such thoughts, even as it recoils from the idea that the close bond between Jesus and Joseph was only temporary, and merely ordained for a passing object. If, then, that bond still exists, assuredly Joseph is with Him in body as well as soul as truly as he was in the workshop of Nazareth, where they worked by each other's side for so many years. St. Bernardine of Siena, that glory of the Seraphic Order and great lover of Joseph, in the admirable sermon which he delivered in honor of the Saint, after declaring his conviction that Joseph enjoyed the same privilege as Mary in the resurrection of his body, concludes with saying that, as this Holy Family—that is, Christ, the Virgin, and Joseph—had been united in a laborious life and in loving grace while on earth, so also their bodies and souls reign together in Heaven in loving glory, according to that Apostolic rule: *II As you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you be also of the consolation.*" [19] Gerson, after saying that words fail him worthily to extol that admirable Trinity,—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,—adds that, after Mary, Joseph is nearest to Jesus in Heaven, even as, after her, he was nearest on earth. P. Giovanni Osorio will not hear of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph being divided in Heaven, or of anyone being nearer to Mary in glory than her most sweet spouse, nor nearer to Jesus, after Mary, than His reputed father, since on earth there were none so closely united as Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Isidoro de Isolano, whom we have just quoted, also says that Joseph, spouse of Mary, arrayed in two robes like the ancient Joseph—that is, with the blessedness of his soul and body,—accompanied Jesus in His Ascension into Heaven, and sat down next to the King of Glory, [20] that place being, according to Cartagena, on His left hand, the right being reserved for Mary.

It would be long to quote all the concurrent opinions of the learned and the holy, but we cannot omit that of Suarez. After saying much in praise of St. Joseph, he adds that, according to the sufficiently received belief, it was probable that he was reigning gloriously with Christ in Heaven, both in body and in soul. [21] If Suarez could call this a sufficiently received belief more than two hundred years ago, what would he have styled it at the present time, when it is held well-nigh universally? Finally, we must content ourselves with citing the opinions of two Saints of these later ages, St. Francis de Sales and St. Leonard of Port Maurice. The former, after speaking at some length of the resurrection of Joseph, thus concludes: "St. Joseph is, therefore, in Heaven in body and in soul; of that there is no doubt." [22] And St. Leonard, in pronouncing his eulogium, exclaims that Joseph was transported in body and in soul to the empyrean by a particular privilege, which appears to be indicated in the Proverbs, where it is said that all of her [Mary's] household are "clothed with double garments," [23] which interpreters have understood as signifying the twofold glorification of soul and body.

But let us look at the subject from another point of view. Our Divine Lord in calling from the grave this multitude of saints intended them, as the Master of Theologians teaches, [24] to serve as witnesses to the reality of His own Resurrection, in order that the disciples and the rest of the faithful should not imagine that it was a phantom who had appeared to them, but should firmly believe that it was truly He Himself, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they beheld. We know how hard of belief they were, and how, when they saw Him walking on the Sea of Galilee, notwithstanding all the wonders they had witnessed, they had cried out for fear, imagining it was an apparition. [25] And, although He had repeatedly told them He should rise from the grave, they refused at first to credit the testimony of Mary Magdalen and the other women; nay, Thomas refused to believe the word of the other ten Apostles, declaring that unless he had ocular and tangible proof he would not believe. Now, the Resurrection of Christ was, we may say, the very cornerstone of Christianity. It was that which the Apostles were to be sent forth pre-eminently to teach." If Christ be not risen again," says St. Paul writing to the Corinthians, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." [26] As, then, the Apostles were to preach this truth to the world, Jesus made use of these risen Saints to confirm their faith in His Resurrection; they were to be to the Apostles what the Apostles were afterwards to be to all the nations of the earth. Angels were employed by Him for the same purpose, declaring it to the women on that first Easter morn, and showing them His open sepulcher. [27] But the Son of God desired also to have the testimony of men, and that, not only to His own Resurrection, but to His power to raise from the dead whomsoever He would. He, therefore, by His Divine omnipotence and the virtue of His victory over the grave, raised to life the bodies of His dearest friends to

overcome the incredulity of His followers. But was there any among them whose testimony would have been more credible than that of Joseph? What patriarch or prophet of the Old Testament could have given the witness to Jesus that the spouse of Mary could give? Abraham beheld Him in spirit from afar, but Joseph saw Him with his bodily eyes in his own house for many years. David prophesied the coming of the Incarnate Word, and described His principal actions, but Joseph had received Him into his arms when He came into the world, and took part in almost all the mysteries of His life. If Joseph, then, who, according to this pious belief, was certainly among the risen Saints, could have said to the Apostles, “This is the true Son of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, the only Savior of men; this is truly He whom I saw born in a stable, the same whom I circumcised, whom I carried into Egypt, whom for a long time I sustained by my labor, and who labored with me in my workshop at Nazareth, He is the same, doubt it not, disciples of Jesus,” must not this testimony, given by one who was also personally known to them, have been a more convincing proof of the Savior’s Resurrection than what all the Fathers of the Old Testament could furnish? The Spirit of God had taught us by the mouth of prophets the eternal generation of the Son of God, Angels proclaimed His temporal generation when He was born in Bethlehem, but to Joseph was given the honor of declaring to the nascent Church what may be called the immortal generation of Jesus, that is, His Resurrection from the dead by the power of the Spirit! [28] All that the other resuscitated Saints might say could not have had such persuasive efficacy as would have had the testimony of Joseph risen from the dead. May we not be permitted to apply to him the words of Ecclesiasticus respecting the ancient Patriarch: “His bones were visited, and after death they prophesied,” [29] or preached? Whatever may be their meaning as regards the elder Joseph—for no tradition has reached us of any wonder or miracle wrought by his precious relics—they were amply verified in the great Saint, his prototype, if, indeed, it were given to him to publish to the Apostles the Resurrection of the Savior, and, through them, as we may say, to preach to the whole Church.

Jesus is the Bread of Life, of Which whosoever partakes shall have eternal life. Hence the Fathers often call the Flesh of Jesus Life-giving Flesh. Contact with It in the Holy Eucharist pours graces into our souls and deposits the germ of our future glorified bodies. If this be so, we may consider, with St. Francis de Sales, that Joseph, having enjoyed the honor of being so closely united to Jesus, of kissing Him devoutly, embracing Him tenderly, and bearing Him so often folded in his arms, must have had a sufficient title to an anticipated resurrection. The Flesh of Jesus is like a Heavenly magnet to draw to Itself the bodies of those who have been honored and sanctified by Its touch. Were they as dry and heavy as the clods of earth which cover them, the Son of God promises them the agility of eagles to fly to Him when, at His second coming, His voice shall be heard by them in their graves: “Wheresoever the Body is, there shall the eagles be gathered together.” [30] But can earth have detained the body of holy Joseph until the consummation of ages, whose union with the Savior had been so close and so endearing? St. Augustine—or whoever may be the author of the Treatise on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin—and other Fathers of the Church give as a reason for believing in the resurrection of Mary that it would have been indecorous that the body of one who was so closely united to Jesus, of whose flesh He had taken flesh, and who had rendered Him so many services, should have remained the slave of death until the end of the world. Now, what is pre-eminently true of the Mother of God applies in large measure to him whom Jesus called His father on earth, and who served Him with such matchless devotion; so that we may readily believe or, rather, we are irresistibly led to believe, that he who was more intimately united to Him than was any other Saint must thence have derived a right superior to that of all others to share the bliss and glory of His risen Body.

The ancient Joseph, when about to die, besought his brethren not to leave his remains in Egypt, but to bear them to the promised land; and Moses faithfully fulfilled the last will of the Patriarch, and carried the relics of this holy man into Palestine. [31] We see here a figure of Joseph, the spouse of Mary, who, when at the point of death, full of confidence in the Savior’s love, recommended, not his soul only, but his body, to that dear Son, who gave it His blessing; and that blessing was a promise. Jesus, Who had so often sweetly reposed upon the bosom of Joseph, who had nurtured, defended, and toiled for Him during thirty years, would not leave Him in the Egypt of this world, but, when he passed to the promised land, took him with Him into Heaven, there to enjoy without delay the fulness of eternal bliss. Thus may we say with the Prophet that Joseph had “a double portion” [32] in that true land of promise, the blessedness of the body as well as of the soul.

Many other reasons might be alleged in support of this belief, and in particular the desire of Mary. When the Blessed Virgin rose from the sepulcher on the day of her glorious Assumption, would she, so to say, have been satisfied had she not seen her chaste spouse, Joseph, similarly glorified? The most pure and holy marriage of Joseph with Mary was, like his paternity, to endure for ever. It was ordained in connection with the Incarnation of the Word, and, as that mystery was still subsisting, and would subsist throughout eternity, so was it also with this alliance. The Word espoused human nature to Himself for ever, and Joseph was united for ever with the Most Blessed Virgin; and, as death did not sever the tie which united the Word to the Body and Soul which He had taken, so neither did it sever the tie which bound together the hearts of Mary and Joseph. She loved him, and will love him as her spouse for all eternity, and must therefore have ardently desired the full completion of his bliss. Even if the loving heart of Jesus had not shared that desire, He must have yielded to the solicitations of her at whose request, for a motive immeasurably less pressing, He had changed the water into wine at the marriage-feast of Cana. St. Peter Damian has left on record his opinion, that St. John the Evangelist is risen and glorified both in body and soul in Heaven, because he was like to Mary in virginal purity, and so intimately associated with her that we cannot conceive the one being raised without the other. [33] But how incomparably more weight such reasons have in favor of her virgin spouse!

Further, we may confidently hold that, had this venerable body been left on earth, God would never have allowed it to remain concealed, and thus to be deprived of the honor given to the relics of Saints much inferior to him. Ecclesiastical history frequently alludes to miracles which it pleased the Lord to work in order to the discovery of the precious remains of many of His servants, that men might render them due veneration, transport them to their churches, place them under their altars, and honor them with religious cultus. But of Joseph nothing remains save the ring he placed on Mary's finger on the day of their espousals, for the possession of which two cities have contended, and a few fragments of his garments, to which pious homage is still paid. Angels were charged to bear the Holy House of Nazareth into Catholic lands, that it might not be left in the possession of infidels; and, if God thus willed that this material tenement should be preserved and honored, is it conceivable that He should have abandoned the body of him who was the owner of that house and the pure spouse of His Blessed Mother, and left it all these centuries in the cold grasp of death? We have every reason, then, to conclude from such facts as these that earth no longer possesses the body of our Saint. Indeed, a latent, if not a positive and declared conviction, seems to have dwelt in the hearts of the great body of the faithful, when visiting his sepulcher in the Valley of Josaphat nigh to that of his most holy spouse; [34] that, like her, he is not there, but is glorified in body as well as soul.

Many learned doctors, and among them [as we have said] St. Francis de Sales, consider that several of the alleged reasons for his anticipated resurrection amount to demonstration. Nay, God Himself seems to have authorized the belief by a striking miracle; for when St. Bernardine of Siena, preaching in Padua, declared that the body and soul of Joseph were both glorified in Heaven, a rich cross of gold was seen to shine over the head of the preacher, proving to the very eyes of those who surrounded him the truth which he was conveying to their ears. The pious Bernardine de Bustis, who was himself a witness of this marvel, also most firmly held that Joseph rose from the grave with Christ and, along with the risen Savior, went to visit his holy spouse, and is now enjoying eternal life and glory ineffable, soul and body, in their company. [35]

How great the glory of the beatified body of Joseph may be, it is beyond the power of our feeble imaginations to conceive. We only know that it must be proportioned to the glory of his soul. It is certain that the Body of the Lord, when He rose victorious from the grave, possessed such marvelous endowments and was adorned with such matchless splendor that all earthly magnificence and beauty is but a shadow of its glory. The living palace of the Incarnate Word, in which, as the Apostle says, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally," [36] must needs thus be gifted and enriched. But Jesus was not only rich in Himself, but rich in order to impart His riches. His followers are to be partakers of it, each in his measure, and that measure, be it small or great, will include and, indeed, will consist in likeness to Himself. The beloved disciple, unable to describe the future blessedness of the sons of God, says, "It hath not yet appeared what we shall be," and then he adds, "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like to Him." [37] That is all he could say; and it was the highest thing he could have said. That adorable Body being, indeed, the first and most perfect of all corporeal beauties, we cannot estimate the riches and glory of other bodies save by comparing them with this Divine exemplar. When the Son of God, then, was willed to raise His father Joseph with

Him from the grave, we feel that He had what we might almost call a special obligation to grant him a singular likeness to Himself. Joseph had been very like to Him on earth, and it was fitting that he should be so in order to confirm the opinion that he was truly His father; and now, in the resurrection, Jesus enhances that likeness, not to establish, but to recompense the paternity of Joseph, and to preserve that just conformity in Heaven which was befitting the relationship subsisting between them, a relationship which, next to that which united Him to His Immaculate Mother, was the most intimate and the most glorious. When Joseph, therefore, entered Heaven on the Ascension Day, he presented to the eyes of the Angels the most magnificent object, next to the Sacred Humanity of the Eternal Son, which they had ever beheld. Mary, their Queen, was, it is true, to shine with still more resplendent luster, but never for a moment must we imagine that her arrival on the day of her Assumption caused the glory of her spouse to pale; on the contrary, it increased and intensified it through that celestial law of reflection of which we have the type and similitude in nature on this earth of ours. The bodies of all the Saints will be invested with light, a light which emanates from the Lamb, who is the lamp and the sun of the New Jerusalem, [38] but the Savior and His most holy Mother will delight in causing the brightest beams of their glory to irradiate through all eternity the beatified body of Joseph, who, abiding ever in close proximity to the central splendors of the empyrean—the Sacred Humanity of the Incarnate Word and His most holy Mother—will be even penetrated with their light—as a precious metal glows with the same intenseness as the furnace in which it is plunged, or, like some pure mirror, which, confronted with the sun, faithfully repeats its image—a light too dazzling for mortal eyes to gaze upon. What more can we say? Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the earthly Trinity, now together enthroned in the blaze of supernal glory, shine in that light eternal which by communication becomes, as it were, common to all three.

Notes:

1. Tom. ii. disp. viii. sec. 1.
2. Lib. iv. Hom. viii.
3. Il Divoto di S. Giuseppe, Novena, Gior. vi.
4. Heb. i. 6.
5. St. Matthew i. 20, 2 ; ii. 13, 19, 20.
6. Chap. xlii. 8.
7. Heb. i. 5.
8. Entretien, xix.
9. Mariale, Sermo xii.
10. Declared Blessed by Leo X. Her life was written by Isidoro Isolano.
11. Cartagena, Lib. iv. Hom. viii.
12. St. Mark x. 35.40.
13. Entretien, iii 13.
14. "Cœlitum Joseph decus."
15. St. Matthew xxvii. 51, 52.
16. Psalm lxvii 19;
17. St. John v. 21.
18. Apud Bolland. die 22 Februarii.
19. Cor. i. 7.
20. In speaking of two robes, he alludes to the robe of silk with which Pharaoh invested the viceroy of Egypt, in addition to his own, when he placed him in his second chariot [Gen. xli. 42].
21. Tom. ii. in p. iii. S. Thomæ, disp. viii. sec. ii. a. 2.
22. Entretien, xix. n. 22.
23. Prov. xxxi. 22. Panegir. di S. Giuseppe, n. 4.
24. "They rose, to die no more, because they rose to manifest the Resurrection of Christ."—St. Thomas, in Matthœum, cap. xxvii.
25. St. Matthew xiv. 25.27; St. Mark vi. 48.50; xvi. 11, 14; St. Luke xxiv. 11; St. John xx. 25.
26. 1 Cor. xv. 14.

27. St. Matthew xxviii. 5, 6; St. Mark xvi. 6; St. Luke xxiv. 5-7.
28. Rom. viii. 11 ; Eph. i. 19.
29. Chap. xlix. 18.
30. St. Matthew xxiv. 28.
31. Gen. I. 24 ; Exod. xiii. 19.
32. Ezekiel xlvi. 13.
33. Sermo ii de S. Joseph.
34. Bede, De Locis Sanctis, cap. lx.
35. Mariale, p. iv. Serm. xii.
36. Col. ii. 9.
37. 1 St. John iii. 2.
38. Apoc. xxii. 5.
