



Daniel Letellier

# Virginal Father, Hero of Confidence

St. Joseph received a greater and more extraordinary mission than any other man on earth. He was spouse of the Virgin Mother, the One who would give birth to the God-Man and Redeemer of the world.



Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

Chosen by the Blessed Trinity to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word, Our Lady is the most perfect of all mere creatures. Even if we were to consider, in their ensemble, all the qualities of the Angels, Saints and men who have existed, exist and will exist until the end of the world, we would still not have even a pale idea of Mary's heavenly perfections, which shone before God's eyes from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception.

In order to fulfil the eternal designs of Divine Providence with regard to the Redemption of humanity, it was necessary that, at a certain moment, this sublime creature should enter into a legitimate marriage. In this way, She could miraculously conceive and give birth to the Son of the Most High without detriment to her reputation.

### *The sole man worthy of Jesus and Mary*

Now, between husband and wife there should be some proportional-

ity; one cannot be far superior to the other. Therefore, a man was needed who, for his love of God, justice, purity, wisdom – in short, for all his qualities, would be on a par with that august Bride.

Furthermore, since it was also fitting that the father be proportional to the son, this man would have to bear the honour of being the adoptive father of the Word made flesh, in all worthiness.

A man then arose for this sublime mission. The Eternal Father had created his soul with all the adornments and predicates that would place him entirely at the level of his calling. This man, chosen among all to be in proportion to Our Lady and Our Lord Jesus Christ, was St. Joseph.

He was qualified for this glory, this unimaginable pinnacle of being spouse of the Virgin Mother and foster father of the Child Jesus. As legitimate spouse of Our Lady, St. Joseph had full rights over the Fruit of her immaculate womb, although this Fruit had been conceived by the Holy

Spirit. That is to say, with the exception of the Divine Maternity itself, one cannot conceive of a more extraordinary vocation! It is an inconceivable grandeur.

For example, let us imagine the moments when St. Joseph carried the Child Jesus in his arms, or of those times when he saw Him engaged in the activities of daily life in the Holy House of Nazareth, or of the hours when he contemplated Him immersed in conversation with the Eternal Father...

Let us consider how pure his lips must have been, and how unfathomable his humility would have been to talk to the Divine Infant, answer His questions, or give Him advice when asked. A simple human being, formed and moulded by the hands of the Creator, teaching God!

Let us also consider the uplifting and respectful treatment between St. Joseph and Our Lady, when she knelt before him to serve him. He sees that creature who is Heaven's Heaven inclined before him, and ac-

cepts her services. As if this were not enough, his Spouse also consults him, exchanges opinions and adheres to his orders.

In a word, he was the man who had enough wisdom and purity to govern God and the Virgin Mary. We thus reach the conclusion that the grandeur of St. Joseph is something simply unimaginable!

### *Perfections of a prince and a worker*

In order to trace the true moral profile of the head of the Holy Family, it would be necessary to know how to interpret the Divine Face of the Holy Shroud of Turin and, by way of supposition, to deduce something of the personality of the one who was the educator of the countenance present there, and the spouse of His Mother.

Married to Her who is called the Mirror of Justice, and foster father of the Lion of Judah, St. Joseph needed to be a model of wisdom, chastity and strength: a steadfast man, full of intelligence and discretion, capable of taking care of God's Secret. A fiery

soul, zealous and contemplative, but also imbued with affection.

He descended from the most august dynasty in the world, that of David. The Jews recognized in St. Joseph the man entitled to the royal throne if the legitimate monarchy was restored in the Holy Land.<sup>1</sup> This right Our Lord Jesus Christ inherited from His lawful father, and so He was acclaimed as "the son of David," when He entered Jerusalem.

In other words, He was not just any descendant of the prophet-king, but the first-born claimant to the throne. And St. Joseph was the man through

*The problem seems to be solved: both will remain inviolate. What happiness! His hope lives on*

whom this dignity was transferred to the Son of God Himself.

Providence wished to ennoble the working class by also making Jesus' foster father a manual labourer, who practised the trade of carpenter. In this way, St. Joseph united the two extremes of the social scale in the inner harmony of his holiness and his person. He was at his peak as prince of the house of David, but he was an impoverished prince who derived from his craftsmanship the sustenance for the Holy Family.

As a labourer, he knew how to be humble and to show due respect for those in a position of superiority. As a prince, he also knew the mission with which he was endowed, and he fulfilled it magnificently, contributing to the preservation, defence and earthly glorification of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was into his hands the Eternal Father entrusted this treasure – the greatest that ever was or will be in the history of the universe!

And such hands could only be those of an authentic leader and guide, a man of great prudence and



Gustavo Kralj

Espousal of Our Lady and St. Joseph by Fra Angelico – Predella of the Annunciation, Diocesan Museum of Cortona (Italy); previous page, statue of St. Joseph – private collection of Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias

profound discernment, as well as of sublime affection, so as to surround the Son of God made Man with every necessary care, filled with adoration and reverence.

At the same time, he was a man ready to perspicaciously and steadfastly confront any challenge that might arise: whether it be of a spiritual and interior nature, or originating from the persecutions of Our Lord's adversaries.

### *Hero of confidence*

Let us consider, for example, the tremendous ordeal that befell him at the very beginning of his marriage with Mary Most Holy.

In the Old Testament, the greatest blessing to which any Jew could aspire was to be counted among the ancestors of the Messiah. In view of this, the immense majority of the chosen people sought to marry and have children, and it was not unusual to consider sterility as a sign of contempt and disgrace.

But St. Joseph, moved by grace, did not wish to marry in order to preserve his virginity. He lived his tranquil life as a chaste and pure man when, unexpectedly, he received a summons: all the direct descendants of David had to appear before a Virgin called Mary, so that a husband might be chosen for Her.

Obedient, the holy man appeared beside his relatives, trusting in the voice of grace that had caused him to embrace virginity. In his heart, he had the certainty that another would be the chosen one.

At that time, everyone travelled with the support of a staff, and so each man there had his own.

The priest presiding over the ceremony determined that the one upon whose staff a flower bloomed would be the one to be united with Mary.

St. Joseph looks at his staff... and sees a flower appear on it! All his

hopes for virginity have suddenly vanished. What will happen now?

He confides. It is a miracle that obliges him to wed Mary. Meanwhile, in the depths of his soul he wishes to remain a virgin! Serene and courageous, he accepts the divine disposition.

He speaks privately with the young lady and discovers that She, too, has taken a vow of virginity. The problem seems to be solved: both will remain inviolate. What happiness! His hope lives on.

As the days pass, he realizes the incomparable treasure contained in the soul of this Virgin who has been confided to him. He reflects: "I will protect her magnanimously. I am here to defend Her in the splendour of her personality against all manner of attacks."

### *But then the unthinkable happens...*

But at a certain moment the unthinkable occurs: he notices that the

*But at a certain moment the unthinkable occurs and St. Joseph undergoes a terrible ordeal*

Virgin is expecting a Child. Perplexity pervades St. Joseph's soul.

He could not comprehend what was happening after so many miracles... The blossoming of the staff, the delight with which the two had communicated their mutual desire for perpetual virginity, the joy of soul that they then felt: "Of course! God has put us on the same path. He has

made a promise to us and is fulfilling His promise."

St. Joseph went through an unspeakable ordeal, and so did Our Lady, since She perceived the full extent of her husband's suffering. His anguish was all the more intense for knowing clearly that a betrayal on the part of that incomparable Virgin was impossible.

Now, by Jewish law, if a wife were to transgress, her husband was obliged to expel her from his home. But St. Joseph was certain that Mary had committed no sin.

Not wanting to commit any injustice towards such a holy Virgin, and not being able to cover up this irremediable situation, St. Joseph decided to leave the house of Nazareth unnoticed. Before undertaking the long journey that awaited him, he decided to rest to gather his strength.

At dawn he would leave, carrying only his staff, some food and the burden of a great enigma, heavier than Mount Everest: "How did this happen? My God, my God... I trust in Thy promise!"

Despite the affliction, his soul was so confident and so serene that he slept. And upon falling asleep, he was visited by a dream that held a recompense. God communicated to him that the Child in Mary's virginal womb was the Incarnate Word, Son of the Divine Holy Spirit.

When St. Joseph awoke, peace reigned in his soul. And Our Lady, seeing the luminous countenance of her spouse, knew that his trial had ended.

Because he was a hero of confidence, St. Joseph received a greater and more extraordinary mission than that of any other man on this earth. He was the spouse of the Virgin Mother, of the One who would give birth to the God-Man and Redeemer of the world. Thus, the promise of virginity that had been made to him flourished. Everything was fulfilled in an unimaginable manner.

### *Model knight in the protection of the King of kings*

Nevertheless, obstacles had not vanished from the paths along which St. Joseph would tread. Sufficient proof of this can be seen in the rejection he encountered at the inns of Bethlehem when he sought shelter for Our Lady, who was about to give birth to the Infant-God, or likewise in the flight to Egypt.

A “flight to Egypt”... To 20th-century man, these three words mean something relatively commonplace: take a plane from Jerusalem and arrive a short while later in Egypt.

It was not so at the time when St. Joseph, receiving the warning that the cruel Herod was seeking to kill the newborn King of the Jews, was forced to take the Mother and Child and leave with them for the land of the pharaohs.

Ahead of them was a long and uncertain journey through deserts where all sorts of dangers were lurking, including those posed by wild animals, thieves and brigands. The latter were capable not only of stealing from and killing travellers, but also of taking them into captivity for trade in the slave markets.

And St. Joseph, with his fiery heart, his foresight and virile strength, faced all of these obstacles, leading Our Lady on a small donkey, bearing the Child Jesus, the God who wanted to be weak in the arms and hands of the Glorious Patriarch.

The vocation of Godfrey of Bouillon is often admired and praised – that victorious warrior who, in the First Crusade, commanded the Catholic troops in the conquest of Jerusalem. This is a beautiful feat! He is the crusader par excellence.

However, to defend Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself signifies much more than to retake the Holy Sepul-



St. Joseph's dream  
Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph, New York

*Despite the affliction, his soul was so confident and so serene that he slept. And upon falling asleep, he dreamed...*

chre! And it was with this that St. Joseph was gloriously entrusted, becoming the model knight in the protection of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

### *In the ranks of the Saints, the first below Our Lady*

Alongside all the glories that have been showered upon him, St. Joseph received an invaluable reward, while

yet on this earth: he is the patron of a good death.

In fact, it could be said that he had a death to cause envy, for he died in the arms of Our Lady and Our Lord, who surrounded him with all their affection and consolation at his last hour. It is impossible to imagine a more perfect death, with both of them physically present.

On one side was Our Lord, pouring out increasingly greater graces upon His virginal father as the soul of St. Joseph continued to grow in holiness in the final throes of his agony. On the other was Our Lady, whose smile, full of esteem, sought to strengthen his confidence:

— My husband! Remember that everything will be fulfilled. Courage! Let us forge ahead!

Upon entering Heaven, he saw the fulfilment of all the promises, the perfect accomplishment of a calling that had involved unspeakable perplexities and incomparable glories.

And St. Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary, foster father of Jesus and declared Patron of the Church, occupies such an eminent place in Heaven that he receives the cult of protodulia. That is, below Our Lady – who merits the devotion of hyperdulia – he is the first to be venerated in the vast hierarchy of Saints.

It is the sublime reward earned by this man who practised the virtue of confidence in the loftiest degree. ✧

Taken with slight adaptations from: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year II. N.12 (Mar., 1999); p.13-17

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *São José: quem o conhece?...* [St. Joseph: Who Knows Him? ...] São Paulo: Lumen Sapientiae, 2017, p.50.