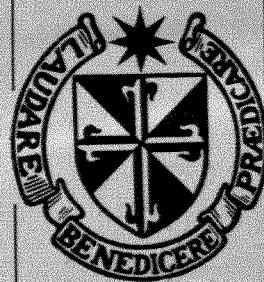


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## St. Joseph and Providence

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.

RECOGNITION of St. Joseph as the greatest of the saints after Mary has been growing in the Church for the last five centuries. Gerson, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Teresa, St. Francis de Sales, Suárez, St. Alphonsus, and Leo XIII taught this doctrine of St. Joseph's high status. In his encyclical on St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, Leo XIII says: "There is no doubt that St. Joseph, the spouse of Mary, approached more nearly than any other the supereminent dignity by which the Mother of God is elevated far above all other creatures." For this reason it would even seem that St. Joseph surpasses the angels, being invoked before them in the Divine Praises recited after benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Likewise in the prayer, *A cunctis*, he is named immediately after Mary and before the Apostles. He has a special preface; the month of March is consecrated to him, and in his litany he is proclaimed the protector of the Holy Church.

The reason for Joseph's pre-eminence is that an exceptional divine mission demands a proportionate exceptional sanctity. St. Thomas applies this principle to Jesus, to Mary, and to the Apostles. It is also applicable to St. Joseph and to the great servants whom God chooses directly for Himself; for God does all things with measure, might, and sweetness. The mission of St. Joseph is unique in the world for all time. His mission is not only elevated above the natural order, but it exceeds the order of grace; it belongs to the order of the hypostatic union constituted by the mystery of the Incarnation. The mission of St. John the Baptist and that of the Apostles belongs to

the order of grace and of salvation; that of St. Joseph approaches the mission of Mary, the Mother of God.

The divine maternity belongs by reason of its end intrinsically, physically, and immediately to the hypostatic order, since Mary is the mother of the Word made flesh. Joseph's mission belongs extrinsically, morally, and mediately (through Mary) to the hypostatic order because of a moral cooperation, for he was the foster father of the Word made flesh and spouse of Mary by the very decree of the Incarnation: "The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David."<sup>1</sup>

Joseph was predestined first of all to be the foster father of the Word made flesh, by the decree itself of the Incarnation, which is the predestination of Christ and was anterior to the predestination of all other men. Joseph was predestined in consequence to the highest degree of glory and grace after Mary. And although he is not the father of Jesus in the essential meaning of the word, he is more than a simple foster father, more than an adopted father. According to Bossuet he received a father's heart from God to accomplish as perfectly as possible and with perfect love all the duties of the best of fathers toward Jesus. Such is the reason for his exceptional sanctity, which is second only to that of Mary.

Bossuet has brought out clearly the essential character of St. Joseph's mission in his first panegyric on the Saint, by comparing his mission with that of the Apostles. He says: "Among all vocations I notice two in the Scriptures which seem essentially unlike: the Apostles' and Joseph's. Jesus is revealed to the Apostles so that they may announce Him throughout the universe; He is revealed to Joseph so that he may keep silent about Him and conceal Him. The Apostles are lights to show Jesus to the world; Joseph is a veil to cover Him, and under this mysterious veil there is hidden from us the virginity of Mary and the grandeur of the Savior of men. He who glorifies the Apostles by the honor of preaching, glorifies Joseph by the humility of silence." The hour of the manifestation of the mystery of the Incarnation has not yet come; this hour must be prepared for by thirty years of hidden life. Perfection consists in doing God's will, each one according to his vocation; but the vocation of Joseph in silence and

<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:26.

obscurity exceeds that of the Apostles because it more closely touches the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation.

St. Joseph's mission was twofold, first, in relation to Mary and second, in relation to Jesus. By virtue of his first mission St. Joseph preserved Mary's virginity by contracting with her a true but absolutely holy marriage. No shadow however slight was to touch the honor of the Son and that of His Mother. Moreover, Mary found in Joseph help and protection. He loved her with a most pure, devoted, theological love, for he loved her in God and for God. The beauty of the entire universe was nothing compared to the sublime union of these two souls—a union created by the Most High, which ravished the angels and gave joy to the Lord Himself.

In relation to the Word made flesh, Joseph watched over Him, protected Him, contributed to His human education. He was more than a foster or adopted father, for a man becomes a foster father or even the adopted father of a child by chance, whereas it was by design that Joseph became the foster father of the Word made flesh. He was created and placed in the world to that end; it was the first purpose of his predestination and the *raison d'être* for all the graces that he received.

According to Bossuet, just as grace gives us the heart of a child toward God, just as at Pentecost grace gave an apostolic heart to the Apostles while enlightening and strengthening them and endowing them with invincible courage, so Joseph was given the heart of a father toward Jesus as an immediate result of the divine power. God the Father gave Joseph a father's love toward Jesus; for this reason Joseph did not fear to command Him. Joseph was predestined, first of all, to serve as a father to the Savior, who could not have one on earth; then, to receive a high degree of glory and grace so that he might be the worthy protector of the Savior of men.

St. Joseph's virtues are especially those of the hidden life and are in proportion to his degree of sanctifying grace: virginity, humility, poverty, patience, prudence, unshakable fidelity, simplicity, faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, trust in God, and perfect charity. He preserved these God-given treasures with a fidelity proportionate to their inestimable value. Bossuet says: "It is a vice common to men to give themselves entirely to exterior things and to neglect interior things; to work for show and appearance and to neg-

lect the effective and the solid . . . and yet all the mystery of genuine virtue is in its secret character. . . . Otherwise there is only the semblance of virtue, which does not make a man according to the heart of God. Joseph, the simple man, sought God; Joseph, the detached man, found God; Joseph, the withdrawn man, enjoyed God."

St. Joseph's humility was confirmed by the thought of the gratuity of his exceptional vocation. Why did our heavenly Father give His only Son to me, Joseph, to safeguard? "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Joseph appears as the most humble of all the saints after Mary, more humble than any of the angels. Because Joseph is the most humble, he is the greatest of all—for the virtues being related, the depth of humility is proportionate to the elevation of charity. Jesus Himself says: "He who is the lesser among you, he is the greater."<sup>2</sup> Joseph, far from boasting of his gifts, hid himself, enjoying peacefully with God the mystery revealed to him. "He possesses the God-man and says nothing about it."

In spite of the obscurity of the angel's words, in spite of poverty which was accentuated at Bethlehem where there was "no place in the inn" during Christmas night, the faith of Joseph was unshakable. He suffered because he had nothing to give Mary and her Son. His trust in God was manifested in trial, during the flight into Egypt. His love of God and souls did not cease to grow at Nazareth, particularly when he held the Child Jesus in his arms, the Child who is the source of ever new and ever loftier graces. The acceleration of the growth of his charity was prodigious, being far more rapid in later life than in his youth.

St. Joseph's contemplation was very simple and lofty, like that of a poor workman we knew who used to say the Our Father three times a day in honor of the shedding of the precious blood. But this simple and eminent contemplation demanded the greatest sacrifices from him when he recalled the words of the aged Simeon. He constantly offered the Child Jesus to His Father.

St. Francis de Sales thinks that St. Joseph was among those who, according to St. Matthew,<sup>3</sup> arose from their tombs after the resurrection of the Lord. He holds that these resurrections were definitive

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:48.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Matt. 27:52.

and that St. Joseph entered heaven with body and soul. St. Thomas is much more reserved on this point.<sup>4</sup>

The litany of St. Joseph offers a series of titles of supernatural splendor which clearly show us his role. Like Providence he is occupied with the most universal things (e.g., the reunion of the Churches), and with most particular things (e.g., the finding of shoes for a poor man). He is mindful of the greatest sinners and the most advanced souls. Making us persevere in the road to salvation Joseph is terrible to the devil, against whom he is our great defense. In his relation to man Joseph is above all the patron of a happy death.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q. 53, a. 3, ad 2.

## *Balance between Action and Contemplation*

Raymond A. Tartre, S.S.S.

THE tremendous interest aroused by Thomas Merton's books on contemplative life in this country where the cult of action prevails, has astounded observers both here and abroad. As a result, conflicting and opposite claims in a somewhat exaggerated form have been made by the proponents of both the active and contemplative life. Some of the confusion seems to have come from a misunderstanding of the terms, setting up opposition between action and contemplation where only harmony and mutual dependance should exist.

It is but natural that our judgments should be colored by our likes and dislikes. One of the most common forms of self-deception consists in justifying set purposes and natural proclivities by invoking high-sounding principles. A man who loves company will fall back on the principle of christian charity to justify frequent absences from more urgent and immediate duties at home, while one who loves his own personal ease will reckon that refusing to meet and help people is but a sign of his desire to lead a studious life and to shun the world.

How ingrained and widespread this self-deception can be is evidenced by the belief held by everyone that he is immune from it. We smile at people who attempt to justify their worse habits by a virtuous exposition of high motives. We hardly realize that we are victims of the same blindness. If we are inclined to active work, we