

St. Joseph – Servant, Adorer, Disciple, and Our Model¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Angers, Thursday, March 19, 1868

Joseph, noli timere accipere Mariam conjugem tuam — [Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home] (cf. Mt 1:20).

My dear Sisters, notice today's feast. This feast of St. Joseph is so beautiful and consoling for us! I must offer him special honor and give him to you as protector and model. That's why **I will speak to you about St. Joseph: apostle, prophet, servant, adorer, disciple and model of the coenobitic life.**

When God the Father wanted to give his Son to the world, he wanted to provide honorable circumstances for him, because he is certainly worthy of all honor and praise. In order to honor him, God the Father had to give him a court, a kingdom, of earthly glory. The heavenly Father had to prepare those who would serve him. At the coming of his Son on earth, God did not want anything left to chance for such a mystery of grace and love. Therefore, the heavenly Father had to prepare those who would participate in the mystery of the incarnation. He had to give his Son a court and consequently a kingdom.

Who will form the court of his Son? It consists of Mary and Joseph. In your consideration, the honor of St. Joseph consist in his role as his first adorer and the most faithful of his disciples. That is the glory of St. Joseph that concerns you, my Sisters. First, he will be his most faithful servant. In the world, when a king has an heir, the most dignified and perfect men are chosen to serve the royal prince. The Father owes it to his honor and glory to provide an education fitting for a prince, among other things. The heavenly Father must give a father to his Son. He chooses St. Joseph, because, remember this, what exists on earth is a replica of the heavenly kingdom, with the difference that earth is passing, while heaven is everlasting.

St. Joseph, then, had to be a prudent, wise, and perfect servant; otherwise he would have brought dishonor. Nothing dishonorable must approach a prince. The Lord, the King of kings, must be honored by his servant. Notice that St. Joseph is humble, yet he is heir to the highest throne in the world. Flowing in his veins is the blood of David and Solomon, and of all the kings of Judah. If his family were still on the throne, he would be the first, the most worthy. In Judea, he is of the family, the kingdom, the tribe of Judah, the family of David. Don't look at his poverty; a king can appear poor for a while. Don't look at his clothes; there is no one on earth, there is no king in the universe who is greater, nobler, and richer than St. Joseph. That's why he will be inscribed in the registry of Bethlehem, recognized by the Roman governor as the heir of David. He will be clearly recognized through this royal and divine document.

Is this nobility relevant? Jesus is king with royal blood. Don't you want Jesus to share in this nobility? By his death on the cross, he will redeem everyone in his mercy. He surely must take their place. When, however, he comes from heaven with all the glory of heaven and earth, Jesus is noble. He will choose his apostles from among the lowly and ennoble them according to his will. This son of David, this son of Abraham... it is necessary that his family be honorable. The Church is not like a democracy that equalizes everyone; we must respect everything that it respects. Is it necessary to be noble in order to serve our Lord? If you were, you would bring him an added glory; but it is not necessary. Let each one bring good will to the service of our Lord, with heart in hand. [...]

St. Joseph is great. What else does he have? All the natural virtues, all the virtues of an excellent education, because for the Jews education was perfect, done in the temple. It was only right that all

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the natural virtues and those of education should embellish the first servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. And all the Christian virtues, spiritual and supernatural, were all shining brightly in St. Joseph, as bright as the sun.

St. Joseph was an apostle. The apostles proclaimed our Lord by preaching, and St. Joseph by his silence. St. Joseph was a prophet. He announced the coming of the Messiah in limbo. Since St. Joseph had to represent the heavenly Father, he had to manifest his glory, his wisdom, and his holiness. How many virtues have come to light in St. Joseph! He held in his arms the Old and the New Covenant, the glory of one and the holiness of the other. You who are Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, and you who will become servants, must also have the virtues of St. Joseph. When someone applies to join the service of a great prince, his aptitude, his honorability, and his qualities are examined. You will not be examined now, because you have already been admitted, and notice that no one is excluded; there is not a minimum standard. No, no! We look at the personal vocation and the good will. Virtues will come later – now, we consider the grace.

What were St. Joseph's qualities? Sacred Scripture chooses a single word: He was just. (cf. Mt 1:19). By this expression he is crowned with all the virtues. He was faithful, as sacred Scripture also says. He was faithful to accomplish all the commands of God and everything required of him among men; as our Lord accomplished even the smallest part of a letter (cf. Mt 5:17-18). In addition, he was devoted, for a servant must be devoted; dedication is the measure of love and the degree of virtue. One who loves more than self shows infinite dedication. St. Joseph manifested this devotion during his life. In the service of the Savior he was always faithful. The dedication of a servant deserves to be honored and rewarded. Such dedication merits a crown. However, St. Joseph was not to have a crown on earth, for his love was beyond limits.

You must be dedicated until death. Do you think you could ever equal the dedication that our Lord has for you? Even if you lived a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, you would always lose out to our Lord. Take on the dedication of St. Joseph. I would even say that the service of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament cannot be rewarded here on earth, since you have no right to a reward. Would an angel want to be rewarded? The service of our Lord is itself a reward. Your reward is the joy and honor of serving our Lord in his own person. There is no greater reward.

Take note. The queen of Sheba, who arrived in Jerusalem at the time of Solomon, voiced out her praise: *Happy are your men, happy these servants of yours, who stand before you always and listen to your wisdom. I am not so fortunate; I must return to my own country* (1 Kgs 10:8,13). People in the world say the same about you: How fortunate these Servants who can always be with the master, kiss his feet, and rest on his heart! Are you not fortunate? What have you done? What an honor and grace the Good Lord has given you! You could be the object of jealousy from an indignant world, saying, I worked hard just to reach the door, but you... Pray for the others and never forget this grace.

These, then, are three qualities of St. Joseph. After the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph is the first adorer of the incarnate Word, our Lord. Why the first? Did not the prophets adore him? Did not Abraham see his day, since our Lord said it? (cf. Jn 8:56). St. Joseph is the first adorer, from the point of view of faith. He did not see our Lord when the angel announced to him that the incarnation had started three months earlier. He was the guardian of the Virgin Mary, but she kept her secret to herself. How blessed she was! She did not speak about her joy... no, no, she kept it hidden. Three months later, St. Joseph learns about the secret of his spouse, when the angel tells him: *You will have the honor to name him* (cf. Mt 1:21).

What does he do when he learns that the Word has taken flesh in the womb of Mary, as in a divine tabernacle? Did he not adore him? While it cannot be described in human language, surely his adoration was perfect. When our Lord went to visit his precursor, St. John the Baptist *leaped for joy* (cf. Lk 1:44), like a sick person who sees the sun, like a prisoner who is granted his freedom. Wasn't St. Joseph worth more than the precursor, since he would have authority over our Lord? For six months, he adored the incarnate Word.

There is a story about Origen, that pious man whom the heretics calumniated and whose good name has been restored today. It seems his father used to respectfully kiss his chest in which the Holy Spirit was dwelling, considering it a tabernacle. Can you not believe that St. Joseph would get up at night to adore the incarnate Word? And the Blessed Virgin did even more so, since she was the mother. St. Joseph would say: My Lord and my God, behold your servant. His adoration must have been very devout. Since he had been chosen as his foster-father and legal father, he had to serve him. No one can describe his adoration. For six months, he did not see him but believed, beyond the virginal veil of the most Blessed Virgin.

My Sisters, between our Lord and you, there exists only the veil of the sacred species, much more consoling and transparent. Look for our Lord behind that veil. As the prophet said: He will come under a thin veil. **Ask St. Joseph for his living and perpetual faith.** We can imagine Joseph picking up Jesus, carrying him close to his heart, embracing him in his arms. These were times that Jesus received the worship of his first adorer, after the Blessed Virgin. These acts of worship were more pleasing to God than those of heaven. When we see God, it's impossible not to take something from him. Seeing the face of the infant Jesus, it would not be surprising for St. Joseph to take something. What would he take? Some of the glory of the Son of God. Picture St. Joseph adoring his God, telling him that he would die for him, and pouring out his heart to tell him all that he would do for him. The creative genius of love is proportioned to its holiness. The more a soul is pure and simple, the more it is holy.

You are adorers, not in the stable, but at the altar that has replaced Calvary, the second mountain of God, like Tabor instead of Calvary. Adore as in the stable, but this is not the best adoration. Adore, then, but your adoration will not be equal to that of St. Joseph. One who loves God in everything offers him the sacrifice of her love. God listens to that soul. She is worth thousands of others.

St. Joseph adored our Lord in the stable and during his hidden life, but we truly have something more. St. Joseph did not have the grace that we have to adore him on the cross, on his mystical altar. Do you think that our Lord, who loved him dearly, would have deprived him of this grace of compassion? St. Joseph was on Calvary more often than ourselves. Do you not believe that his spirit of faith led him there? Wasn't his heart pierced by a sword when Simeon took the child Jesus in his arms and revealed to the Blessed Virgin the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah – an account more perfect than the gospels? Immediately, Calvary appeared to him. [...]

Oh! **Compassionate love!** You will never experience it to the same degree as St. Joseph. Your adoration has a triple object: Jesus hidden, as he begins his royalty in Bethlehem; Jesus on the cross; and now as he appears on our altars. What a joy! You are there like the torch burning for his glory.

[...]

My Sisters, you are going to profess the vow of poverty. It will never be equal to that of St. Joseph; still, the gift of your will is something great. When you hear someone like St. Peter saying: *Master, we have left everything*, he seems to be boasting, and he had good reason, *what will there be for us?* The Jews believed that the Messiah would have a temporal kingdom, and each had his own ideas about its power and glory. – Peter, what have you left behind? An old boat not worth even one hundred francs and a house near the shore that did not belong to you, but to your mother-in-law. – Our Lord did not tell him that, and the other apostles acted the same as St. Peter. Our Lord told him: *Everyone who has given up his house, his family, or lands for love of my name will receive a hundred times more in this life, and will inherit eternal life* (cf. Mt 19:27-29). St. Gregory, a great pope, asks: How does St. Peter dare say that he has given up everything? He had given up his will and his privilege to possess things; that's why he had made a great sacrifice.

How many men, born miserably poor, died on a throne! They found a crown on their way and picked it up. In the past, it was common to see a military officer take possession of a throne. One can at times find a treasure. When you take your vow of poverty, you freely decide no longer to possess

anything in this world; you have only food and the use of things. Does a servant ask his master: What kind of food are you going to give me today? Everything is in the hands of our Lord, as the prophet used to say: *Cast all your worries upon the Lord, and he will support you* (cf. Ps 54:23; 1 Pt 5:7) – Our Lord said something similar to his apostles: *Were you ever in need of anything?* (Lk 22:35)

Then, there is the vow of chastity. Oh! This is the white crown that surrounds your pure forehead, the cloak of honor, the cloud that surrounds you. Even more: it is the angelic robe that gives you the right to enter into the service of our Lord. You will not accomplish much in making this vow. St. Joseph was purer and more a virgin than you. Some claim that he was sanctified in the womb of his mother; not like the Blessed Virgin! We must never exaggerate. The Blessed Virgin was immaculate from the moment of her conception. You can call this the first degree, while you can place St. Joseph in the second degree. Besides, this seems appropriate, since St. Joseph must be more perfect than the prophet Jeremiah. Since Jeremiah was sanctified in the womb of his mother (cf. Jer 1:5), St. Joseph had to take precedence. And if Jeremiah was sanctified in the sixth month, St. Joseph must have been sanctified earlier, of course. Events must be in proportion to the grace given by our Lord.

Besides, he was the virgin spouse of the Virgin Mary. Would God have entrusted her to a man who was not a saint? Why did Joseph want to separate from her when he noticed that she was pregnant (cf. Mt 1:19), if not because they had promised to respect each other's virginity. He was face to face with a mystery that he did not understand; or perhaps he considered himself unworthy, as some saints have said. Note that in the first convent, there were three virgins: our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and St. Joseph. One must be pure to serve our Lord.

Since Joseph didn't make the vow of obedience, you have something he lacked. **You make the vow of obedience in imitation of our Lord who is your head.** This is your first vow, the royal vow of religious life, leading everything. The Carthusians make only this vow, which takes the place of all the others. How was our Lord submissive? *Et erat subditus illis – (and he was obedient to them)* (cf. Lk 2:51). Our Lord was obedient to St. Joseph; and the Blessed Virgin, the holiest of all creatures, obeyed him also. What a man! He gave orders to the Son of God, the king of heaven, and to the Blessed Virgin, his mother! He knew very well that they had to obey him. What's amazing is that in this convent the least perfect is the one who commands, and he does it very well. He is the one to decide: *Let us go – get up. We are leaving for Egypt* (cf. Mt 2:13-14). There is no question of personal sanctity, but of mission. This pleases me very much. How can I give orders to persons who are very virtuous, and who have many shining merits, when I have none. Such is the duty of a priest! He must lead. St. Joseph gave orders to the Savior. Although wretched, we give orders to angels, to seraphic souls, paying no attention to personal merit. Be at peace. Even St. Joseph must have trembled when he gave orders; he must have felt small and humble.

Are some superiors proud? If we dare to be proud, the day will come when there will be an exchange of roles: the one who obeys will now command. Do not look for virtues and holiness in your superiors. If you do this, you will set fire to all these flowers; all these treasures of straw will be burned. Oh! Do not stop at the [person of the] superior who gives you orders; see rather our Lord and the Blessed Virgin.

St. Joseph obeyed not as head of the family, but as a disciple. When the angel tells him: *Rise, take the child, and flee* (cf. Mt 2:13), he does it; he goes and takes the child. He might have protested with a thousand reasons. How can we do this, in the middle of the night? A young mother of fourteen! How long shall we stay? – We would have had many objections. – He does not know, but the heavenly Father will tell him. That's what is done in the navy: a dispatch comes, it cannot be opened. At two or three leagues on the high seas it may be read. The destination remains a secret, and no one must speak about it. The dispatch can be opened only in front of the crew at a designated spot. St. Joseph does not know where he will go on his return. Imagine, God did not tell him that he would make changes! Naturally he thought he would return to Bethlehem. His heart goes back to where the Lord was born. God allowed him to go to the city gate, and then he learned that Archelaus reigned in place of Herod. He was afraid, and the angel told him: Go to Nazareth (cf. Mt 2:22-23).

The Eucharistic vow places you ahead of St. Joseph. He never had the joy of receiving our Lord in his mouth and in his heart. That is why our Lord said: *There is none greater than St. John the Baptist in the Old Testament, yet the least in the New Testament (the kingdom of heaven) is greater than he* (cf. Mt 11:11). The least child in the New Testament is greater than all the saints of the Old Testament. Did St. Joseph make a spiritual communion? Isn't this like the bread of divine and human life? Did not his eyes devour Jesus? Wasn't his heart consumed in the fire of his love? He had Jesus in his heart and everywhere. If we could see inside of St. Joseph, a host would emerge. Did our Lord hide anything from him? Would he not have revealed the Eucharist to him? It was only right that the last of the prophets and the first of the Christians share in the graces of his love. You can certainly adore along with St. Joseph, for he is a better adorer than you are. I will leave it at that.

The postulants will take the holy habit. You will carry two habits to the altar of God: by the grace of God there are still some souls who have their baptismal robe. I don't know the mystery of your consciences. Here is another white and pure robe, which has passed through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we read in the Apocalypse (cf. Rv 7:14). It has passed through the blood that has bleached it. You must take care of this habit with concern and vigilance, since you will carry it to your death adorned with all the diamonds of your merits, virtues and holiness. Let me say to you, my Sisters, who will profess triennial vows. When we say triennial, does that mean that we have doubts about your commitment? We must proceed gradually, like dressing up. In your heart they are perpetual, but before the Church and before God, they are temporary. With these three vows you should be preparing yourselves for the Eucharistic vow, as one prepares to go to heaven.

You, my Sisters, you are most fortunate. If your profession could extend itself it would be a profession of a hundred thousand years. You would live a hundred thousand years only to serve our Lord during that time, and even longer. Heaven is called a crown of justice. Poor little heaven! What shall we bring there? A few small merits that we have stolen here and there. Poor heaven! We will have an infinite reward, since it is eternal. So that we may have an infinite reward, our Lord gives us the privilege of serving him without end. If you tell him: I would serve you for a hundred thousand years, this will give you merit.

Now, it's time to stop. **Let St. Joseph be your good protector.** Do not forget his feast. Let it be written on your heart, as the Jews wrote the law on their hands (cf. Ex 13:9). Complement your poverty and wretchedness with his poverty; your adoration, with his. He must be happy that some souls consecrate themselves to our Lord through him; he must be saying: Since I can do nothing more on earth, I will be the one who will adore on earth through them, love and serve you through them in this world, until the glory of heaven. This is my wish for all of you.



Points for reflection:

In this meditation on St. Joseph, Father Eymard presents him as the model for our life as a religious and adorer. He brings up several of his favorite themes from his spiritual teaching. Which ones do you recognize? What feelings does this meditation evoke in you?