

GARGOYLE GAZETTE



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Happy First Sunday of Lent! Not only is March the beginning of Lent this year, but every year, the month of March is a time designated by the Church to pray to Saint Joseph, whose feast will be on March 19. Saint Joseph is a powerful intercessor on our behalf, and to pray to him during Lent is especially fruitful because of his strength in overcoming temptation and denying himself for the sake of the baby Jesus and the virgin Mary. Not only is March a fitting time to pray to St Joseph, to honor his feast, but I encourage you to entrust your entire Lenten season to him. Make him the patron of your prayer and fasting this year and see how he will guide you to purity and trust in God amidst suffering.

There are no words of Joseph's recorded in scripture. The words written about him still are few. We find mention of Joseph in Matthew 1 and 2, Luke 1 and 2, and in John, Joseph is only mentioned in reference to Jesus, who is referred to as "son of Joseph," two times. Joseph is not mentioned in Mark's gospel. From the lack of what is written about Joseph, we can presume much about his humility: he made Mary and Jesus the focal point of his life, not himself. From his lack of recorded speech, we can learn of his integrity: his actions



San Jose del Sombra, William Hart Nichols

Mary is with child and resolves to divorce her quietly. Some scholars have seen Joseph's desire to "send away" Mary as founded in his desire to uphold Mosaic law, in light of suspected adultery on Mary's part. The punishment for adultery, even during betrothal, was stoning to death. He was aware of this, and did not wish ill on her, even if he did conclude that it was

spoke for him. Pope Benedict XVI has this to say: "St. Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart... It is not an exaggeration to think that it was precisely from his 'father' Joseph that Jesus learned — at the human level — that steadfast interiority..."

In Matthew 1:18-25, Joseph hears that

adultery. Others have considered that Joseph's desire to separate himself from Mary was due to his genuine belief in the virgin birth. It was his extreme humility and a clear sense of his own unworthiness that caused him to send her away. It is painful to think of what would have befallen Jesus and Mary had Joseph decided upon divorce. Unfortunately, however, it is not hard for us to imagine. We see the breakdown of families all around us, even in our own families, as a result of pride, fear, and distrust of God. Because of his courage to be faithful amidst great fear and stay with his wife, Saint Joseph is a powerful intercessor on behalf of marriages and families. One of his titles is, in fact, "Pillar of Families."

In a dream, the angel of the Lord exhorts Joseph to take Mary into his home and name the child Jesus, and Joseph resolves to do so immediately upon waking. The name "Jesus" was common among Jews at the time. Pope Saint John Paul II wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, 1989, "In this case, ... it is the Son who, in accordance with the divine promise, will bring to perfect fulfillment the meaning of the name Jesus-Yehos ua' - which means 'God saves.'" In Joseph's naming of Jesus, we see glimmers of the first man Adam, who was told by God to give names to all creatures in the garden, signifying dominion and stewardship. This time, however, Joseph follows through fully on his promise to *shamar*, which is the Hebrew verb originally used in Genesis meaning "to protect." This protection extends spiritually to the entire Church. Pope Leo writes in *Quamquam Pluries*, 1889, "It is, then, natural and worthy that as the Blessed Joseph ministered to all the needs of the family at Nazareth and girt it about with his protection, he should now cover with the cloak of his heavenly patronage and defend the Church of Jesus Christ."

We see in Joseph a perfect balance of stillness and action, deriving from his deep trust in the Lord. Notice that his communication from God comes always while he is sleeping, and immediately upon awaking, he is decisive and obedient to what he has been told. Often, we find ourselves doing too little or doing too much. Saint Joseph exemplifies for us the perfect middle, achieved only through that "steadfast interiority," that utter dependence on God. This allows him to sleep well at night, but when he is called upon, he is free to forego sleep and comfort for the sake of Christ.

Like Mary, we find in Joseph this reining of earthly powers in service to the kingdom of God. Ven. Fulton Sheen said in 'The World's First Love: Mary, Mother of God,' "in both Mary and Joseph, there were youth, beauty and promise. God loves cascading cataracts and bellowing waterfalls, but he loves them better, not when they overflow and drown his flowers, but when they are harnessed and bridled to light a city and to slake the thirst of a child."

In the same way that Joseph of the Old Testament received visions in dreams, was raised to second-in-command to Pharaoh, and thus stewarded all the grain of Egypt that the people might not go hungry, Saint Joseph received word from God in dreams, and was raised to the high post of steward of the Bread of Life, that all souls would be satiated with the heavenly food of salvation. One must only think for a short while on the gravity of the task Saint Joseph fulfilled and the graces he received, before his great strength dawns, and this spurs the soul to run to him with all of its needs. "Joseph" literally means "increase," and this call was placed on both the saint's prefigurement in Genesis and on himself. Whatever virtue you desire, Saint Joseph will intercede for you, and his provision never fails. *Ite ad Ioseph*.