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JOSEPH: THE SPOUSE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

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Abstract

In the liturgical prayers of the East Syrian tradition, St Joseph, the spouse of the Virgin Mary is presented as the most exalted above all the Old Testament and New Testament saints. On the *dukрана* of this chaste son of David, the Church offers praises to God for the life and example of His chosen guardian for the Virgin and prays for protection from evils. An analysis of these prayers reveals how the Syriac tradition treasures the hidden merits of this great saint. Under six headings, this paper unfolds few eminent features of the unique relationship between St Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary which stands out as a model for all earthly relationships. This study analyses the liturgical prayers of Syriac tradition along with the apostolic teachings to better understand the silent and just husband of the Mother of God.

Keywords: Companion of angels; Liturgy of St Joseph; Most chaste; St Joseph, Spouse of Virgin Mary

Introduction

“Blessed are you, for the maker of creatures separated you to be the spouse of Mary the chaste virgin and to be called her husband, by the depths of his providence.”¹

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¹Part of *Suhlapa* (Ending prayer of psalms sung with a changed tune) prayer of *Lelya* on the feast of St Joseph (the spouse of the Virgin Mary which falls on the 19th

This prayer reveals the special vocation of St Joseph as the spouse of the Virgin Mary. It was not accidental as it is in the case of any nuptial relationship on earth but by the endless providence of God and divine plan. In the liturgy of the East Syrian tradition,² St Joseph, the spouse of the Virgin Mary is presented as the most dignified above all the Old Testament and New Testament saintly characters. On the *dukрана*³ of this chaste son of David, the Church offers praises to God for the virtuous life and example of His chosen guardian for the Virgin. The euchology⁴ of East Syrian Churches reveals how the Syriac tradition treasures the unseen merits of this great saint. This paper discloses some salient facets of the exceptional relationship between St Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary which stands out as a model for all earthly relationships. To better comprehend the role of Joseph, a companion of angels, during his life on earth, the apostolic letter of Pope Francis *Patris Corde* and the apostolic exhortation of Pope Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos* are also referred.⁵ This

March) taken from the second part of *Gaza*: from the beginning of Great Fast to the Pentecoste. Paul Bedjan, *Breviarium juxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum*, Vol. 3, (Romae, 1938), 526-536. I use the unpublished English translation of the prayers on the feast of St Joseph by Fr Emmanuel Thelly from the third volume of Paul Bedjan's *Breviarium* in this paper. Paul Bedjan's breviary is an abridged form of the most ancient East Syrian Divine Office that consists of (i) *Hudra* (Cycle), which is the Offices for all Sundays of the year and for days (movable feasts too) that go along with Sundays, (ii) *Gaza* (Treasury), which is the Offices for immovable feasts [marked in the Calendar as 'eda (feast) and *dukрана* (remembrance)], and (iii) *Kaskol*, which is the Offices for ordinary (*S'hima*) days.

²The official books of the Divine Office for the Liturgy of the Hours for the Syro-Malabar Church are the three volumes of *Breviarium juxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum*, compiled by Paul Bedjan, which were published for the Catholic Chaldeans and the Catholic Thomas Christians by the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches in 1938. On the history of Paul Bedjan's breviary see J.-M. Vosté: 'Paul Bedjan, lazariste person' *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 11 (1945) 45-102 esp. 57-67 and for the contents see, Mateos: *Lelya-supra* 3-37. Even though the *Breviarium* was published in 1938, among the Thomas Christians of the Malabar Church another *Kaskol* printed in 1867, together with an Office for all Sundays, which was used until 1967.

³Syriac term *Dukrana* means 'commemoration.'

⁴The term Euchology originates from the Greek words *euche* (prayer) and *logos* (discourse about). It is the study of the liturgical prayer texts contained in ritual books. For a detailed discussion on this see, K.W. Irwin: *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, Collegeville, 2018, 242-261.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Patris Corde* (English translation of the Apostolic letter), Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2020, 5-34. Pope Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos* (English translation of the Apostolic exhortation, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2020, 37-80.

study unveils the splendour of relationships and the divine will about each individual's unique input in the salvific plan.

1. Found Worthy and Chosen from above

In a number of prayers on the feast of St Joseph, he is depicted as chosen from above. *Onitha daqdam*⁶ on the day of the feast of St. Joseph invites all servants of God to praise the Lord since it is "the day of the remembrance of the chosen of God, Joseph from the house of Israel who received betrothal of Mary chosen from above, the mother of Emmanuel."⁷ This prayer shows that Joseph was the chosen one to be the spouse of Mary who was also specially designated as the mother of 'God with us.' As Jesus taught the choice of God is manifested in each vocation.⁸ Individually, human beings have unique roles to play in life as the Apostle says, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."⁹ This is true in the case of St. Joseph too. It was by God's providence that he was chosen to be the head of the Holy Family.

*Sambah*¹⁰ prays, "On the day of the memory of blessed Joseph saint and just, let us sing with tender voice, praise to Jesus the vivifier. For he chose him to be the guardian of his mother without harm." This prayer calls Joseph as the guardian of the vivifier Jesus' mother. *Onitha d'wasar*¹¹ sings: "...O Joseph chaste and holy...For the action of the Lord, you were found worthy by the high priests to espouse Virgin Mary the mother of spiritual life for the earthly and the heavenly." Their marriage bond was according to God's dream about human beings from the beginning.¹²

Here Joseph is named chaste, holy, and blessed. He was found worthy by the high priests to espouse Virgin Mary. This is according to the tradition that Mary grew up in the temple and her betrothal

⁶Anthem before the Evening Psalm.

⁷Bedjan, Breviarium.

⁸"You did not choose me but I chose you." Jn (15:16).

⁹Eph 2:10.

¹⁰*Sambah* means praise.

¹¹Anthem after the Evening Psalm.

¹²Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." Gen 2:18.

with Joseph happened by a miraculous event.¹³ *Maothwa*¹⁴ of *Lelya* sings as follows:

O Joseph blessed are you, for you were chosen from the womb of your mother to be the spouse to the Virgin. You were named father to the Lord of the worlds. And therefore, angels and men celebrate your *dukrana* and all the churches praise you.

This prayer reminds us of the call and commission of prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). Exactly in a similar way Joseph was chosen from the womb of his mother to be the spouse to the Virgin Mary. The Church prays in a *Karozusa*¹⁵ of *Lelya* as, “O Christ who chose chaste Joseph from the people of Israel, to be the spouse to his holy mother...” Likewise, many prayers underscore the divine hands behind the selection of Joseph as the life partner of the Virgin mother of Christ

2. The Chaste Guardian of the Virgin

Joseph is described as “chaste and holy” in the liturgical prayers. *Sambah* of *Ramsa* goes like this: “Let us praise Christ on the *dukrana* of chaste Joseph who was found worthy to become a provider and guardian for the virgin...” In *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis explicates what it means to be ‘most chaste.’

That title is not simply a sign of affection, but the summation of an attitude that is opposite of possessiveness. Chastity is freedom from possessiveness in every sphere of one’s life. Only when love is chaste, is it truly love. A possessive love ultimately becomes dangerous: it imprisons, constricts, and makes for misery. God himself loved humanity with a chaste love; he left us free even to go astray and set ourselves against him. The logic of love is always the logic of freedom. He never made himself the centre of things. He did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus.¹⁶

Being chaste is freedom as well as providing freedom to the loved one. Hence, Joseph’s love was against all kinds of possessiveness. Accordingly, it is close to divine love which created humans in *imago*

¹³See that story in Roland H. Worth, *Alternative Lives of Jesus Noncanonical Accounts Through the Early Middle Ages*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010, 57-58.

¹⁴Anthem sung while sitting.

¹⁵Proclamatory Prayer or Litanical Prayer.

¹⁶Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 28.

Dei that is they were similar to God in their ability to choose and free will.¹⁷

In the *Maonthwa* of *Lelya*, the Church prays: "O chaste Joseph who was faithful over the treasure which enriches the entire world, offer with us prayer to the one who chose you and raised your dignity, to have pity on us and save our souls." This prayer points to a very significant nature of Joseph who like a responsible steward took care of the treasure entrusted to him.¹⁸ He followed the directions of the owner to protect what was assigned to him as an obedient steward. We see in Joseph the three most evident characteristics of a trustworthy steward which are continuous reflection to discern God's will, self-control which helps to respect the other, and accepting pains to protect the entrusted treasures.

2.1. Docile to Divine Plan

Joseph was a true minister of salvation.¹⁹ *Suhlapa* of the feast *Lelya* reads like this, "Joseph to whom the angel appeared in a dream whom the Lord sent and instructed him: Do not fear to receive your chaste spouse..." Pope Francis says that "Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history."²⁰ Joseph acted just as Jesus told to the Baptist at the time of his baptism, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). Joseph was always ready to fulfil the will of God. His quick response to the dreams which revealed the divine plan about the Virgin, shows his obedient character.²¹ Likewise Joseph observed God's mandate about nuptial relationship strictly taught by Jesus, "what God has joined together, let no one separate."²²

¹⁷Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex (Westminster: Newman Press, 1955), 2.1.3.

¹⁸"Indeed, Jesus and Mary his Mother are the most precious treasure of our faith." Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 23.

¹⁹Church's Liturgy teaches, he "cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation" and is truly a "minister of salvation." Both Pope Francis and Pope John Paul II quotes this from the homily of St. John Chrysostom. St. John Chrysostom, In Matthew's Homily. V, 3: PG 57, 57f.

²⁰Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 18.

²¹Pope Francis says, "He was a just man (Mt 1:19), ever ready to carry out God's will as revealed to him in the Law (Lk 2:22.27.39) and through four dreams (Mt 1:20;2:13, 19, 22)" Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 6.

²²Mt 19:6.

As a faithful steward of God's assets, it was appropriate for Joseph to do than to routinely examine how effectively he is carrying out his responsibilities. Stewards continually examine their motives, their thoughts and their attitudes. Joseph being a good and faithful steward performed routine self-examination as part of his daily life and ended up with clear instructions from the owner about his duties.

2.2. Companion of Angels

In the euchology of the East Syrian liturgy, Joseph is called a companion of angels. *Onitha d'wasar*²³ sings: "Blessed are you and bliss to your soul. Happy is the man in whom you are pleased. O Joseph chaste and holy, you are blessed and a companion of angels." *Suhlapa* of *Lelya* praises Joseph like this, "Blessed is your spirit O just Joseph...who was not blemished by the lust of the deceitful and transitory world and like an angel you went out from it decorated with splendour..." Joseph had a pure and holy soul and so he is compared to an angel and after his earthly life, he joined the company of angels in heaven. A *Qanona* of *Lelya* states, "...Blessed are you O Joseph whose enjoyment is confirmed with the angels, above in heaven..."

Suhlapa of *Lelya* acclaims this, "O our father who laboured diligently and prided himself over the passions of the body..." Living a controlled life is a foundational characteristic of a good and faithful steward. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). Undoubtedly Joseph lived a chaste or self-controlled life. *Suhlapa* of *Lelya* repeatedly describes Joseph as the "fountain of chastity and spring of holiness O pure Joseph, lover of purity..." In I Corinthians 9:25 St. Paul uses the discipline and self-control of an athlete in training to illustrate the controlled life of a steward. Proverbs 25:28 instructs that "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." By constantly restraining and retraining one's natural impulses, a good steward keeps all his desires under control. So, being a steward with good self-control, Joseph emerged as both useful and effective in obediently serving his Master. The Liturgy of the Hours of the Syro-Malabar Church calls Joseph an angel in the hymnography of the liturgy.²⁴

²³Anthem after the Evening Psalm.

²⁴I have analyzed the euchology of the evening prayer (*Ramsa*), the night prayer (*Lelya*) and the Morning Prayer (*Sapra*) of the texts in use of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Syro-Malabar Church. It was published by the commission for the Liturgy of the SMC as an experimental text in English areas outside of Kerala in 2012.

As an angel, Joseph protects Mary,
The mother of God in the garden of God,
There is no tree of knowledge though,
With no serpent to fight humans,
With no Eve to bring death on earth,
A tree of life grows well in there.²⁵

In this hymn we see as an angel in Eden, Joseph protected Mary who is the garden of God with the tree of life within.²⁶ Again, we see that “Mary the well-irrigated garden is God’s gift, the life-giving water did flow from herself, the dead Adam revived with honourable life, Full of joy and radiance to reign forever.”²⁷ Eden, God’s garden is a metaphor of the Virgin Mary and Joseph watching over it with great care and respect.

2.3. Atoning Steward

The third typical nature found in the life of a good and faithful steward is sacrifice. The Apostle reminds Christians in Romans 12:1 to be a “living sacrifice.” Jesus challenges every steward who wants to follow Him in Luke 9:23, “let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Joseph was well aware of the “mission entrusted to him by God’s providence.”²⁸

A faithful steward willingly and sacrificially gives oneself to others for their happiness and comfort. Joseph was thus identified as a good and faithful steward and heard those wonderful words, “Well done,” from God since he made sacrifices to make sure that his life is on the

Commission for Liturgy, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Ujjain: Synodal Committee of Bishops for the English Version of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Syro-Malabar Church, 2012.

²⁵Commission for Liturgy, *Liturgy of the Hours*, 87.

²⁶“The fruit of Eden gave not eternal life, The first fruit took flesh in the womb of Mary, And became true food for wanderers on earth, Gave perpetual life to all who receive it...God became man in the womb of the virgin, God the creator suspended the Divinity, Assuming human form sprang up from Mary, Just as he rose up-from-the sealed tomb at night...Like the image shining in the horizon at dawn, From you, O Mother, is born Lord of true Light, With his birth, God shone the light on earth in darkness, And bestowed the knowledge of eternal wisdom.” *Liturgy of the Hours*, 411.

²⁷Liturgy of the Hours, 489.

²⁸Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 5. Pope John Paul refers to the Latin liturgy in his exhortation like this: “In recalling that ‘the beginnings of our redemption’ were entrusted ‘to the faithful care of Joseph,’ (Roman Missal, Collect for the Solemnity of St Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.) the Liturgy specifies that ‘God placed him at the head of his family, as a faithful and prudent servant, so that with fatherly care he might watch over his only begotten Son.’” (Roman Missal, Preface for the Solemnity of St Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.) Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 50.

right course that has been set by His Master. More than being self-sacrifice, the life of Joseph was one of self-gift as Pope Francis puts it. "Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust..."²⁹ This is exactly what St. Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians about a cheerful giver. "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."³⁰

A hymn of the Liturgy of the Hours is as follows:

The husband always is the head of his wife,
The wife a jewel in the crown of husband,
In self-sacrifice, they love each other,
As sacred vessel at the altar of God,
So did Joseph protect her always,
In love she bore God's son in her womb.³¹

In the *Onitha d'Mawtwa* of Tuesday of Annunciation, we see the nature of the nuptial relationship between Mary and Joseph. The husband is the head of his wife but the wife is a jewel in the crown of husband. Though the husband is the head, the wife is decorating that head. They loved each other with self-sacrificial love. Joseph treated Mary as a sacred vessel at the altar of God, like a priest he protected her in love since she bore God's son in her womb. In the *Onitha d'Mawtwa* of Wednesday of Annunciation, Joseph is compared to Moses who bore the tablets in reverence, because Mary is the Ark in which the Gospel is enclosed.³²

3. Surpassingly Righteous

Gospels certify that Joseph was righteous. Liturgical prayers describe his life and ministry as follows: *Suhlapa* of Lelya,

Blessed are you faithful Joseph the spouse of the virgin. Blessed are you for you fulfilled thoroughly your ministry...Blessed are you the just one whose name is exalted, for you became the spouse of the most beautiful Virgin Mary...

Suhlapa continues,

Blessed are you who put to shame the priests of the Law by your chastity, which is exalted above all the orders. Blessed are you who adorned

²⁹Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 29.

³⁰2 Cor 9:7.

³¹Liturgy of the Hours, 88.

³²Liturgy of the Hours, 98-99.

yourself with a virtuous life...your splendid soul was purified. Blessed are you for your grade became eminent over measure..."

When Jesus taught in his sermon on the mount that "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20), he might have Joseph in his mind whose righteousness surpassed the law of Israel. That is why the Church acclaims, "Blessed are you for you whose position was exalted above the excellent of the Old (Testament) whose grade you crossed and were raised over the saints of the New (Testament)." Joseph was unlike the Pharisees of his time. Because Jesus said about them "So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Mt 23:28). In his time, Joseph stood exceptionally righteous in keeping the laws and going beyond the laws expressing the NT righteousness which demands more mercy and love.

Suhlapa of Lelya declares,

...Who is able to tell the famous deeds of Joseph the just man, a friend of Christ, who by modesty and holiness adorned and sanctified himself and became a dwelling of the Holy Spirit and a pure palace? He emulated Moses in his humility and Abraham through faith and Job in his perseverance. In all his deeds he resembled Joseph the just and modest of the same name...That one was scarcely saved from the wife of Potiphar his master; this one kept his virginity for a long time, though he was the spouse...

Joseph's virtues surpass the qualities of all forefathers and great prophets of the Old Testament. He outdid the simplicity of Noah, the faith of Abraham and the modesty of Joseph.³³ The humility of Moses is multiplied in Joseph and he fulfilled the zeal of the heart of David. He was filled with the Wisdom of Solomon and he is compared to monk Elijah. He exceeded Elizeus, King Hezekiah, and Isaiah.³⁴

³³"...O holy St Joseph, most admirable among the chaste, who is able to narrate your famous deeds? You desired to emulate the life of virtue of the first fathers. And you continued to follow in their footsteps so that you may enjoy with them. O holy Joseph, the simplicity of Noah was seen in you; the faith of Abraham took its boundary and end in you. You had the modesty of Joseph, the son of Jacob. In yourself, its memory is doubled."

³⁴"The roots of the humility of Moses germinated multiplied in you. You kept the virginity of Joshua without spot, O one holy in mind. O son of David, you fulfilled the zeal of the heart of the lord David. The wisdom of Solomon the wise, was sealed in your soul. The monastic life of Elijah is very small in comparison with you. The seed of the glory of Elizeus flourished in you twofold. The justice of king Hezekiah

Joseph is described as the most beloved of prophets and the Church proclaims that the zeal of the Maccabees was perfected in him. Joseph is recognised as an ascetic.³⁵ Thus, Joseph stands out as a perfect model of virtuous life for Christians.

4. A Respectful and Responsible Spouse

From her response to the Archangel Gabriel in the Gospel of Luke, one of perfect obedience to God's will, the Blessed Virgin Mary becomes the new Eve, reversing the sinful disobedience of the first human mother. But Joseph is never called the new Adam but Jesus. This points to the fact that Joseph had a different relationship with Mary, the new Eve, unlike the first Adam and Eve. Joseph never blamed Mary on the occasion of his misunderstanding. Moreover, he accepted her unconditionally,³⁶ respected and protected her throughout his life.

Adam blamed Eve for his own sin,
Because she came from his own side.
We gained the lasting grace through Mary,
She is the pride of the world forever.³⁷

Pope Francis reflects on the nature of God's mercy which is experienced as truth and tenderness instead of condemning or judging us. Joseph showed a similar character of the merciful father in restoring the dignity of Mary instead of condemning her, trusting in God who always sees the bigger picture of one's life.³⁸

"The burning bush in which God revealed himself to Moses became a figure of Mary's womb, where the fire of the divinity dwelt."³⁹ "Immaculate virgin and radiant, we pray, you are the burning bush-unconsumed by fire, On the peak of Horeb, the

kneels and adores before your justice. The sufferings, which Isaiah endured, depict your model privately and publicly."

³⁵The prophecy of the twelve prophets became complete in your days. O most beloved of prophets. O lover of God, that chariot of Ezekiel you saw in action, Daniel the man of desire is smaller than you without measure. You talked with the Ancient of days with voice and music. The zeal of the Maccabees was perfected in you in the last days. The anchorite life of John distinguished you. The asceticism of the disciples was revealed in you O head of the loved..."

³⁶Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 17.

³⁷In the *Onitha d'sapra* of Wednesday in Annunciation. *Liturgy of the Hours*, 103.

³⁸Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 12-13.

³⁹David M. Petras, "Mary in Eastern Liturgical Tradition" *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997) 14.

mountain of the Lord..."⁴⁰ Mary is the burning bush of Horeb which Moses found. Moses removed his sandals from his feet in that divine presence.⁴¹ Similarly, Joseph behaved with humility like Moses in the presence of God within Mary. "The fire was burning in Mary, though, she remained untouched by it always, and earned the Motherhood of God aright."⁴² Mary was burning with the fire of the Holy Spirit but she was not burned by it. Another instance with a similar idea is the *Onitha d'sapra* of Wednesday in the season of *Denha*, "Though fire flamed in her, she remained unharmed, in her rose great one, but waned not meekness."⁴³ These hymns show the ever-virginity of Mary and her spousal relationship with Joseph.

Mary is considered as the fulfilment of many Old Testament images. She is also "the furnace in Babylon, the tongs of Isaiah" (holding the burning coal), "the tabernacle, the temple, the palace of the King of Glory, the ark of the covenant, the urn of manna, the altar of incense, the throne of the cherubim, the fleece of Gideon."⁴⁴ In all these images, Joseph is accompanying Mary as an instrument in the hands of God protecting, supporting, and safely holding the Mother of God. He remained a shadow of the heavenly Father throughout his life journey.⁴⁵ Joseph reflected, accepted, respected and protected Mary's divine call to be the ever-virgin Mother of God.

5. A Protecting Wall

The prayers of his feast reveal Joseph's capacity as a protecting spouse of the Virgin and the Church who is the spouse of Christ. We recurrently read in the prayers, "...you made Mary the pattern of the Church by conferring the highest dignity in the Church on her."⁴⁶ Joseph was "the guardian of his mother without harm."⁴⁷ So the Church prays, "...protect anyone who is persecuted by the

⁴⁰Liturgy of the Hours, 414.

⁴¹Ex 3:5 "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground"

⁴²*Onitha d'Wasar* of Wednesday in Annunciation. *Liturgy of the Hours*, 94.

⁴³Liturgy of the Hours, 178.

⁴⁴Joseph Ledit, *Marie dans la liturgie de Byzance* Théologie Historique 39 (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1976), 161.

⁴⁵Pope Francis mentions about this evocative image of shadow to define Joseph. Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 26-27.

⁴⁶Liturgy of the Hours, 101.

⁴⁷Sambah of Ramsa.

devil...,"⁴⁸ "Let his prayer be a wall to our souls,"⁴⁹ "Let your prayer be a high wall to the churches," "...let your prayer be a strong wall to our assembly, for it is tempted and persecuted by Satan...," "...Let your prayers be a refuge to us from the wickedness of the devil...," "...they hasten to take refuge in you always so that you may be to them a saviour from evils and a protector," "...Let your prayer be to this assembly a strong wall and help," "...Be O my lord, an intercessor and suppliant for this assembly so that it may be saved from the deceit of the evil,"⁵⁰ "...O our lord, by his prayers, protect the church and her children, which sings praise in his *dukrana*...,"⁵¹ "...Come let us take shelter in the prayer of St. Joseph just and holy, and with tears of sorrow pray to his lord to protect us from the deceit of the devil."⁵² All these prayers describe Joseph as a strong and high wall or shelter which protects the Church. Consequently, the Church seeks refuge in Joseph for protection from evil.

In one of the *Aalam*⁵³ prayers, the Church prays, "O our Lord, give us also who take refuge in his prayer, in your mercy, from the treasure all those which help us. And protect your church by his prayer and her children shall praise you in her." In *Qanona*⁵⁴ we see, "Just St Joseph, son of David, may we be protected from the devil by your prayer." In the *Theshbohtha*⁵⁵ of Lelya we read, "O Saint, may your prayer be a wall to us from the frauds of the devil, the adversary..."⁵⁶ *Onisa d'bathe*⁵⁷ of Lelya ends as follows, "...And your prayers O holy Joseph be a wall and refuge to the assembly who celebrated your memory with psalms of the Holy Spirit." *D'varek*⁵⁸ of *Sapra* prays, "Pray to your lord Christ to save us from the disturber." *Theshbohtha* of *Sapra* repeats, "O perfect one, the spouse of Mary of exalted name, protect us in this world from the wickedness of the

⁴⁸D' vasaliqe of Ramsa.

⁴⁹Mavthwa of Lelya.

⁵⁰*Suhlapa* of Lelya. The same idea is repeated in the proper prayer of Qurbana, D'rase ends like this, "...Let your prayer help our assembly and protect us from every evil."

⁵¹Qala of Lelya.

⁵²*Suhlapa* of Lelya.

⁵³*Aalam* prayer is the response to the Glory be to the....

⁵⁴Doxology.

⁵⁵Hymn of Praise.

⁵⁶In the d'bathe of Qurbana, we see the Church prays, "...Let your prayer drive back our adversary so that we may sing joyfully with the sound of songs..."

⁵⁷Accompanying Anthem.

⁵⁸Blessing hymn.

jealous. O chosen of the Lord, let your prayer...protect us from the frauds of the plunderer." Joseph was careful to protect the divine vocation and honour of Mary at any price.

6. A Paradigm for Earthly Bonds

In human nuptial relationships, both parties have equal rights, responsibilities, and faculties. But in this particularly chosen pair of Joseph and Mary, we see asymmetry. Mary was the true mother of Jesus while Joseph was added to that family in a unique way. Therefore, bonds of the Holy family remain as a paradigm of family relationships. Pope John Paul reflects how Joseph's love as a man was given new birth by the Holy Spirit. Quoting Rom 5:5 Pope says that the Divine Spirit moulds every human love to perfection.

This love of God also moulds in a completely unique way, the love of husband and wife, deepening within it everything of human worth and beauty, everything that bespeaks an exclusive gift of self, a covenant between persons, and an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity.⁵⁹

God has manifested steadfast love in his covenantal relationship with Israel. Likewise, Jesus emptied himself to become a human being to make the Church his bride. God sheds his blood and dies for the love of human beings. God, the Father spared his only begotten son to gain humankind. God is always ahead of the human partner to restore and strengthen the bond of intimacy. He takes initiative to heal the wounds and forgives unlimitedly. God is willing to accept the human partner even after all kinds of infidelities and failures. This happens very rarely between human pairs. "In-his-vision Ezekiel saw the door shut, A voice was heard, that the door will remain so the Lord of Israel will arrive by this door, that foreshadow the Virgin Mary to his people."⁶⁰ Mary and Joseph appear as an extraordinary pair with a divine purpose cooperating in the salvific plan of God.

Jesus is ready to take the shape of a lifeless host to abide in a human soul. Holy Eucharist is the greatest manifestation of his love for humanity. Taking part in the divine love which is poured out into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, Joseph and Mary excel in their mutual love by self-gifting and self-emptying models in the Holy Family.

⁵⁹Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 63.

⁶⁰"The Lord must enter and leave through the porch of the gate." (Ezek. 44: 3). *Liturgy of the Hours*, 419.

Accordingly, this family becomes a model for all family relationships. Pope explains it like this.

Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice...Whatever our vocation...our gift of self will not come to fulfilment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case, instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness, and frustration.⁶¹

SC 104 states that “the Church proclaims achievement of the paschal mystery in the saints who have suffered and have been glorified with Christ.”⁶² In SC 111, we read that “the feasts of the saints proclaim the wonderful works of Christ in his servants.”⁶³ Appreciating the central role of St Joseph in the history of salvation, the liturgical prayers of the East Syrian tradition, exalts the hidden life of the chosen, chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary. Though he appears as an unnoticed, discreet, and hidden presence in the Gospels, later the Church identifies him as the most admirable among the chaste who enjoys the light with the sweetness that the Lord has prepared in the chamber. He dwells with Christ in heaven and reclines on the table of the glorious groom in his chamber. The beauty of his valour is made famous by the just God and paid back twofold by the celebrations on earth. Since he chose humility, he was exalted in the land of the just and yield fruits hundredfold and fill the barns of his harvest.⁶⁴ Thus we see that the life of St Joseph “proclaims the wonderful works of Christ” and he has lived the paschal mystery so that he is set before us as an epitome of humble life and role to be played in the vast plan of salvation of humanity.

⁶¹Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 29.

⁶²“Sacrosanctum Concilium,” in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, eds. Norman P. Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo, vol. 2, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990, 838.

⁶³“Sacrosanctum Concilium,” 839.

⁶⁴Onisa d’vathe of Lelya.