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ST JOSEPH: A FAITHFUL WITH A FATHER'S HEART

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Abstract

St Joseph was an integrated person with God, an integrated person with society and an integrated person with oneself. That is why he is called "Joseph, the just". What made Joseph a righteous man? He saw the pregnant Mary, not from the perceptive of law that the Israelites practised and meticulously followed from the time of Moses but the divine law of compassion. Joseph could have chosen the law to save his face and the community's conventions, which would have been a mark of exemplary religious commitment. But as a man of righteousness, he was ready to do the will of God. He is an ideal personification of a true father who could easily influence and inspire people of the present generation.

Keywords: Commitment; Compassion; Faith; Righteous; Silence

Introduction

The primary and pre-eminent image of God to Christians is of a father who is "the creator of all things visible and invisible" (Nicene

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Creed). Naturally, it is easy for us to consider all creations as members of one family. A father is the principal figure of a family, and all others look upon him with great reverence and put him on a pedestal. When unfortunate things happen in the family, they count on him as the one having solutions to all problems. It is the scenario in a patriarchal family.

The Old Testament (OT) notion of God, on the contrary, is more of an omnipotent creator who wields authority and reign over all creations. Some OT titles of God are the highest God, the God of heaven, the holy God, the God of hosts, the Lord God of hosts, the mighty God, the Lord God of the fathers, etc. "The supremacy of God and glory of God and the weakness of human beings stand out strongly in the Old Testament."¹ The OT God is a God of severity, a God of retribution and a God of power. Indeed the father image of God has not been emphasised adequately, but a God of retribution was always associated with his fatherhood. "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore, I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord (Jer 31:20). The book of Jeremiah beautifully but befittingly stresses the father figure of God, "For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (31:9). Despite those dominant images of God as a God of power and might, the OT image of God shares the concept of God as one showering unconditional love upon the People of Israel. "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me" (Ex 4:22). We see Yahweh's insistence on his fatherhood over the chosen people.

The father's strictness in the Old Testament never caused damage to children, but it had a therapeutic effect. Psalm 68:5 says, "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of widows, is God in his holy habitation." Here Scripture underlines that the God of the Old Testament is a mighty God who protects his children and does not endure injustice to his children. Psalm 103:13 highlights that "As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him."

The New Testament invites all to a new face of identifying God with a loving father, unlike in the OT. The Gospels are to be understood as the expression of love of the Father for humanity.

¹Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning God the Father*, New York: American Tract Society, 1904, 19.

Jesus presents God as significantly as with the quality of the loving father. "So then Jesus himself is the supreme epitome of the love of the Father for the world."² John clearly says about the depth of the love of God for humanity. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (3:16). Jesus said about his father not through any traditional understanding but with his own empirical experience and existence. He was well aware that he was telling about the father to those who had no idea of the "fatherhood" of God. That is why they all got angry with Jesus when he addressed God as "my father". It irritated them because calling God the Father was an anathema for them. Jesus emphatically uses the word Father to demonstrate that God is the Father of all humanity. He used 'my father, the father, your father, our Father, abba father' etc. He used all these relatively unfamiliar names for God to show that God is to be experienced very personally and confidently as in a family.

Joseph: The Righteous Father Characterised in Scripture

Who is Righteous?

The righteous is an integrated person with God, an integrated person with society and an integrated person with oneself. To be more precise, those who do responsibilities dedicatedly to God, humanity and oneself is called righteous. "Joseph was a righteous man" is the best compliment because it is a more eloquent usage than "Saint." The word Saint has certain limitations in its meaning, but righteous is more meaningful as above mentioned. We can call many people "saints" in a broader sense. "Righteous" cannot be used more broadly because it is inclusive of all aspects of life. All right, decent, ethical, good, honest, honourable, just, moral, nice, right, right-minded, straight, true, upright and virtuous etc., are the synonyms for righteousness. The Gospel of Matthew highlights the term "righteous" to qualify Joseph.

What made Joseph a righteous man? He saw the pregnant Mary, not from the perceptive of law that the Israelites practised and meticulously followed from the time of Moses but the divine law of compassion that made them the covenant people of Yahweh. He could have chosen the law to save his face and the community's conventions, which would have been a mark of exemplary religious

²Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning God the Father*, 19.

commitment. There were solid and apparent regulations to put Mary mercilessly in trouble as she was seen pregnant (Deut 22:23) before getting married. Before the law, Mary was a serious offender. But Joseph opted for compassion which is the sign of righteousness. The lesser evil Joseph could do to Mary was leave her alone and go without minding rightful law. Law and compassion move in diametrically opposite directions. Law is human, and compassion is divine. It is so expounded in the OT. God showed mercy to the Israelites despite the specifications of the law.

Spirituality of St Joseph and his Old Testament Precursors

Adam and Joseph: Compassion Incomparable

According to Scripture, Adam is the father of all human beings. God gave him a partner because He realised it was not good for man to be alone. So, God created Eve as his partner. But Eve deviated from the laws of God, succumbing to the Evil One. When they appear before God, Adam puts all the blame on Eve. God expels them from paradise by punishing them both yet allowing them to be together. A moment of sinful thoughts may not be the nature of human beings. Sinfulness and fall are natural, but goodwill never permits one to continue sinful life. Though Adam accused her first, he had no hypocrisy, but he was genuine in his feelings in front of God. "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9).

God offered Joseph, the New Testament Adam, a wife whom God wanted to be the mother of the saviour of the progeny of Adam and Eve. The work of the Holy Spirit was evident, and she bore a child. However, Joseph was in a quandary accusing Mary in his heart, not in public and wanted to leave her privately. Joseph and Adam were kind-hearted persons. Adam and Eve went out of paradise, lived together, and brought up Abel and Cain. Joseph accepted Mary as his wife and protected them. Both of them were genuine in their call. They were genuinely compassionate towards their wives. Compassion is the recipient's right and never the giver's prerogative to measure it out. Joseph thus becomes an icon of merciful love.

Noah and Joseph: Waiting for God

Scripture portrays Noah as a "righteous man, blameless in his generation" (Gen 6:9). "Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation" (Gen 7:1). Indeed, it took a

long time to build the ark. God waited for the people to turn away from their sins by placing Noah as a 'preacher' before them. In the meantime, he was waiting for the intervention of God. People, on the contrary, were, no doubt, making fun of him for building a huge ark saying, 'God asked him to make it.' Waiting has a spirituality that demands waiting for the appropriate time, waiting for God's choicest time to come, waiting to discern things God wishes. The Psalms praises the importance of waiting for the Lord, "... be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him (Ps 37:7). Again the Psalmist prays, "But it is for you, O Lord, that I wait" (Ps 38:15), "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning" (Ps 130:5-6), "O Lord, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble (Isa 33:2).

Often our decisions are compulsions of impatience. If it is God's will, we must have the patience for waiting, discerning, deciphering, reflecting, and applying it to our life. Noah still waited as Scripture says, "At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent out the dove from him, ... but the dove found no place to set its foot... He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark, and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf..." (Gen 8:1-12). Noah patiently waited for God's time.

Joseph's initial response was fully human, but he waited to know God's will. But as a man of righteousness, he was ready to do the will of God, and the Angel guided him in the dream. He was waiting to get a signal from God about the time of return to Nazareth. Till then, he sojourned in Egypt. "We are not told which part of Egypt Joseph went into, nor how long he stayed there: some say six or seven years; others, but three or four months."³ Joseph indeed had the fortitude to wait for God's command as he had the experience of waiting for the directions of the Lord. Those who wait for the Lord intensely wish to keep God's ways. "Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land" (Ps 37:34).

³ Matthew Poole, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/poole/mathew/2.htm>, Dated on 2-12-2021.

God waits for us. By waiting, God has something to tell us, something to do for us, and He wants to guide us by holding us in His heart. Isaiah 30: 18 says, "The Lord waits to be gracious to you; ... For the Lord is a God of pristine justice; blessed are all those who wait for him." Therefore, justice and waiting go hand in hand. That is why the people of wisdom say that the time of God is the apt time for everything, and we have to wait for the answer of God. Also, Hosea says, "so I will be like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way (Hos 13:7). Occasions abound in our lives to wait and see so that more wisdom may come our way. Joseph was such a person who waited for the will of God to be revealed to him when he could not decide on his own. Faith is well found expressed in Joseph this way.

Abraham and Joseph: Unconditional Obedience

Both Abraham and Joseph were silent but uncompromising masters of faith. The faith of Abraham was unique in that he categorically followed the instructions of God. Generally speaking, in such a situation, the person is tempted to ask the following questions: Where should I go? When should I go? What is the reason to go there? The mode of preparation? What are the better benefits it will have than the present situation? Abraham never raised these questions but followed what Yahweh asked him to do. "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (Gen 12:4). Boundless faith led him to put his absolute confidence in Yahweh.

Joseph, the New Testament Abraham, also did not mind asking further questions to God but trusted what was revealed to him in the dream. "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (Mt 1:24). No longer was Joseph under the pressure of human law but was ready to surrender himself to God's Justice. He had the right to say no, but he remained silent as Abraham did. The silence was the answer of Joseph to God. The silence of a friend is perceived in both Abraham and Joseph. They were friends of God than obedient servants, which shows that they had complete confidence in the good of the will of God. The future of both Abraham and Joseph was unclear. But they kept silent in the moment of confusion, ignorance, and darkness with total trust in God. Sometimes, we should be quiet because silence is a teacher, a light, and a drop of water that helps the seed sprout. Abraham and Joseph were intelligent enough to recognise that God's interventions were beyond human logic.

Isaac and Joseph: Being in the Shadows⁴

Isaac was one of the patriarchs of the Israelites. He was sandwiched between the two personalities of Abraham and Jacob. His role in the Bible is that of the son of Abraham and father of Jacob. He was a man of serenity everywhere. He represents the majority of people who live with a close circle of family. From the human point of view, Isaac was not a significant contributor compared to Abraham and Jacob. But he reminds us of the life of the general public. They do not make history; they make no momentum in social life. But they are paramount bonds linking the past with the present for the clarity of history.

Joseph's character is not much or well described in the Gospels or the church's teachings. In comparison with Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Apostles, not much is said about the foster father of Jesus. He remained a shadow always, a man behind the scene. But Joseph challenged the pharisaic morality of the time. His life was an interpretation of the new face of compassion envisaged by Jesus. He represents people who do not come to the limelight but are humanity's crusaders of compassion. He shows that silence is sometimes more effective a weapon than verbal communication. It is beautiful that his silence and sense of justice are oriented to all dimensions of whole gospel living. We can interpret his spirituality of silence as one bearing a unique mark.

Joseph of the OT and Joseph of the NT: Being in Relationship

Joseph in the OT played a decisive role in the history of Israelites at a moment of their crisis. He providentially gained authority over the land of Egypt and saved it from the famine by collecting grains in advance. Jacob and his brothers have survived the famine because of Joseph. The virtue of care for the family was predominant in Joseph. He did not think about the past but saved them, providing for their physical needs. Joseph accepted everything as the will of God so that he could say to his brothers, "...for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). For Joseph, commitment to his family was the heart of spirituality.

Joseph in the New Testament walked in proportion to the virtue of commitment to the Holy Family because the responsibility towards Mary and child Jesus was entrusted to him by the divine intervention. He did not think of anything of the virgin conception of

⁴Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2020.

Mary and little Child Jesus but to save their lives in their moments of crisis. Joseph dedicated his life to their cause. Joseph in the New Testament took them to Egypt to save the mother and the child at the risk of his life. What made Joseph protect the family was that he followed his conscience, as in the case of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph, the son of Jacob, did not consider the pain his brothers inflicted on him; Joseph, the father of Jesus, did not think of pain related to his mission.

We have to sense the will of God through the given opportunities and life situations. Our intelligence, spirit of faith, trust in the supernatural powers, etc., will help us know God's will. We have to believe in the ever-inspiring presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Our openness to God-given opportunities is what we call to trust in the Lord. If you have faith the size of a mustard seed... and nothing shall be impossible for you" (Mt 17:20). The Bible means this absolutely, factually, completely and literally.

Moses and Joseph: Being Totally Committed

The commitment to protect the people of Israel is the highlighted image of Moses. He was safely living in the palace, adopted by the kingly race. Moses could have had a greater scope to lead a comfortable life had he lived there as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:10). The manner of counting a person's success, in general, is how one makes it comfortable with gains and not losses. But Moses just gave it all up just for his people. He bore the full brunt of this task entrusted by the God of Israel, facing the wrath of not just Pharaoh but of the same God, finally leaving himself to die without entering the promised land.

In Joseph, we see a beautiful personification of Moses' life. Joseph could have said "no," to the Angel, ignoring his dream and leaving Mary to herself. However, a man of justice himself did not shirk his responsibility to save a woman in distress.

Joseph did take the initiative to protect his family. He took the saviour of the Israelites out to Egypt, thus securing both Jesus and Mary; on the other hand, Moses led the Israelites, liberating from slavery and protecting them. Joseph was the saviour of the saviour, and Moses was the saviour of the saved ones. Both guided them passionately until their death. Moses did not enter the promised land and died on Mount Nebo (Deut 34:6), but he gave them the law of God to make the people of God. According to the traditions, Joseph

was not fortunate enough to accompany Jesus to and till Calvary as Mary did, but he accomplished a task well to help him "increase in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour" (Luke 2: 52). Then he withdrew gently.

One might think if God did an injustice by calling Moses out from the cosiness of the palace of Pharaoh. But that 'injustice' became a blessing to the Israelites. Joseph also faced "injustice" by responding to the will of God. He could lead a peaceful life. But all generations of goodwill benefit from the sacrifice of Joseph by seeing and experiencing Jesus, the saviour.

Despite all his difficulties, Moses had only one motto in his mind: do the mission God had assigned him. Though it was a difficult assignment, Joseph was assiduously into his role as the guardian of Mary and Jesus. "He was the true and worthy Spouse of Mary, supplying in a visible manner the place of Mary's Invisible Spouse, the Holy Ghost."⁵ Protecting Mary and the child was to the core of his heart. Thus both Moses and Joseph were committed protectors of lives.

Tobit and Joseph: Spirituality of Accompaniment

Tobit, in the OT, is characterised as an exemplary father. He was a righteous man. "I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life" (Tob 1:3). The vivid portrait of Tobit outshines all other fathers portrayed in the OT. His virtues of faith, spiritual life, family bond, conjugal fidelity and unstinted accompaniment are supreme to his fatherhood.

The first chapter of the book of Tobit is a classic example of the integrity and ethical notes of a father. An exemplary and genuine father is pictured in chapter fourteen of Tobit. It is the best example of an idyllic head of the family. Tobit was worried about the family, especially Tobias, as he went to Gabael, son of Gabrias, at Rages in Media to get back ten silver talents but was confident in God's protection (Tobit 4:20). Tobit accompanied Tobias through prayer. (Tob 5:17).

Joseph is presented in the Gospels as an example of accompaniment par excellence. Unlike Tobit, Joseph was to see to the course of divine plan meticulously both as the spouse of Mary and the guardian of Jesus. His role was not of a passive or indifferent

⁵Cardinal J.H. Newman, *Prayers, Verses and Devotions*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, 320.

character but an active leadership to fulfil the will of God. “He is Holy Joseph because no other Saint but he lived in such and so long intimacy and familiarity with the source of all holiness, Jesus, God incarnate, and Mary, the holiest of creatures.”⁶ Joseph’s righteousness is in its highest realism as he took the mother and child out to Egypt.

Joseph’s agony is well portrayed in the finding of Jesus in the temple. “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety” (Lk 2:48). On no occasion, we see in the Gospels that Joseph was absent from the family. His constant presence might have had a lasting influence on the formation of child Jesus. “Fathers are not born but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way, he becomes a father to that person.”⁷ When we look at Jesus’ mission, we see his continuous empathy and accompaniment with the poor and the needy, the sinners and the tax collectors, which had a *Josephian trait*. A complete transformation of the father concept of the OT begins with him and continues with Jesus as he highlights the compassion and love of the heavenly father. “If a type is to be sought in the character of Joseph, it is that of a simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing man, who was possessed of large sympathies and a warm heart.”⁸

Job and Joseph: Living through Brokenness

Job was a righteous man who had to go through many difficulties despite his goodwill and justice. “There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. The man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). The divine intervention occurred all through his life, especially during his struggles. At the end of the episode, we see that he was blessed with a vision of God. He had gone through many problems, difficulties, mental agony and ridicule, loss of children and wealth, and even his wife accused him of being the cause of all these misfortunes (Job 1:9). He experienced real brokenness and uncertainty in his life. He was a lonely man without anyone to help him. Finally, he saw God, and a transformation happened in him though it was late. He reminds us

⁶Cardinal Newman, *Prayers, Verses and Devotions*, 322.

⁷Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2020.

⁸James ORR (General Editor), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939, 1741.

that God will not abandon the broken ones. There is a divine pedagogy in the work of God.

Joseph was a man of brokenness. He is a Job II, a man of goodwill and justice. The usual course of his life got diverted in and through the message about the advent of the saviour. It was the most challenging moment for him as he had to say "yes" or "no" to the divine intervention. Joseph might have gone through an extraordinary moment of pain and prayed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" (Ps 22:1). God intervened in Joseph's life proposing him to be the custodian of Mary and child Jesus. It was a challenge and brokenness that would take him away from the routine and comparatively easy life. The moment he said "yes" to this divine invitation, he had to be active, and therefore the life became unimaginably hard for him.

Every brokenness is a channel to make a new road to success. In the beginning, he had difficulties in accepting it, but once God intervened in his life, he was ready to obey the will of God. It is logical to conclude that he was always guided by divine intervention until his death. The feeling of brokenness is a reality in everyone's life. The question is whether we are willing to accept it or not. Even if we don't accept it, it will be part of our life by its destiny. It is better to accept it wholeheartedly than deny it blindly. In one way or another, brokenness follows us. Faith in God will help us to have the courage to bear it positively.

The Titles of Joseph in the Liturgy: The Spouse of Mary and Joseph the Just

Traditionally the church believes Joseph as protector and the foster father of Jesus. Among the Israelites, there was the custom of adoption. Brant Pitre explains the adoption between Mary and John that gives us the nature of adoption. "Jesus' last words to Mary and John are a kind of formal act of adoption, by which Mary takes John to be her adopted son, and John takes Mary to be his adoptive mother. In ancient Judaism, adoptive relationships were real; they were legally binding. (Think here of the genealogy of Joseph and his adoptive fatherhood toward Jesus). Mary really becomes John's mother, and John becomes Mary's son."⁹

⁹Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, New York: Image, 2018, 187-188.

Here in the case of Jesus, God, the Father, gave him Joseph as his human father. "His was the title of father of the Son of God because he was the Spouse of Mary, ever Virgin. He was our Lord's father because Jesus ever yielded to him the obedience of a son. He was our Lord's father, because to him were entrusted, and by him were faithfully fulfilled, the duties of a father, in protecting Him, giving Him a home, sustaining and rearing Him, and providing Him with a trade."¹⁰ The Gospel of Matthew highlights it as a purely divine will that Joseph must be the foster father of Jesus. Joseph's responsibility of protecting Jesus shows that he has formally adopted the child and the mother, and they adopted Joseph as their father and husband. That is why Mary followed the instruction of Joseph true to its details (Lk 2:1-30). They were together for child Jesus always, i.e., taking Mary and the child to Bethlehem, to Egypt, Egypt to Israel, to the temple to offer the child to God (Lk 2:24), taking the mother and Jesus to Jerusalem (Lk 2:41), finding the missed Jesus (Lk 2:45-48), and leading them home. Matthew and Luke emphasise the vibrant presence of Joseph, the foster father, in the Gospels.

Pope Francis included a recent and significant addition in the liturgy to commemorate St. Joseph. The official addition is "Joseph, her spouse"¹¹, and the Syro-Malabar church replaced it as "St. Joseph the just."¹² The relationship between Joseph and Jesus is not genuinely represented in both additions. The Gospel of Mark says about Jesus, "the son of Joseph" (Mt 13:55, Lk 3:23, 4:22, Jn 1: 45, 6:42), and the traditions state that Joseph was the foster father or the adopted father. Pope Francis says, "The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus."¹³ The terms

¹⁰Cardinal Newman, *Prayers, Verses and Devotions*, 321.

¹¹The Roman Missal, The conference of Catholic Bishops of India, 2011, 612. "On May 1, 2013, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments promulgated the decree *Paternas vices* by the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis. The decree instructed that the name of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, be inserted into Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV. Already on November 13, 1962, Pope John XXIII had inserted the name of St Joseph into the first Eucharistic Prayer (the Roman Canon), and that work was carried forward to the other three Eucharistic Prayers, initially by Pope Benedict XVI and confirmed by Pope Francis." https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/saint-joseph-in-the-eucharistic-prayers_ (Quoted on 04-12-2021).

¹²Raza Qurbana Taksa, Secretariat, Kakkanad, Kochi: Commission for Liturgy, 2021, 44.

¹³Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde-1*, 2020.

“Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man...” (Mt 1:19) or “... Joseph the husband of Mary...” (Mt 1:16) are not reasonably closer to the relationship between Jesus and Joseph. It is better and more meaningful to use “the foster father of Jesus” in the liturgy than “spouse of Mary” or “Joseph, the righteous”. This term will show Joseph’s closer affiliation with Jesus. The inclusion of “the foster father of Jesus” as a more meaningful expression in the liturgical text is to be considered. It will be a more “just” way to honour St Joseph.

Conclusion

Oftentimes, we find in Joseph—the man who goes unnoticed, who is gentle and discreet and often a hidden presence—an intercessor, support and a guide. God repeatedly chooses the least likely persons to accomplish his will throughout salvation history. For example, Moses was a stutterer. Peter was a fisherman. Paul was a persecutor of the church. Joseph was a carpenter. What matters to the Lord is neither our status in life nor our but certainly our simplicity to comply with God’s will. St. Joseph modelled himself as the best in that respect. From the moment of accepting as his spouse till the return to Nazareth, he acted according to the divine plan. St. Joseph teaches us lessons of obedience and humility. He shows us that those who stay hidden or in shadows play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. There is a Joseph hidden in each of us, a person of woes and worries. It is easy to meet the challenge if we trust in the will of God, which creates positive energy. St Joseph faced difficulties courageously. Since he was a righteous man, he was fully aware of the beautiful designs of God for him and, therefore, saw everything from the perspective of faith.

Joseph could have just denied the reality of the dream, considering it as a mere dream, but he tried to translate the moment into a sign from God. Righteous people have an innate nature to look at realities without malice and get into the situation quickly. Some individuals are knocked completely off by seemingly minor setbacks, while others achieve high productivity despite major adversity or significant physical impairment.

Joseph was quick to make an answer to what he perceived to be the direct call of God. Originally a “just man,” the natural clemency within his heart prevailed over mere justice, and by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, that clemency was transferred into a strong and enduring love. Joseph is known to us only as a passive figure in the background of the Gospel

narratives. Yet, his whole-hearted reconciliation to Mary, even in the face of possible slandering by his neighbours, his complete self-sacrifice, when he left all and fled into Egypt to save the infant Jesus, are indicative that he was not unworthy to fulfil the great trust which was imposed upon him by the Eternal Father.¹⁴

He is an exemplary personification of a true father who could easily influence and inspire people of the present generation. We look for reasons for all inspirations, but it may not immediately make sense. We have to wait, reflect and realise the purpose of the inspiration. It was the methodology that St Joseph followed in his life. Now the church has the challenge to wait for the guidance of God rather than depending upon human wisdom. To listen to the will of God, we need to wait in patience whether as a person, family, society or church. St Joseph is a pillar of light who could show us how to respond to the call of God and patiently wait to discern the right path.

Just as God told Joseph: 'Son of David, do not be afraid!' (Mt 1:20), so he seems to tell us: 'Do not be afraid!' We need to set aside all anger and disappointment and embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish, not with mere resignation but with hope and courage. In this way, we become open to a deeper meaning. Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from the stony ground. Even if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 Jn 3:20).

To give life to someone is the greatest of all gifts. To save a life is the next. Who gave life to Jesus? It was Mary. Who saved his life? It was Joseph. Ask St. Paul, who persecuted him. Ask St. Peter, who denied him. Ask all the saints who put him to death. But if we ask, 'Who saved his life?' Be silent, patriarchs, be silent, prophets, be silent, apostles, confessors, and martyrs. Let St. Joseph speak, for this honour is his alone; he alone is the saviour of his saviour (Blessed William Joseph Chaminade).

¹⁴James ORR (General Editor), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 1741.