

Editorial

Year of St Joseph: Joseph as a Formator and Just Man

St. Joseph as the Formator

The substantial and terrible impact of the COVID pandemic worldwide has left the Church facing the challenge of helping people find meaning and purpose in their uncertain lives. In the light of faith, the Church has viewed this as an opportunity to encourage the faithful to become aware of our vulnerability and dependence on God. Pope Francis had declared the year from December 8, 2020, to December 8, 2021, as the “Year of St. Joseph.” Widely known as an obedient, accepting, working Father, Pope Francis, in his letter, “*Patris Corde*,” meaning “With a Father’s Heart,” described St. Joseph as a father in the shadows. There is no better personality to bring out the vulnerable yet faithful side of humanity than the life of St. Joseph. He is described as “the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a supporter and a guide in times of trouble. Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.” The Editorial hence would like to focus and reflect on the formation process by replicating the life and sacrifices of St Joseph.

What is formation?

The formation is a process of becoming from within. The metaphor for the formation process that reflects this continuous and enduring process that results in a beautiful creation is a rosebud becoming a rose flower. Parents are generally concerned that their children grow up to think independently and reason clearly about matters of justice and fairness (Boyes & Allen, 1993). In the Christian doctrine, Christ is seen

as the ultimate figure of formation, and we need to contemplate His journey from birth to ministry as a part of His formation.

St. Joseph was a law-abiding citizen, religious person, and someone who had his eyes and ears open to the voice of God. Even in the short narrative of his life, it is seen how the man who was to marry Mary went through a series of life-changing decisions that seemed illogical to human understanding but was essential to bring the word of God to Earth. In the Bible, there are two narratives about the birth of Christ. In Luke, we see a historical narrative (Luke 1). It is an authentic chronological narrative. For Luke, I think the source of this information is Mother Mary. In St. John, we see a philosophical description about the birth of Christ (John 1:1-18), for which the source of information would have been Jesus himself. We can take a moment to consider where Jesus received the news about his birth. We can contemplate the position that the account of St. Joseph left with Jesus and His years of formation. Jesus himself might have inquired and sought knowledge from St. Joseph, who would have interacted with Jesus to bring forth his purpose in life. This gives more meaning to the understanding of why at the age of 12, Jesus tells his parents that he involves in his Father's House.

From his awareness about his birth, Jesus realized his mission in life. For the rest of His life in Nazareth, he was preparing himself with the help of Joseph and Mary in his journey that we can understand was his formation journey. Jesus's realization that he was not lost in the temple of God at the age of 12 and Joseph's realization of the transformation in Jesus (Luke 2:41-52) might have led to the recognition that there was no need for accompaniments anymore/accompaniment in formation. Thus, it can be understood that the course of becoming was a combination of an internal calling and a strong foundation leading to the transformation that brings the formation process into completion.

Enabling a Threefold Process in Human Formation

In the Faith Formation, Assessment and Long-Range Planning Tool that address the various components that affect the strength of parish faith formation, there are six fundamental tasks of catechesis that needs to be accomplished: promoting knowledge of faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching to pray, education of community life, and missionary initiation (General Directory for Catechesis, 1997, #85-86). The threefold process in human formation involves self-knowledge,

self-acceptance, and self-gift. The resources for fostering this process of formation in a seminary context are not limited to the following. They receive instruction from rector and other faculty members through various communication channels like courses, educational sources, and conferences. Personal reflection is another critical resource that the formee uses to reflect on themselves and their appropriation of life experiences, especially suffering. Apart from this, community life and feedback help expand self-knowledge and self-control. An application to the tasks of seminary life helps develop acceptance to the authority of superiors and develop the habit of using freedom with discernment. Spiritual directions cultivate virtues of self-reflection and self-discipline, and formation advisors are models of an external and internal forum of the priesthood.

Though it is difficult to establish the true path of formation of the ministry of Jesus, it is not far-stretched to deduce that till his public ministry from the age of 12, Jesus was preparing himself for the mission entrusted to him by his Father. Jesus was trained under two rectors- St. Joseph and Mother Mary. It is not clear in the scripture or other works how long St. Joseph lived with the Holy Family. The one thing that is clear from the Bible was that Jesus had self-knowledge and self-awareness during the lifetime of Joseph itself (Luke 2:41-52). A father's influence on the development and well-being of the child (Nierengarten, 2019) is based on growing evidence that Father contributes positively to the child's growth and development. When the character of Jesus is analyzed, some of Joseph's characteristics like self-sacrifice and acts of submission and acceptance had a lot of influence on Jesus. The focus here is the nature of St. Joseph, who helped enable the formation of Jesus.

The core of Jesus's teaching was based on two values- love and forgiveness. Literature reflects how Jesus must have seen these qualities modelled in the life of Joseph. Without prior warning, Joseph was required to exhibit characteristics of a man faithful to God. The Angel of God appeared to Mother Mary with the good news (Luke 1:26-38) while in the vision to Joseph, he received instructions on how to go about with things that were not customary in those days (Matthew 1:20-21). Joseph's immediate acceptance and obedience (Matthew 1:24-25) reflects how God indeed selected him to be a part of the Ministry. Joseph's precise actions in response to the Angels without putting Mary or the newborn child in distress reflect his in-depth love

for them. Mother Mary and the newborn were traveling, seated on a donkey or a horse while Joseph traveled on foot. The humiliation of knocking on doors and delivering the baby in an animal shelter are just a few examples of the sacrifice and suffering he had undergone. Leaving his native place to ensure the safety of the mother and the child and living a life of a traveler were not easy tasks considering the dangers during those times.

Joseph's trouble did not end there but continued with the continued travel back to his home town and the life threats from Herod would assure that Joseph had numerous sleepless nights. A contradictory and amusing reality is seen when people nowadays respect a statue of a sleeping St. Joseph. It might even be possible that Joseph might not have slept till Jesus attained the age of 12. In these difficult situations, Joseph did not show hostility or anger towards anyone. He kept utmost silence and forgiveness. These qualities of Joseph might have influenced Jesus in his early stages of life.

Later in his public ministry, we see Jesus inviting his first disciples to his home. St. John wrote in his gospel targeting the Greek people in mind. We have studied in Ancient Greece, many schools of thought existed- great teachers like Socrates, Aristotle, Plato are but a few examples of great teachers. That is why they asked Jesus where you stay means where you teach.

Come and See

The Editorial calls the readers to the Nazareth experience. All the disciples were staying with him during their three years of formation. The home in Nazareth played a vital role in the life of the disciples. The participants in the house- St. Joseph and Mother Mary must have played a significant part from the beginning till the day of Pentecost. Nazareth created a new culture of formation. The Message that we can receive today from St. Joseph as a Formator is not limited to just developing love and forgiveness but a way of life consistent with God's will being done in our lives. Some points we can take are:

1. Our parents are our great Formators
2. They are the people who pray and do penance for our spiritual and physical growth
3. Human formation is the most crucial aspect of our formation
 - a. Develop Self-knowledge
 - b. Attain Self-acceptance

- c. Imbibe Self-gift or self-sacrifice
4. There are different stages of our formation that ask us to attain these things in our life
5. The formation is a process of becoming from within

Pope Francis proclaims through this letter “to increase our love for the giant saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession, and to imitate his virtues and his zeal.” I would like to remind the readers about the message of continuous hope and patience during times of the pandemic and reflect on the strength of St. Joseph as he overcame various crises in his life. Pope Francis concluded his letter with a prayer to St. Joseph:

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To you, God entrusted his only Son; in you, Mary placed her trust; with you, Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.

The prayer of Pope Francis should echo in us a feeling of responsibility and caring for ourselves and others. Let us ensure that the pandemic does not weaken us but strengthen the mission of our lives. Let’s look into the life of St. Joseph and prepare our hearts and mind to take the responsibility of being a Formator even when the spotlight is elsewhere.

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