

The School of Joseph: A Prototype of Formation Through Visual Learning

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Abstract

Pope Francis wrote about Saint Joseph being called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus. With the world moving into a need for universal peace and prosperity and the formation of persons through education, there is a need to echo the methodology from the life and leadership of Saint Joseph for our times. As visual learning is an essential channel of learning, the article implores the reader to look into the leadership of Saint Joseph as having paramount implications of effective formation. The article reflects on a formation program in the Church and the school of Joseph under the following titles: (1) silence as the sound of formation; (2) the Spirit as the star of formation; and (3) service as the soul of formation.

Keywords: School of Joseph, Pope Francis, Formation

Introduction

Education for life is the catchphrase today. Having tired of the existing educational system, new ways and means are explored to encourage the future generation to rise to the expectations of our time. Initiatives are taken on national and international levels to cope with the changing demands. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN and the New Educational Policy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) of the government of India echo the deep-seated desire *samagra*

shiksha (integral education) to make education for life, implying a necessary formation of persons through the process of education.

Sustainable Development Goals 2015 of the UN presents a new way of envisaging education, “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity” (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Interesting to note that a holistic approach to life is reiterated in this dream project of sustainable development. All the seventeen sustainable development goals are integrated and they recognize that “action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability” (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Introducing these ideals into schooling is urgent and important. One of the goals is education and it focuses on an “inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development” (United Nations Development Programme, 2021).

The system and the structure of education undergo changes as the situations and needs of society keep mounting. “The world is undergoing rapid changes in the knowledge landscape” (NEP 2020). New forms of the ancient *gurukula* (students doing education staying in the company of a teacher) system of education of India are experimented with, and residential schools may be a case in question. Homeschooling is tried in different parts of the world. Attractions to Montessori schools are very much alive to date. Playschool or Kindergarten method of education is attracting the children as private schools are mushrooming in the country. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (202) thus stated that education should move towards less content, and more towards learning about “how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields.” Hence, the New Education Policy focuses on a pedagogy evolved “to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable” (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

As we reflect upon the formation of candidates, which is an education programme, during the year of Saint Joseph, the article draws some insights from the person and mission of this silent, vibrant, and just formator. The specificity and effectiveness of his formation program

may be christened as visual learning, that is, learning by seeing and doing. In the words of Jesus, it may be summed up, “come and see” or “follow me”. There is no account of Joseph uttering any word in the gospels. Nevertheless, none are recounted in the infancy narrative of Jesus. In the case of Saint Joseph, the gospels are silent and there is no verbal communication whatsoever from him, neither to the angel who spoke in his dreams nor to Mary and Jesus.

Does visual learning have any formative value? What is the significance of silence in formation? How can we discern the promptings of the Spirit, the true and genuine animator of formation? Could we evolve a methodology from the life and leadership of Saint Joseph for our times? These are some of the questions occupying my thoughts at the moment.

Beyond doubt visual learning is an important channel of education. Seeing is believing. Silence is the womb of creation, including artistic imaginations and scientific inventions and innovations. Life and change, prerequisites for formation, take shape in silence. In the depth of silence, we see and listen to the Spirit’s promptings, not in the noise. Therefore, the leadership of Saint Joseph is of paramount importance as far as an effective formation is concerned.

Pope Francis writes, “God called Saint Joseph to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood” and that in this way, “he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation.” (Pope Francis, 2020). Joseph is hailed as one who cooperated in the great mystery of salvation and stood tall as a faithful minister of salvation through his service to the person and mission of Jesus. This means that Joseph is acknowledged as the minister of Jesus, the minister par excellence. Jesus picked up the basic lessons of formation – the great mission of salvation – from the person of Joseph. Suppose Joseph stood up to fulfill his mission in molding Jesus for the great ministry of the mystery of salvation. In that case, he can be a great inspiration and guiding light in imparting right formation to the candidates preparing to be the missionary disciples (Pope Francis, 2013, §119) of Jesus Christ. Hence, we turn to Joseph to learn a few basics from his outstanding examples in bringing up Jesus in age and wisdom.

The School of Joseph is a school of silence and vibes. Nonetheless, there is no room for indifference and inaction, instead, the school of

Joseph is one of dreams and deeds of gigantic proportions and rapid actions. Anyone trained in the school of Joseph might be quick to discern the dream and dare to go the extra mile, however difficult the terrain, unchartered road, and however impossible a mission. Were they thrown into any crisis or emergencies, those formed in the school of Joseph the silent and the just teacher would come out enlightened and empowered to accomplish the mission?

In the school of Joseph, words echo in the background, but works matter; and so also walks matter. With this method of education and formation, there is no verbal exchange, but guidance comes from the contemplation of the word of God and the subsequent communications by visuals and actions. “Preach the gospel always, if necessary, use words” maybe its motto. “Speak only when you feel your words are better than the silence.” Those graduating from the *malpanate* (the school of the teacher) are knowledgeable and wise. “Successful people always have two things on their lips, silence and smile.”

As it has been in the past, students prefer immersive learning, emphasizing seeing, listening, reflecting, and acting. The cry of the poor, the weak, the wounded, the marginalized, the migrants, the enslaved, etc., disturb the trainees and push them to action.

At one time, verbal communications reigned supreme. The scenario is undergoing a sea change. Learning is becoming more and more visual rather than verbal; it is becoming more contextual than textual. This does not empty the power and the vigor of the spoken word; nothing negates the force of this double-edged sword. For instance, Joseph himself was moved by the word of God, inspiring him to move the mountains before his eyes. Nevertheless, immersive learning has lasting impressions and effectiveness in addressing the challenges outrightly.

Visual learning is fairly simple but profound. It’s all about seeing things and events in view of life and mission. This can take different forms depending on the scene in question. “Visual learning focuses on what we can see, so anything that is looked at or watched is part of visual learning” (“Visual Learning Style,” 2020).

Pope Francis (2020) through his apostolic letter, *Patris Corde*, the Father’s Heart, invites us to visit the school of Joseph. “Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support 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” (Pope Francis, 2020). Emphasizing the role of the people who embrace the school of Joseph, Pope Francis highlights the importance of such a company in combating the miseries of Himalayan proportion caused by the Covid-19 pandemic:

our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show, yet in these very days are surely shaping the decisive events of our history. Doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests, men and women religious, and so very many others (Pope Francis, 2020).

The life and ministry of the formators in the overall scheme of the mission of the Church are silent and invisible, the ordinary people toiling round the clock behind the scene. They are not in the limelight, but they set the scene as laborers for a great harvest. The same is true of the parents of families – who go unnoticed and unrecognized – in their leadership role in making the Church a communion of families.

Having highlighted some of the features of visual learning, I would like to the article reflects on a formation programme in the Church and the school of Joseph under the following titles: (1) silence as the sound formation; (2) the Spirit as the star of formation; and (3) service as the soul of formation.

Silence as the Sound of Formation

At the school of Joseph silence is conspicuous. Whoever steps into the school does not listen to the voice of Joseph; people do not hear Joseph speak anything. Is he immersed in contemplation? Is he dreaming all the while? He is found lost in silence. This does not mean that he is not listening. He tunes in to the voice. There is no great noise on the campus, but there is the echoing of the divine voice. And naturally, Joseph listens to the voice of the angel. We notice Joseph is silent so that the voice of God may be audible to him and others as well. He does not disturb the silence of the heart and the voice of the conscience. Silence resounds in the school of Joseph. The ambiance of the school is not one of absolute silence; it needs to be qualified as a sound of silence permeating the whole atmosphere. Silence speaks volumes and

it directs the steps in the right direction, a mission to translate the sound of silence in the concrete context of life towards the full flowering the salvation.

The sound of silence is the hallmark of the Josephine school. Wherever there is silence – both external and internal silence – there is the atmosphere conducive to listening to the voice of the Lord and contemplating the face of the Lord. The sound of silence resounds in the heart of those who enter the portals of the school of Joseph. If the sound of silence succeeds in disturbing the heart and mind of the seeker, then, we might conclude that formation is underway. Joseph was disturbed because of the pervading silence. He could not hold his breath steady anymore. Joseph, a man of pure and clean heart – a just man - discerned the herculean task communicated to him silently and carefully. Though he was disturbed by the sound of society, Joseph listened in the silence to embrace the vision and mission of salvation wholeheartedly, for he found no word adequate to explain the reality shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, Joseph was convinced of the decision he arrived at in the context of freedom and faithfulness. Therefore, the silence of Joseph before and after the dream was saving and safeguarding the design of the Lord.

In the present scenario of formation and spirituality, the candidates and the masters have to enter the cave of Joseph's school. All need to encounter the sound of silence in the heart of their heart. The master and disciples should discern the dream of the Lord in their given context, making the mystery and mission of salvation revealed in Christ reasonable and visible. In other words, the sound of silence – embracing challenges in humility – has to make a re-entry into the premises of formation houses and hallow the persons undergoing formation. Silence speaks louder than the sounds around. It can disturb the aspirant's mindset from within – otherwise holding on to the status quo and enjoying their comfort zone – offering a safe anchorage – despite the encircling whirlpool and rough waters. Encounter with the Lord in the silence of the heart will empower us also to say with Saint Paul, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?” (Rom 8:35). Joseph displayed the courage and commitment to take up his cross in accomplishing the mission entrusted to him in various dreams. Jesus, privileged to have the schooling and formation in the school of Joseph, found the courage to carry the cross for the salvation

of the world. Everyone undergoing formation – basic or ongoing formation – are invited to listen to the sound of silence in the cave of one’s heart, where the divine voice may be decoded clearly and convincingly.

In the sound of silence, Joseph responded to the voice of the Lord – a conspicuous moment of the formation in the school of silence – which required and enabled him to accompany Mary and Jesus in the mission of salvation of the world. Pope Francis teaches, “The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus. In this way, he placed himself, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, “at the service of the entire plan of salvation” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.1). Jesus learned the lessons of life and mission from the school of Joseph. The Pope alludes to it, “Jesus told us: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (Mt 11:29). The lives of the saints too are examples to be imitated. Saint Paul explicitly says this: “Be imitators of me!” (1 Cor 4:16). By his eloquent silence, Saint Joseph says the same” (Pope Francis, 2020).

Silence is the starting point of formation; it is also the beginning of divine revelation. A call within a call was given to Joseph in the first dream. “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:20-21). Joseph resolves the dilemma in the school of silence. He slept over the call and challenge. When he woke up from sleep – the sound of silence – Joseph was resolute. “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (Mt 1:24). This stage of formation is one of freedom, without which there is no following.

The second stage of formation is also in the school of silence. In the second dream, the angel tells Joseph “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him. He got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod” (Mt 2:13-15). This stage of formation is one of sojourn, leaving one’s land and people to a distant land God shows.

The third stage of formation is again in the school of silence. In a third dream, the angel told him that those who sought to kill the child were dead and ordered him to rise, take the child and his mother, and return

to the land of Israel. He got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel” (Mt 2:19-21). This stage of formation is one of returning to the land of the Lord.

All these different moments of formation were enveloped by the sound of silence and Joseph was empowered to make the right decision because of the mission. So also formation in our times should have these decisive moments packed with the sound of silence, in the absence of which following the Lord in the world will be futile and fugitive. This process is all the more important when silence is becoming a casualty in the formation program. Silence and serenity are necessary ingredients for education and formation.

The Spirit as the Star of Formation

The Spirit of the Lord is the witness of formation. Jesus said to his disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit is the genuine director of the candidate. The Spirit is the helper, accompanying the disciple everywhere, and shows the path of salvation. As per the promise, the Advocate will be with us forever (Jn 14:16). This is the Spirit of truth (14:17). In the same breath, Jesus reveals the Spirit, the indweller, “You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (14:17).

The formation programme aims to facilitate the candidate to encounter the Spirit of truth, the helper, and the indwelling Spirit in their concrete situations and challenges. It is to direct people to be aware of the indwelling Spirit and to be awakened by the Spirit, so that the formation program may be faithful and fruitful to the mission assigned given the salvation of the whole world.

“For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The Spirit of the Lord is not far from us. The Spirit is as intimate as our breath (Gen 2:7). We breathe the Spirit in and out. But often we are unaware of the intimacy of the truth of the Spirit. The Formation Program is envisaged in such a way that the faithful experience the abiding presence of the Spirit – to turn to the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. Once again to turn to the abiding Spirit means to discern the presence of the Lord in the sound of silence.

Joseph felt the presence of the Spirit in him, even during his sleep and dreams. This means that he was not only having intimate communion

with the Spirit, but was aware of the Spirit speaking through him, allowing him to embrace the truth, despite his personal, social, and religious inconveniences and challenges.

Joseph, in his school, acquired a degree of understanding of the promptings of the Spirit by clearly hearing the voice of the Lord. Hence, he does not ask questions or seeks explanations. Instead, Joseph sees things on a larger canvas and converts the demands onto a war footing. *Patris Corde* informs us that “The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that explains, but accepts. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4).

Students trained in the school of Joseph – in the accompanying presence of the Spirit – will be prompt to act as and when challenges shoot up. Joseph is a great model here. The master’s voice would be sufficient for the disciples to go onto a war footing. Challenges keep coming one after another, most likely unimaginable and unpredictable. Nevertheless, the students of the school of Joseph will be quick to respond to the demands of the time, just as Joseph showcased his readiness and availability in the trying times without delay.

Regarding the prompt execution of the proposal, *Patris Corde* presents a beautiful insight into the formation in the school of Joseph. Pope Francis reminds us that, “Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4). Such reconciliation does not lead the student to passivity, rather to act positively and courageously. Pope Francis comments, “Joseph is certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit’s gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations, and disappointments” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4). Within this process and program of the school of Joseph, the students experience strengthening by the Spirit.

Readiness to undertake the recommendations often at the eleventh hour does not mean that it is easy and rosy. It is uncomfortable and it brings with it an unimaginable amount of unwanted troubles. A person guided by the Spirit in the school of Joseph will have a generous disposition to face them squarely. In the school of Joseph, there is no

clarity about the fuller picture and the future. “Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary’s good name, her dignity, and her life” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4). Francis encourages people to assimilate the values of the school Joseph. “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” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4).

Openness to the Spirit is the hallmark of the school of Joseph. By nature, the Spirit moves freely and unpredictably. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8). The spirit of the school of Joseph is the Holy Spirit, the helper leading us to truth and freedom. Like Joseph, an aspirant of the school of Joseph, will be open to the Spirit and follow the promptings of the indweller spontaneously, though it is costly.

Service as the Soul of Formation

Service is the soul of any vocation. The formation of candidates, therefore, is to train them for service. Students in the school of Joseph undergo training in the sound of silence through the whispering of the Spirit and the examples of excellent self-gift. All vocation is to serve; no vocation sans service. As per the name ‘Joseph’, the school stands for service excellence, promoting the progress of others.

The formation period is meant to prepare the candidate for service, involving the service of God, the service of creation, and the service of humanity, guiding and guaranteeing the salvation of all. There is no better formation than to equip the students to serve society thoroughly and unconditionally, after the example of Joseph.

Service was the soul culture of Joseph. Joseph of the Gospels emerges as a servant par excellence. His life and mission were to serve Mary and Jesus. Through such selfless service, Joseph served the Lord and the world in receiving the dawn of salvation. The benchmark of the school of Joseph is service excellence. Joseph did not reserve anything to serve himself but was always found busy serving others. Thus, the trademark of formation programs for different vocations should be nothing, but service and service alone. If the program is chalked out only to ensure the increase of the individuals or the institutions, we miserably defeat the purpose of the formation houses.

Jesus learned the basic lessons of service in the company of Joseph and Mary. Francis attests to the importance of the school of Joseph in his letter. “From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labour” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.6). The washing of the feet of his disciples by Jesus (Jn 13:1-20) remains a great scandal but shows the indomitable greatness of service for all times. On the occasion, Jesus asks his disciples, “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). Were he not trained in the school of Joseph, humanly speaking, Jesus might not have washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus admonishes his disciples further, “Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them” (Jn 13:16). Jesus praises the value of service. He raises the standard of servants, who go out to serve the world in the footsteps of their master. By these words, is Jesus not acknowledging and admiring the school of Joseph, where he has been groomed as the servant, even as a slave by choice?

Service in the school of Joseph stands for sacrifice, which is exemplified in self-gift. Francis writes, “Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.7). Jesus might have had his preliminary lessons on service involving sacrifice and self-gift from the school of Joseph. The reverberation of an ideal service is recounted in the Pauline letter of Philippians, “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8). Is it not appropriate to say that Jesus lived out the dreams on service he had caught from the school of Joseph. “Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.7).

Any formation program devoid of service is not worth its name. Every service counts, however, small and insignificant it may appear in the eyes of others. This is reflected in the commandment of God. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself” (Lk 10:27). Love and service are strong pillars on which the edifice of formation is built. Joseph was keen to give his life without reserve. He emptied himself for the mystery and mission of salvation.

Pope Francis calls our attention to the kind of faith Joseph held through the life of Jesus. “The faith Christ taught us is what we see in Saint Joseph. He did not look for shortcuts, but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4). Joseph was a person of total surrender to the dream of the Lord, without any complaint and without expecting anything in return.

Another signature characteristic of the school of Joseph is its care and concern for the frail. Joseph showcased the nature of God – compassion or mercy – through his service and ministry. Pope Francis reflects on this expansively. He observes, “Joseph’s attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak, for God chooses what is weak” (Pope Francis, 2020, p. 4). This is an important angle in the field of formation. It simply asserts that there should not be any discrimination whatsoever, either based on color, or caste, or economic status, or social ranking, etc. For example, a candidate being a Dalit or a tribe is not a disqualification. Unfortunately, this is a burning issue and an alarmingly cancerous development in the Indian ecclesial scenario. The papal document cites the passage to show the worthiness of a candidate coming from a marginalized sector, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:7-9).

Being a service in the ecclesial ecosystem, the formation program should be inclusive of all who have been chosen by the Lord. Human elements should be warded off and the divine choice should be recognized and responded to positively. Francis gives us a course correction, “The evil one makes us see and condemn our frailty, whereas the Spirit brings it to light with tender love” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.2). The school of Joseph is branded for its outstanding mercy, pouring out mercy, Joseph accepts Mary as per the command of the Lord. Unlike worldly considerations, the logic of the school of Joseph is one of hospitality. “We know that God’s truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains, and forgives us” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.2). In the formation program there should be ample room for “accompanying, discerning, and integrating weakness” (Pope Francis, 2016, Chapter 8). Striking on a beautiful note of hope, Pope Francis says, “God can make flowers spring up from stony ground” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.4). Joseph was lavishly pouring out mercy on all occasions and serving the mission of God. The school of Joseph has a signature of mercy. Therefore, the formation program should ensure that every graduate

of the school showcases the compassion of the Lord as a mark of their school.

The school of Joseph appreciates and promotes the ecosystem of freedom, faith, and friendliness. Whenever the plan of salvation is disclosed, freedom is granted, faith is required, and friendliness is assured. Roadmaps are proposed and not imposed in the school. There is an ample atmosphere of freedom – exercised in silent contemplation driven by love – before Joseph takes a decision. Though the dream did not let Joseph sleep, he was free, faithful, and friendly to the messenger of God and the holy family. Francis says, “The logic of love is always the logic of freedom, and Joseph knew how to love with extraordinary 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” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.7). Freedom liberates individuals from the clutches of petty interests and personal entanglements.

In the context of freedom, Joseph, though ignorant of the details, leaped into the darkness to the divine voice, with the proper disposition of come what may. Thoroughly he trusted in the Lord and took up the mission courageously with courageous faith. Despite insurmountable fears, Joseph showcased his utter faith in the providence of God, all things working together for good for those who love him (Rom 8:28). “Even through Joseph’s fears, God’s will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.2). Fear does not overpower Joseph in the carrying out of his mission impossible. Francis encourages us by saying that Joseph teaches us that “amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.2). The school of Joseph keeps the Scripture open and learns from its pages of divine revelation. Today the students have to gather courage from the annals of history and go forward in service with conviction amidst encircling fears and anxieties for the future.

The school of Joseph teaches aspirants to be responsible persons through service, the soul of formation. By shouldering the roles gratefully and joyfully and moved by the Spirit they have to win the hearts of the world in silence so that they are the shepherds of the flock. Francis writes, “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” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.7). The trainees of the school of Joseph go out of its portals capable of shouldering the responsibilities of mothering or fathering of the children of God in the realization of the mission of salvation.

Conclusion

Joseph’s life was a sequence of celebrations of the sound of silence. The divine communication echoed in dreams to Joseph and he responded to it in silence and through his decisive action. Acts of Joseph were a great celebration – comingling of earth and heaven – through the sound from heaven and the silence from Joseph. It was a perfect divine-human theatre of cosmic proportion, beginning with the acceptance of Mary as his wife, to his journey to Nazareth after the festivity in Jerusalem. The dreams of Joseph may be seen as a divine-human drama, rolled out in due course of time to set the stage of salvation – a real celebration of human formation in visible form. It is a great treat to the senses, especially to the eyes through visual impressions of Joseph, the most consistent and comprehensive impression influencing the candidate undergoing formation. The school of Joseph is a challenge for both the formees and the formators, for nothing is hidden which is revealed. The sound of silence pervading the school of Joseph puts things in the right perspective to see and learn. On the one hand, catching the values is made easy, and on the other, it is a great challenge to put on the sound of silence and showcase scenes that are both inspiring and motivating.

The Spirit was the shining and guiding star of the school of Joseph. Joseph was open to the promptings of the Spirit, revealing the dream of God for Joseph and others. He was guided by the Spirit, leading to truth and freedom. The Spirit was accompanying Joseph throughout his life and mission, however impossible they seemed to be. The star of the Spirit was guiding him in accomplishing the dreams, often without rest. If formation houses are tuned into the voice of the Spirit and leave the formees to the direction of the Spirit in discerning the signs of the time, then there will be a better and healthier ambiance in the field of formation. Nothing is alien to the Spirit. Let the formees and the formators be trained in the school of Joseph under the close watch of the Spirit. If we let the Spirit guide us, then we will be scripting a beautiful story, revealed in Christ for our salvation.

The soul of formation consists of service; service is the end of formation. The transformation of our life into Christ is the greatest service we can render to the world. Jesus learned the basics of service from Joseph. Jesus was the man for others and he became so because Joseph was a man for others. The hallmark of the school of Joseph is excellence in service: the service to God, creation, and fellow beings. By praising God, establishing peace on earth, and extending hope to human beings we enter into a world of service, the sign of salvation accomplished in Christ. Mercy or compassion leads us to the service of humanity, a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ, which he learned in the school of Joseph. The formation program is geared to the celebration or transfiguration of life in Christ, always putting on – compassion – the nature, name, and face of God. Joseph excelled in showcasing mercy and compassion.

The school of Joseph stood out in fulfilling the will of God. Francis says, “In every situation, Joseph declared his own «fiat», like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane” (Pope Francis, 2020, p.3). Whether in silence or action, Joseph discerned the will of God and fulfilled it. Missionary disciples of Jesus undergoing formation are called upon to follow the path of “fiat”, and walk blamelessly before the Lord our God as Joseph the just.

I would like to conclude this reflection on the school of Joseph with the parable of the Good Samaritan. I would think that Joseph foreshadows the story of the Good Samaritan. Except at the end of the narrative, the Good Samaritan does everything in silence guided by the Spirit and showcases an excellent service model. In a world of noise, it is high time to reclaim the significance of the sound of silence, beginning with the formation houses. In a world of individualistic and materialistic mindsets, it is high time to return to the promptings of the Spirit. In a world of selfishness, it is high time to rediscover the importance of service, the key to joy and celebrations. Pointing to Joseph, his father, “the earthly shadow of the heavenly father” (Pope Francis, 2020, p. 7), Jesus seems to be telling us today – the formees and the formators alike – as he said to the Pharisees, “Go, and do likewise!” (Lk 10: 37).

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