

THE
LIFE AND GLORIES
OF
ST. JOSEPH

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*HUSBAND OF MARY, FOSTER-FATHER OF JESUS, AND
PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH*

GROUNDING ON THE DISSERTATIONS OF CANON ANTONIO VITALI,
FATHER JOSÉ MORENO, AND OTHER WRITERS

By

EDWARD HEALY THOMPSON, M.A.

*Can we find such another man, that is full of the
spirit of God? . . . can I find one wiser and one like
unto thee? Thou shalt be over my house and at the
commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey.*

—Gen. 41:38-40

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“Spend your life in honouring St. Joseph, and your love and homage will never equal the love and homage paid to him by Mary; it will approach never so distantly to the obedience, the love, the homage paid to him for thirty years on earth by the Son of God. But in proportion as your heart grows towards him in the reverence and unbounded confidence of a son will you trace in your soul a more faithful copy of the Incarnate Word.”—*Letter on Devotion to St. Joseph*, by Herbert, Bishop of Salford, 1877.

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Preface

THIS is a composite work, constructed with materials gathered from various quarters, principally from the dissertation of Don Antonio Vitali, Canon of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Damaso at Rome, entitled *Vita e Glorie del Gran Patriarca S. Giuseppe, Sposo Purissimo di Maria, Padre Putativo di Gesù, e Patrono Potentissimo della Cattolica Chiesa*, 1883. To him, therefore, special acknowledgments are due, not only for the valuable contributions to the present work which his volume has supplied, but for the permission to make free use of the product of his labors. The early chapters, extending to the birth of Joseph, are, indeed, almost a literal translation of his work. Subsequently, his materials have been largely used, sometimes verbally, at other times only substantially, but with frequent omissions and retrenchments.

Much use has also been made of a Spanish work by P. Joséf Moreno, of the Minor Clergy of the House of the Holy Spirit at Seville, entitled *Discursos sobre las Virtudes y Privilegios de S. Joséf*, 1788. It professes to be taken from the French; but, if the idea or the groundwork of the compilation be as represented, its genius and spirit are indubitably Spanish; being characterized throughout by that gravity, solidity, and depth which so especially distinguishes the theologians of Spain. To this work, which is both highly instructive and eminently suggestive, the present writer is indebted, not only for large portions of several chapters of the book, but for eight of the more important among them, including those

on the Subjection of Jesus, the Paternity and Offices of Joseph, his Interior Life, and the Glory of his Soul and Body in Heaven; all which are especially calculated to deepen our conceptions of the dignity and sanctity of the great Patriarch. But here, as generally throughout the volume, he has not always adopted the author's language or the form in which he expresses himself, but has rather digested and developed the truths he has propounded.

Occasional recourse has likewise been had to the *Vita di S. Giuseppe* by the Rev. Vincenzo de Vit, 1868, which is valuable for the general justness and discrimination of its views.

Passages from the visions and revelations of saints and holy contemplatives—St. Bridget, Sister Maria de Agreda, and others—have been interwoven with the narrative, simply in the way of illustration, and not as being invested with authority, except in the sense in which, after due examination, they have been favored with ecclesiastical approval: namely, as containing nothing contrary to faith and morals, and affording pious and profitable helps to meditation.

Finally, observations and reflections have been introduced as occasion offered which were suggested by various authors whose works have been consulted, or which occurred to the writer's own mind from consideration of the materials before him.

It is no uncommon idea, even among Catholics, that the devotion paid to St. Joseph and the lofty estimate of his prerogatives now prevailing in the Church are innovations of comparatively modern date, and that they have no precedent or sanction in antiquity. But this is far from being the case. In the writings of the ancient Fathers are to be found, not only what may be called prolific germs, but also positive and explicit statements of doctrine, which sufficiently show how deep in the consciousness of the Church lay the belief of Joseph's exalted dignity and sanctity, and how definite a shape it had

assumed even in the early ages. The devotion paid to him has, it is true, been much more distinctly formulated in later centuries, when his place in the celestial hierarchy came to be more fully recognized; but from the first this great Saint had a peculiar attraction for many holy and gifted souls, who regarded him with singular veneration and affection, as the citations given abundantly testify.

The Church brings out of her treasury things both old and new, according as the exigencies of the time require; and this is especially true of the devotions which have arisen from age to age and have received her ready sanction, or, rather, have been joyfully welcomed and embraced as the fulfillment of her heart's desire. Thus, the devotion to Our Blessed Lady, though dating from Apostolic times, received a powerful impulse at the Council of Ephesus, where the dogma of the Divine Maternity was proclaimed in opposition to the heresy of Nestorius; and, among other instances, may be mentioned the ardent devotion to the Holy Places, which resulted in the Crusades; the public and solemn adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which found its satisfaction in the Feast of Corpus Christi and the Rite of Benediction; and, at later epochs, the devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the several mysteries of the Passion in all their pathetic details: the Five Wounds, the Precious Blood, etc.; and, in our own days, renewed devotion to the Adorable Face of Our Lord. But what is most remarkable about the devotion to St. Joseph is that, after centuries of obscurity and apparent oblivion, it received a sudden and mighty impulse, which carried it, as it were, at a bound into the hearts of the Christian populations and disseminated and planted it in every clime. Or, rather, we may say that the breath of God's Holy Spirit quickened into life and energy the devotion which lay, as it were, dormant and passive in the hearts of the faithful, and rapidly stirred the smoldering fire into a blaze. Some account of this extraordinary movement and expansion is given in the

concluding chapters of the work.

If to some it may be matter of surprise that saints and doctors should have written and discoursed so largely and so eloquently respecting one of whom it might appear scant notice is taken in the Gospels, and of whom no single word spoken by him has been recorded; that a voluminous theology should have grouped itself around him; and that he should have been proposed by the Holy See to the veneration and devotion of the faithful as Patron and Guardian of the Universal Church—this can only be because they have never sufficiently considered what was Joseph's position in the economy of redemption; and it may safely be affirmed that the more they realize that position, and the more they study him in his several aspects, as presented in Holy Writ, the more will his grandeurs open upon them and the deeper and the higher will be their thoughts about him. For who, in fact, was St. Joseph? And what were the offices he filled, and the privileges he enjoyed? He was predestined to be the virgin spouse of the Virgin Mother of the Son of God, and to be His and her guardian and protector; he was the chosen minister of the counsels of the Most High in the mystery of the Incarnation; he was for years the habitual companion both of Mary and of Jesus; he bore the Divine Child constantly in his arms, lovingly caressed Him, and received His caresses in return; to him, as to His Blessed Mother, Jesus was subject in the house and workshop of Nazareth; he was as a father and a tutor to Him; he was the daily witness of His hidden life, and heard the sacred words that fell from His lips, all through His boyhood, youth, and early manhood; and he had the unspeakable blessedness of dying in His embrace. But further: with this sublime vocation and these incomparable privileges the graces and virtues of Joseph fully corresponded; his merits were commensurate with his dignity; and therefore it is that he ranks next to Mary in the Court of Heaven and is seated in glory so nigh unto the throne of the Incarnate Word.

But again: there is another and a fundamental Christian doctrine, the disregard or imperfect recognition of which lies at the root of the difficulty entertained respecting the position and power of Joseph in Heaven, as also respecting that of his Immaculate Spouse. It is this—that Our Blessed Lord is as truly Man now that He is seated in Heaven at the right hand of the Father as He was when He trod the streets of Jerusalem and the ways of Galilee. The Incarnate God, enthroned in His majesty on high, is still our Brother-Man. Nothing, indeed, is more remarkable than Our Lord's solicitude (so to say) after He had risen from the dead, not only to prove His identity to His disciples, but to convince them of His possession of the full attributes of man. "See My hands and feet," He said, "that it is I Myself"; nay more: "handle and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see Me to have"; and then He took and ate before them. (*Luke* 24:39, 42, 43). But not only so: it seemed as though He wished to impress upon them the fact that the relationship which He had assumed with men remained, not merely unbroken, but, as it were, sealed and enhanced, now that He was about to ascend into the Heaven of Heavens. The words He spoke to St. Mary Magdalen immediately after His Resurrection: "Go to My *brethren*, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and your God" (*John* 20:17)—words differing in their solemn emphasis and expression from any which He had heretofore used—seem to have been uttered to this end. Thus, being ever perfect Man as well as perfect God, as He had a mother and a foster-father on earth, so now in Heaven Mary is still His mother and Joseph retains the honored name of father. The ties of their human relationship still endure, and will endure forever. Hence the dignity of Joseph and the power of his intercession. His Foster-Child is the Almighty and Adorable God.

Many books of devotion to St. Joseph have been written in many languages; indeed, the literature dedicated to him may be said to form a library of itself. The object

of the present work is, not only to increase and stimulate that devotion, but to exhibit the theological basis on which it rests, and to show how great is the amount of authority and how strong are the intrinsic reasons for holding that a profound and solid reality of heavenly origin underlies the dignity and office to which the husband of Mary and foster-father of Jesus was elected. The chapters on the Paternity and Offices of Joseph, which are drawn (as has been said) from P. Moreno's work, may be particularly mentioned as having been composed with this intention.

And now, humbly kneeling at the feet of this great Patriarch and most powerful Saint, solitary in his grandeur as in his endowments, the writer implores his blessing on a work devoted to his honor; not only for the exaltation of that honor among men, but for the glory of his Immaculate Spouse, and, supremely, for the glory of Him the companion and guardian of whose Childhood he was ordained to be, and to whom, indeed, he owes his incomparable dignity and his very being—the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father made Man for us and for our salvation.

For the satisfaction of the reader it is desirable to state that the work has been carefully revised by a most competent theologian in its progress through the press.

CHELTENHAM,

Feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, 1888

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Chapter I

Joseph Included in the Decree of the Incarnation.

TO DESCRIBE the life and the glories of Joseph is to describe at the same time the life of Jesus and the glories of Mary; for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are so intimately united, that it is impossible to speak of one without treating of the others. These three dear names—Jesus, Mary, Joseph—form that triple heavenly alliance which can never be broken. He, therefore, who undertakes to narrate the life of Joseph is under the happy necessity of narrating at the same time, in large measure, the life of Jesus and Mary. The reader will never object to this, since, after God, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are the sweetest and sublimest objects with which our minds and hearts can be filled; they are the three powerful advocates of our cause, the three guiding stars of our salvation. But, in order clearly to understand the greatness of Joseph, we must look very far back; for his greatness did not begin with his birth, neither did it begin with his espousals to Mary. Its origin is far more remote, and must be sought, not in time, but in eternity; it began with his predestination.

Predestination, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is the divine preordination from eternity of those things which, by divine grace, are to be accomplished in time.¹ Now, the most compassionate Lord God had, in the admirable dispositions of His Providence, from all eter-

1. P. iii. q. xxiv. a. 1.

nity, preordained the ineffable mystery of the Divine Incarnation to repair the fall of Adam and save his descendants from eternal ruin. This mystery "hidden from ages," as the Apostle says (*Col.* 1:26), was to be revealed in the fullness of time. The Eternal Word was to assume human flesh, and, after a life full of sufferings, was to offer Himself as a voluntary victim to die upon a cross, in order, as an innocent Lamb, to expiate the sins of all mankind. This mystery, then, was to be accomplished in Jesus; and, therefore, Jesus, the Saviour of all, was, according to the Apostle Paul, "predestinated the Son of God in power" (*Rom.* 1:4); and, as St. Augustine explains, it was predestined that Jesus, who according to the flesh was the Son of David, was in truth to be the Son of God, seeing that it was preordained that human nature was one day to subsist in the Eternal Person of the Word along with the Divine Nature, in order that the sufferings of Jesus might have an infinite value to satisfy worthily the Divine Justice. And this is what is called the eternal decree of the Divine Incarnation.

Now, in this decree is comprehended, not only the mystery itself of the Divine Incarnation, but also the mode and order in which this mystery was to be accomplished, and, consequently, those persons who were principally and more immediately to have a part in it; for, according to the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, the eternal predestination includes, not only what is to be accomplished in time, but likewise the mode and order according to which it is to be so accomplished.² And the mode and order predestined by God in the Incarnation of His Divine Son was this: that the Most Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ was to be taken, but without sin, from that same human nature which had sinned in Adam: that It was to descend from the blood of Abraham, to be of the tribe of Juda and the race of David, and that the Body of Jesus was to be formed by the

2. *Summa*, p. iii. q. xxiv. a. 4.

power of the Holy Ghost in the pure womb of an immaculate virgin. This elect virgin is Mary; and therefore Mary, after Jesus, was immediately comprised in the decree of the Divine Incarnation, and from eternity predestined to be the most august Mother of the Son of God. "The Virgin," says the great doctor Suarez, "could not be disjoined from her Son in the Divine election." The Church herself puts into the mouth of the Virgin these words of the Divine Wisdom: "I was preordained from eternity." (*Prov.* 8:23). Mary was truly a predetermined end of the eternal counsel, and St. Augustine calls her "the work of eternal counsel."

But, in order to conceal this mystery of love from the world until the appointed time had come, and to safeguard at the same time the reputation of the Virgin Mother and the honor of the Divine Son, God willed that Mary by a marriage altogether heavenly should be espoused to the humblest, the purest, and the holiest of the royal race of David, one therefore expressly predestined for this end; a virgin spouse for the Virgin Mother, who at the same time should be in the place of a father to the Divine Son. In the Divine mind Joseph was the one chosen from amongst all others. Joseph held the first place. Joseph was predestined to this office. True, from the tribe of Juda, from the family of David, great patriarchs were to arise, famous leaders of the people, most noble kings; but God did not choose any of these. He chose Joseph alone. Joseph was the beloved one. Joseph was specially preordained to become one day the happy spouse of Mary and the foster-father of Jesus. "As Mary," says Echius, the famous opponent of Luther, "was from eternity predestined to be the mother of the Son of God; so also was Joseph elected to be the guardian and protector of Jesus and of Mary."³

Thus Joseph was, after Mary, comprehended in the very decree of the Incarnation, and, after Mary, was called to have an integral part, as it were, in this inef-

3. *Sermo de S. Joseph.*

fable mystery. It is easy to perceive how much honor hence redounds to Joseph; for if, next to the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Divine Incarnation is the essential foundation of the Christian Faith, who can fail to see that to be included in the eternal decree of so admirable a mystery, into which the angels themselves “desire to look” (*1 Ptr.* 1:12), is an incomparable glory to this great saint? We must always, therefore, bear well in mind this singular destination of Joseph, because this is truly the ground of all his greatness. This is the basis upon which all his glories are raised. Whoever thoroughly realizes the fact of this preordination will no longer marvel at God’s predilection for Joseph, and at seeing him so highly privileged and exalted to be the guardian and patron of the Universal Church.