

# THE IMITATION OF SAINT JOSEPH





THE IMITATION  
OF SAINT  
JOSEPH

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*Sancti Ioseph alumni filiabusque  
Virginis Matris ab auctore dictum,  
quorum vota peramantia divino ipsum spiritu  
afflent quo talis efficiatur qualem ipsi exoptent.*

*Ioannae Mariae Booth OP  
recensatrici oculatissimae auctor  
gratias grato animo.*





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## INTRODUCTION

**H**OW CAN I IMITATE THAT WHICH I do not know? How do I speak about one whose words are not recorded? How do I attempt to look like one whose visage has never been captured?

The relative obscurity of Saint Joseph is not only caused by his hiddenness in Scripture; it is also a direct result of the Church's benign neglect. She has not, until recently, had a need. If the Church is a city set on a hill, there is a lighthouse in that city, a lamp that shines giving light to all around. As with any lighthouse, the Church directs her light this way and that as occasion warrants. In one age, she shines onto a truth of her treasured deposit of faith. In a different age, another. This is true both of the beautiful as well as the perilous. That we might not make a shipwreck of our faith (see 1

Tm 1:19), she illuminates dangerous crags and reefs when all the world would tell us the water is clear. Clarifying with the true and protecting against the false are not mutually exclusive tasks. They often go together.

Every age has its idols and thus its heresies. Our age seems particularly skilled not only in erecting altars to the ego but in disassembling even the natural. The ego now creates reality rather than receiving and participating in it. It is lonely being a god, but it is the price one has to pay for extreme emancipation. *Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret*. Hurl nature out with a pitchfork and she will nevertheless be thrown back to you. The return has not yet happened. We are living through a time in which nature is still flying away in the minds of the moguls. It becomes increasingly difficult to find something about which to break new ground when the ground is no longer underfoot. How can one be *avant-garde* when there is nowhere from whence to charge? In other words, if there is no longer a starting point, it is hard to measure advancement. It is difficult to pride oneself on being

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woke when no one is allowed to sleep. One of the first principles of our age, therefore, is that whatever came before is evil. I am not sure at what point the proponents of this movement themselves grow sufficiently old to be evil, but I have no doubt as to the hermeneutic principle.

Patriarchy and hierarchy are, by definition of this system, mortal sins. *Pater*, *Hieros*, and *Archon* = father, priest, beginning/leader. The air we breathe is so suffused with hatred for these natural historical realities that the best of us blush when these words are spoken of with praise unchecked. And there is reason for such shame. Fatherhood and priesthood go together and are intrinsically linked to beginnings and leadership. They are intrinsically linked to Christ and salvation history: “And I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority [*archei*] to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Is 22:21–22).

This power of the keys was transferred to a man. A rock. It is lineage, connection, tradition (*tradere* = to hand on). To have an *archei* is to have a beginning. To have a beginning and a series of inheritors is to have yourself an inheritance. This means that you too come from and hand on. You are not formless. You are not self-made nor can you create *ex nihilo*. There is a reason the current mind wants history, patriarchy, hierarchy, and origins to go away. It is in direct conflict to self-creation.

Yet there is another reason, perhaps even more visceral. The history of our participation in these fundamental realities is heavily laden with examples of failure. Perhaps we have grown collectively cynical and our epistemic trust has evaporated. We set up heroes to be imitated and those heroes—real or imagined—too often fall.

Thus, it is my estimation that the Church has had reason to look to Joseph in these latter days. The “light of the patriarchs” is the one to whom the Church turns her face in a time of the annihilation of the paternal, of the masculine, of the hierarchical, of the priest. This

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is an emerging exigency. If one seeks to find a church dedicated to the honor of Saint Joseph amidst the Basilica, Romanesque, Norman, or even the Gothic, one will search in vain. There are those like Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Theresa of Avila, who long ago discovered the power of this holy patriarch, but the universal Church was slow to turn in his direction. He was not needed before as he is now. We are in need of a father, a true father, who shows us the fatherhood of God. The children of the Church began to turn their faces in his direction and found in him one who is just, prudent, chaste, obedient, and protective. The more the children looked, the more the Church's lighthouse turned in that direction. She began to turn her face toward him.

The once obscure Joseph now finds his name in the canon of the Mass. He is now the universal patriarch of the Church, with feasts, parochial churches, traditions, basilicas, religious orders bearing his name, and diverse iconography. In 2020, the Diocese of Charlotte, to commemorate the 150th year of Saint Joseph being

declared the universal patron, proclaimed a year of Saint Joseph. The universal Church followed suit in 2021. It seems that the Church is in need of a father, a true father, the kind of father who looks like the one from whom all fatherhood on earth takes its name (Eph 3:15). It seems that the Church is in need of seeing a true priest, one who offers himself for others and not others for himself. It seems as if she is looking to her origins to purify, to clarify, to promote what is natural and what is under attack. Where gender is attacked, she promotes authentic masculinity in Joseph. Where patriarchy is attacked, she looks to the chosen father of the Son of God as a model of all fatherhood. When hierarchy is looked upon as subjugation, she presents us with the service of Joseph. When the priesthood is attacked, she looks to Joseph, the first to have care of the body of Christ both in the flesh and in the mother. In these latter days, we are in need of this father. It seems that the Church's attention is like a certain wedding at Cana—she has saved the best for last, and now shines fully on the face of Joseph and bids her children to behold him.



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Saint Joseph is an antidote to the self-referential age of failed fatherhood. Abuses do not negate the truth. Those who have not provided, not protected, and failed to bestow are not the examples we look to for imitation. But imitate we must. We do not enter life creating our own language, designing our own clothing, or learning to walk on our backs. We imitate. To reject that from whence we come is a self-contradiction and the annihilation of existence. In failed masculinity, failed hierarchy, failed paternity, we turn to Joseph. The antidote will not be found in the anemic feminization of our men, whether by drugs or by drowning in the sea of cacophonous demands of conformity and confirmation. The antidote will be found in a full-blooded response, in a Josephite response, of one who is not afraid to take the Church to himself as his own, to provide for her, protect her, and to be the steward of God's greatest possessions.

Imitation of Saint Joseph may not have been needed in former ages. Failures there were, to be sure, but the failures have so multiplied that we deny the very rule itself. We need to see Joseph

to order our minds and give hope to our hearts. Yet the need to see will not necessarily create sight. It does not answer the questions hitherto posed. If Joseph is the archetype, how do I imitate him? How do I receive formation of character from one whose character I scarcely know? It will do no good to pin virtues onto Joseph as if he were little more than a mannequin. We can dress him up any way we please, but in so doing, we will also lose the attractiveness of an actual man. Joseph is a fact. Others knew him. How can we? Far from an historical analysis and endless archeological inspection for which I am neither competent nor interested, I will simply ask him. Joseph is a fact. And he is not merely a fact of history. He is a man, as am I. This is likely where the similarity ends, but it is sufficient to begin. Joseph saw and imitated. Joseph was formed. We know much about what he saw and how he was formed, and so to get at Joseph, I will have to do the very thing to which the world is currently allergic: I will look first at his fathers. Joseph is their inheritor. I will move from that sketch by inspecting what Joseph must have

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seen when he saw her, the woman, and when he beheld Him, the God-man. I know something of what he saw, but I will ask him to show us more of what he saw, and that to which he conformed by obedience and stewardship. This will give us, if not a complete portrait for emulation, at least something genuine and potent. Finally, I will briefly ask Our Lord and Our Lady what they saw when they looked at him. These sketches, laid one over the other, will hopefully present us with a true image of the man the Church has rightly called our patron—that is, our father, and the one the Lord Himself called *abba*.