October reflections for the Year of St. Joseph
Husband of Mary—Marian devotion

Simple title, profound mission

The titles given to Jesus, Mary and the saints tell us about who they are and show us something of God’s work in and through them. In the lives of saints, something about God or His work is brought to light through them personally. Many of the titles can be mysterious and cause us to wonder, or they are enlightening in how they reveal God’s love to us.

The title “Husband of Mary” for St. Joseph, however, may not seem mysterious or enlightening. It is obvious that he is the husband of Mary, and it appears ordinary and simple. Other titles of St. Joseph are similarly ordinary: “Father-Father of Jesus” or “the Worker.” In light of the more exciting and grand ones (such as the “Terror of Demons” and “Patron of the Universal Church”), the former ones seem to lack that fresh breath of God’s work in the New Covenant.

“Husband of Mary” may seem obvious and un-noteworthy, but it allows us to reflect on two things: first, this title is the gateway for all the other titles granted to Joseph, and second, God still makes old things new.

Our only description of St. Joseph’s character from Scripture is that he is righteous (cf. Mt 1:18), that is, Joseph was living out the Law of the Old Covenant justly. He thoroughly lived it out interiorly and exteriorly. He did not live the Law just to live it like the Pharisees did. If that were the case, he would have exposed Mary’s pregnancy rather than try to divorce her quietly. Rather, he was truly in relationship with God, and was able to participate in the love of God. By living out the Law this way, Joseph was prepared to receive the New Covenant that was arriving with Jesus. He was prepared to receive Mary as her husband, and eventually Jesus as the foster father.

For us, then, St. Joseph points out that a very common and unremarkable life can still be a life where our hearts are always encountering God, and we are being transformed within. In this place of facing God justly and wholeheartedly, we are able to receive new life from Him.

To be the husband of a woman was certainly nothing new, but to be the husband of the Blessed Mother was to foreshadow an element of the covenant that Jesus would establish with His Church. This type of husbandry would broaden the scope of fatherhood and stewardship granted to husbands. St. Joseph is the first to participate in the spousal relationship to be seen in the ordained priests of the New Covenant: where celibate love allows the heart to wholeheartedly love the bride for who she is, and to serve her in the measure of their years on earth, preparing to love her perfectly in heaven.

That gift of celibate love, though, first seen between St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother, is not just for them or those with a celibate state of life. It reminds us that when love is primarily directed to God, it becomes purified and can be given to others without fear or hurt or shame.

To be the husband of Mary was to be devoted to God and His work, to be a part of God’s love in action in the world. This station of husband can appear so simple and ordinary, and yet remains a place to be filled with God’s grace and love, like a reservoir that will pour over to affect the lives of others. ❧
Chaste Spouse of Our Lady:
A model for all

St. Joseph was truly married to his wife Mary: “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.” (Mt 1:20) Of course, this marriage was altogether unique in that it was also celibate and virginal. In this way, St. Joseph not only participated in the normal married life of the vast majority of the Church’s lay faithful but also the celibate life of the Church’s religious and ordained. His life and devotion to Mary are a model for the entire Church.

Was St. Joseph reluctant to be married to Mary? We certainly know that he had decided to remove himself from her life once she was found to be pregnant with Jesus. (Mt 1:18-19) His motivation for this plan has been the source of many meditations through Church history, and there are different proposals in Church tradition. My personal favorite is that he did not suspect Mary of adultery, but rather knew that the child was of God and so knew of Mary’s unique consecration to Him. Possibly, St. Joseph was not able to imagine how he could possibly care or give anything of value to Mary since God had consecrated her to Himself in such a complete and total way. From here, we can interpret God’s words, “Do not be afraid,” to St. Joseph as a reassurance to him that he did have a real role to play in Mary’s life.

The role that he was to play is a lot like our own, namely, to pray and work for Mary and Jesus. Imagine St. Joseph the carpenter and husband coming home from a particularly long day of working in his shop. He is very tired and still smells of sawdust and sweat. He enters the front door of his house and his tired eyes lock with the eyes of his wife, Mary. Maybe she says, “Thank you, Joseph. Thank you for working so hard, for giving yourself for us.” Maybe she doesn’t need those words at all, and St. Joseph can see the perfect gratitude in her eyes. How rejuvenated St. Joseph must have been by experiencing Mary’s own love and gratitude for him as her husband! What a blessing God had given to St. Joseph by giving him so perfect a wife!

I love to think that the days were few that St. Joseph had to rely only on his willpower, to “white-knuckle” it, in order to get through a day of mundane work. I love to think that St. Joseph’s devotion to and love of Mary were a bonfire that always burned in his breast and gave him more than enough energy and motivation to make it through his hardest trials. He was a man in love. Of course, all of his devotion to Mary was not opposed to his love of God and Jesus but, rather, flowed directly from it.

These images encourage us to view our own devotion to Mary neither as just another habit (“Well, I pray a Rosary every day because I always have”), nor as some unwanted necessity (“Aw man, I’ve got to get my Rosary in today”), but as a genuine act of love and a plea for the help of the Great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy. Even though Joseph did not encounter Mary in the marital embrace, he was no less of a husband and did not love Mary any less. St. Joseph was completely devoted to Mary as her husband, which is a compelling reason to ask for St. Joseph’s intercession: St. Joseph, help me to love Mary more. Help me to love her as you do.

REFLECT AND PARTICIPATE

As the Diocese of Lafayette celebrates the Year of St. Joseph, reflecting upon the virtues of adoration, obedience and service, several events have also been planned in which all are invited to actively participate. Events scheduled for October include:

- Oct. 12-16: St. Joseph Week at Diocesan Catholic Schools
- Oct. 27 (6:30 p.m.): West Deanery Celebration, St. Joseph Church, Rayne

Additional information about the Year of St. Joseph may be found at diolaf.org/stjoseph.