

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 2, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Devotions to the 7 Sorrows of St. Joseph

On March 19th, the Church celebrates the feast of St. Joseph the Husband of Mary and on May 1st the Church celebrates the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. Saint John Paul II saw in St. Joseph the powerful intercessor our modern world needed when he declared: "Saint Joseph was a just man, a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care. May he always guard, protect and enlighten families." To guide our reflections about Saint Joseph this month, I will be turning to the spiritual tradition of meditating on the Seven Sorrows of St. Joseph. (I will reflect on the Seven Joys of St. Joseph sometime in the future.)

Sorrow #1. The Doubt of St. Joseph. (Matthew 1:19)

This first sorrow asks us to focus our attention on St. Joseph at the moment he discovered that Mary was pregnant and how he must have felt believing that Mary had betrayed him. As I reflect on this moment, I do not think that I can truly imagine the pain and heartbreak Saint Joseph must have felt at the moment. St. Joseph was, after all, a young man filled with many hopes, dreams, and expectations for his future and since he was betrothed to Mary, we can be assured that she played an important part in many if not all of those hopes, dreams, and expectations. The pain of the moment was probably magnified by the fact that Mary was probably the last person on earth that Joseph would have expected to betray him in the way he thought. Pain is always magnified when it is inflicted intentionally or accidentally by a love one than if it had been inflicted by a complete stranger.

In this devastatingly sad moment in Saint Joseph's life, Saint Joseph models for us some different virtues that we should incorporate into our lives. The first virtue Saint Joseph models for us is the virtue of patience. Despite the pain and suffering he is feeling and the (presumed) absurdity of Mary's story, Saint Joseph does not act rashly or in haste. He stops and thinks and ponders all options that lay before him. He chose therefore the least emotional and the most rational option of planning to divorce Mary quietly. Saint Joseph could have acted without thinking, while being motivated by anger and rage and had Mary stoned to death. Instead St. Joseph practices the virtue of patience. He allows time for God to unfold his plan. I guess you can say he decided to "sleep on it". His practice of the virtue of patience allows God plan of salvation to continue.

The second virtue St. Joseph demonstrates for us is that of mercy. At this moment, Saint Joseph literally has Mary's life in his hands. It was the law of the land at the time that a woman could be stoned to death for infidelity. Saint Joseph, probably still feeling hurt from Mary's perceived betrayal, chooses to have mercy on her. The decision to have mercy on Mary comes before Saint Joseph knows that Mary's story is true. Saint Joseph's mercy therefore is unconditional.

The third virtue that St. Joseph teaches us is the virtue best called "respect for life." Joseph has the legal right to have Mary killed but he chooses not to. I think this is an important lesson for people in the world today because many of us spend a lot of time focusing on our rights instead of helping other people. The government, society, and culture would have applauded and probably participated in Mary's demise but Saint Joseph new life was more precious than what the rest of the world thought it was.

Thank God, that Joseph did not choose this option because that choice would have affected history in such a negative way that Joseph could ever imagine. I think it is interesting that Adam and Eve brought sin into the world by doing something that they were not supposed to and Joseph allows our savior to come into the world by not doing something he had the legal right to do. I cannot help that he chose to divorce Mary quietly was because Joseph had a deep respect for life. Could we bring Christ's presence into the world by following St. Joseph's example and not claiming our rights that our government gives us but at the same time show no respect for life?

PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH FOR CHASTITY

Father and protector of chastity, glorious Saint Joseph, in whose faithful custody was entrusted the very Innocence, Jesus Christ and the Virgin of virgins, Mary; for this twofold and most loved token, Jesus and Mary, I pray and plead you to help me always to purely serve Jesus and Mary with an uncontaminated soul, pure heart and a chaste body. Amen.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 9, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

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“Those who give themselves to prayer should in a special manner have always a devotion to St. Joseph; for I know not how any man can think of the Queen of the angels, during the time that she suffered so much with the Infant Jesus, without giving thanks to St. Joseph for the services he rendered them then.” -- St. Teresa of Avila. Let us continue our look at the man the Father chose to be the adoptive Father of Jesus by continuing our look at the 7 Sorrows of St. Joseph.

Sorrow #2. The Poverty of Jesus' Birth (Luke 2:7)

This sorrow invites us to ponder what it is like to follow God's will and still look and feel like a failure. Once accepting the responsibility of having Mary as his wife and raising Jesus as his own child, Joseph desired to give his family the best. Finding his wife giving birth in a stable in a city far from their home must have been a major blow to Joseph's male ego. Good husbands and fathers want to provide for their spouses and children and it hurts like hell when they are unable to do so. I would think that this is one of the major causes of depression, alcoholism and drug use in men. Joseph demonstrates the virtue of perseverance. As I think about this virtue, this may be one of the most needed virtues of our time. We need the virtue of perseverance when Mass gets “boring.” We need the virtue of perseverance when things do not go the way we want them to go. Many of us, quit at the first sign of desolation (St. Ignatius of Loyola's term for the feeling of God's absence. God is never absent but sometimes it can feel like He is). St. Ignatius speaking out of the wisdom of the Church encourages us not to give up when we experience desolation but rather to pray more. Joseph keeps moving forward until he gets his next clear sign from God.

Sorrow #3. The Circumcision (Luke 2:21)

Saint Luke tells us: “When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” I wonder why this is listed as one of the Sorrows of St. Joseph. I am going to propose that the Circumcision of Jesus as one of the sorrows of Joseph because the Circumcision of Jesus reminded Joseph that Jesus had come into a world that was not perfect and that was filled with sin and violence. Most parents worry about their children's future.

Another major moment happened one the eighth day of Jesus life. According to Roman law the child Jesus was to be present to Joseph. If Joseph literally turned his back toward Jesus, they would take the child and throw the child out into the alley ways to die of exposure. As he once held Mary's life in his hands now he held Jesus' life in his hands. Joseph accepts Jesus as his own. While accepting Jesus as his own Joseph has the right the mourn the life he has given up. I have to believe that Joseph used this sadness in a way that allowed him to become a better parent to Jesus. Sometimes, I wonder how much better our world would be if we learned how to channel our desires for sinful things into positive experiences. For example, how much better would the world be if a husband decides not to look at pornography but instead uses the energy and time that he would have spent on lying, lusting, and covering up, into showing his wife and kids the love he has for them by spending more time with them, complimenting them, etc.

A PARENT'S PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH

O glorious St. Joseph, to you God committed the care of His only begotten Son amid the many dangers of this world. We come to you and ask you to take under your special protection the children God has given us. Through holy baptism they became children of God and members of His holy Church. We consecrate them to you today, that through this consecration they may become your foster children. Guard them, guide their steps in life, form their hearts after the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

St. Joseph, who felt the tribulation and worry of a parent when the child Jesus was lost, protect our dear children for time and eternity. May you be their father and counsellor. Let them, like Jesus, grow in age as well as in wisdom and grace before God and men. Preserve them from the corruption of his world, and give us the grace one day to be united with them in Heaven forever. Amen.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 16, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Devotions to the 7 Sorrows of St. Joseph

“Some Saints are privileged to extend to us their patronage with particular efficacy in certain needs, but not in others; but our holy patron St. Joseph has the power to assist us in all cases, in every necessity, in every undertaking.” -- St. Thomas Aquinas. Let us continue our look at the person God chose to be the protector of the Blessed Virgin Mary by continuing our look at the Seven Sorrows of St. Joseph.

Sorrow # 4. Simeon's prophecy that many would be lost (Luke 2:34)

As I pray over this sorrow, I begin to think of it in two ways. The first way is as if St. Joseph had just received really bad news about two people he loved. I could imagine Simeon's prophecy was something similar to finding out that a love one has cancer. What do you say at that moment? The feeling of powerlessness is definitely something that has filled me with sorrow. Many of us would endure anything in order to prevent a love one from enduring it but often we are not given that chance. The important thing is for us to follow St. Joseph's example and overcome our fear of powerlessness so that we can be present to those who need our help.

The second way in which I see this sorrow playing out is a feeling of being absent. Simeon does not say anything about Joseph. One of my favorite spiritual writers Henri Nouwen often talks about competition being one of the great spiritual diseases of our time. We have turned everything into competition and I could see St. Joseph feeling a little left out. I do not think this “feeling left out feeling” led St. Joseph to sin but once again, I believe St. Joseph channeled this feeling through the virtue of humility. He probably asked God often for the grace to do His role and his heart was probably always open to the graces that God gave him to remain humble. Joseph is never recorded as being jealous of the attention that Mary and Jesus receive.

I also wonder if Joseph allowed his not being included in Simeon's prophecy as an indication that his death was near. The fear of death can be a powerful motivator to do bad things but the realization that we only have a short amount of time in this life can also be powerful in motivating us to do good.

Sorrow #5. The flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14)

There is always some sadness that accompanies a situation where a good man becomes an outlaw. Joseph, just doing what God instructed him to do, is now an outlaw. On the other hand, a paranoid monster, who could care less about his faith, was king. Where is the justice in that situation? Seeing this injustice and knowing that there was nothing he could do about it probably angered Joseph. Joseph once again become our model by doing what He knows God wants him to do. Joseph knows that the only person he can be responsible for is himself. He trusts that God has a much bigger plan, even if he cannot see it. He therefore flees with his family to Egypt.

A second thought hit my imagination. This part of the story takes place right after the magi have presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This is probably the first time that the Holy Family has been financially stable and now Joseph probably had to use things to finance their escape to Egypt. God has provided but probably not in the way Joseph had expected and now God was asking them to trust again. I think that I would have put my trust in the wealth before I put my trust in God. Joseph models us the virtue of faith by remaining faithful to God in both economic good times and in bad times. St. Joseph help me to be faithful to God at all times also.

PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH, PATRON OF WORKERS

Glorious Saint Joseph, you are the pattern of all who work. Obtain for me, please, the grace to work conscientiously and to put devotion to duty before my selfish inclinations. Help me to labor in thankfulness and joy, for it is an honor to employ and to develop by my labor the gifts I have received from almighty God. Grant that I may work in orderliness, peace, moderation and patience without shrinking from weariness and difficulties. I offer my fatigue and perplexities as reparation for sin. I shall work, above all, with a pure intention and with detachment from self, having always before my eyes the hour of death and the accounting which I must then render of time ill-spent, of talents unemployed, of

good undone, and of empty pride in success, which is so fatal to the work of God. For Jesus through Mary all in imitation of you, good Saint Joseph. This shall be my motto in life and in death. Amen.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 23, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Devotions to the 7 Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph

“He was chosen by the eternal Father as the trustworthy guardian and protector of his greatest treasures, namely, his divine Son and Mary, Joseph’s wife. He carried out this vocation with complete fidelity until at last God called him, saying: ‘Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.’” -- St. Bernardine of Siena: Let us continue to look at St. Joseph as we examine St. Joseph’s Seven Sorrows.

Sorrow #6. The return from Egypt (Matthew 2:22)

Of all the Scripture passages listed as sorrows, I find this one the most interesting. I am guessing this is considered a sorrow for one of three reasons. The first reason is that St. Joseph finally heard about death of the holy innocence as he returned to Israel. Upon hearing about the children’s death, I am sure there was sorrow over the death of so many and over the culture of death that had allowed so many to die was alive in his homeland. Sadly, the culture of death is alive in our world today. As I think about the Holy Innocence and Herod, I cannot help but think the culture of death feeds on fear. How many children died because Herod was afraid to lose his throne. In my work with Project Rachel, I have learned from post-abortive women that fear played a major role in their decision. Therefore, when we talk about being pro-life we need to make sure that we are creating safe environments for people who are experiencing unplanned pregnancies. We must help them know that they are still loved by God and by us.

The second reason this event in Saint Joseph’s life might be considered a sorrow because he realizes that there will always be bad people out there wanting to hurt his family. Mothers and Fathers always want to protect the children and the realization that they are not always going to be able to be there is scary. Saint Joseph’s dream of being a simple carpenter seemed to be over with. He would always have to be on guard against those who would want to harm his family. While we do not want to live in fear of others, we do need to help realize that there are people and spirits who do not desire our good. This is why it is important for us to remain close to God and to seek out His will.

The third and final reason why Joseph might be feeling sad is that he seems to have failed to not make Jesus’ live any better. Parents always hope their children will live a better life than they did but here Jesus was going to be raised in this backwater town. I do think that Saint Joseph must have eventually realized that he had given Jesus what he needed most and that was his presence. It is a great sign of love and respect that Jesus chose the word “Abba”

One last thought about this sorrow. There is sometimes a sorrow that accompanies daily life. I think this sorry is best expressed by the phrase “familiarity breathes contempt.” This simply means that more you have or know something the less special it becomes. Daily life in family life requires us to remind ourselves constantly that our family is a gift from God.

PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH IN TIME OF DISTRESS

We come to you, O blessed Joseph, in our distress. Having sought the aid of your most blessed spouse, we now confidently implore your assistance also. We humbly beg that, mindful of the affection which bound you to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and of the fatherly love with which you cherished the Child Jesus, you will lovingly watch over the heritage which Jesus Christ purchased with His blood, and by your powerful intercession help us in our urgent need. Prudent guardian of the Holy Family, protect the chosen people of Jesus Christ; drive far from us, most loving father, all error and corrupting sin. From your place in heaven, most powerful protector, graciously come to our aid in this conflict with the powers of darkness, and as of old you delivered the Child Jesus from danger of death, so now defend the holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity. Extend to each one of us your continual protection, that, led on by your example, and borne up by your strength, we may be able to live and die in holiness and obtain everlasting happiness in heaven. Amen.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 30, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Devotions to the 7 Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph

I would like to continue our reflections on the Seven Sorrows of St. Joseph with the following admonishment of St. Alphonsus Liguori:

“Go, then to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you;
Go to Joseph, and obey him as Jesus and Mary obeyed him;
Go to Joseph, and speak to him as they spoke to him;
Go to Joseph, and consult him as they consulted him;
Go to Joseph, and honor him as they honored him;
Go to Joseph, and be grateful to him as they were grateful to him;
Go to Joseph, and love him, as they love him still.”

- St. Alphonsus Liguori

Sorrow #7. The loss of the Child Jesus (Luke 2:45)

I can still remember quite vividly a day when I was ten years old. My mother had taken two of my brothers and myself to Union Station. I believe we were there with my aunt Chris and two of my cousins. We were getting ready to leave and I was mesmerized by the guys working at Fudge Factory. The Fudge Factory guys used to sing crazy songs while they made their fudge. They would also use these long white paddles to flip the chocolate way up into the air. All of a sudden, my mother started yelling. She had lost sight of one of my brothers in the large crowd. The sound of panic in my mother's voice was a sound I will never forget. I know that I panicked at the thought of my brother being lost, I can only imagine it was ten times worse for my mother as a parent. Luckily my brother was quickly found. Unfortunately, though my mom started making us wear harnesses from that day forward and those harnesses were not shaped like cute animals with long tails either. Joseph losing Jesus in the temple had to be one of the scariest and saddest things that he and Mary ever went through. Once again Joseph showed us how to act by remaining calm and searching for the child instead of blaming others.

The story is also symbolically about sin. When we sin, we like Mary and Joseph, lose God. The important thing to do is not to panic but seek God out. Sacrament of Reconciliation and Sacrament of Eucharist are great places to go and find God again.

The following prayer invokes both the Sorrows of St. Joseph that we have meditated on and the Joys which we will cover in the future.

Prayer of Seven Sorrows and Seven Joys of Saint Joseph

Glorious St. Joseph, faithful follower of Jesus Christ, to you do we raise our hearts and hands to implore your powerful intercession in obtaining from the Sacred Heart of Jesus all the helps and graces necessary for our spiritual and temporal welfare, particularly the grace of a happy death and the special favor we now implore: _____.

Guardian of the Word Incarnate, we feel animated with confidence that your prayers in our behalf will be graciously heard before the throne of God.

R: *Glorious St. Joseph*, through the love you bear to Jesus Christ and for the glory of His name, hear our prayers and obtain our petitions.

1. *Husband of The Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph*, you felt sorrow when you learned that your betrothed was pregnant and in danger of being stoned to death. However, you felt joy when the angel of the Lord told you to have no fear, to take Mary as your wife because the child was the Word Incarnate, conceived in her by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-24) **R.**

2. *Foster Father of Jesus Christ, St. Joseph*, your sorrow was keen when you saw the infant Jesus born in abject poverty, in a stable, because there was no room at the inn in Bethlehem. But your sorrow was changed to heavenly joy when you heard the harmony of angel choirs and beheld the glories of that night (Luke 2:6-15). **R.**

3. *Obedient in following the law of God, St. Joseph*, you felt sorrow when Jesus' first blood was shed at his circumcision, but you felt joy when he was given the name Jesus (Luke 2:21). **R.**

4. *Faithful St. Joseph*, you felt a pang close to death when you and Mary took Jesus to the temple for purification and Holy Simeon prophesied that many would oppose Jesus and that a sword would pierce your beloved wife Mary's heart. But at the same time, you were filled with great joy when Simeon and the prophetess Anna foretold that the little child in your care would save many souls (Luke 2:22-39). **R.**

5. *Watchful Guardian St. Joseph*, you felt sorrow at having to flee with Jesus and Mary into Egypt to escape King Herod's murder of The Holy Innocents, but you felt joy at having God with you (Matthew 2: 13-18). **R.**

6. *Worker St. Joseph*, among the sorrows you faced was fear of Herod's cruel son Achelous and so you moved to Nazareth in Galilee. But there you experienced the joys of living with Jesus and Mary (Matthew 2:19-23). **R.**

7. *Head of the Holy Family, St. Joseph*, you felt horrible sorrow when Jesus was lost to you and Mary in Jerusalem. However, your joy was unspeakable when you found him after three days, among the teachers in the temple (Luke 2:41-51), and when Jesus and Mary were at your side during your old age and at the hour of your death. **R.**

Spouse of the Immaculate Virgin, St. Joseph, obtain for me a pure, humble and charitable mind, and perfect resignation to the divine will. Be my guide, father and model through life, that I may merit to die as you did in the arms of Jesus and Mary. St. Joseph, friend of the Sacred Heart, pray for us. **Amen.**