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Chapter 20. Death of St Joseph. - His burial.

Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace, quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum. (Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation. - Lk. 2:29)

The final moment had come. Joseph made a supreme effort to rise and worship him whom men regarded as their son, but whom Joseph knew to be his Lord and God. He wanted to throw himself at his feet and ask for the remission of his sins. But Jesus did not allow him to kneel down, and received him into his arms. Thus resting his venerable head upon the Divine breast of Jesus, with his lips close to that adorable heart, Joseph expired, giving men a final example of faith and humility. It was the nineteenth day of March, the year of Rome 777, the twenty-fifth since the birth of the Saviour.

Jesus and Mary mourned over Joseph's cold body, and kept the mournful vigil of the dead at his side. Jesus himself washed this virginal body, closed his eyes and crossed his hands over his breast; then blessed him to preserve him from the corruption of the grave, and placed the angels of Paradise in his keeping.

The poor worker's funeral was as modest as his whole life had been. But if they seemed such in the face of the earth, they were of such great honour that they certainly did not boast of the most glorious emperors of the world, since the King and Queen of Heaven, Jesus and Mary, were present at the august body. The body of Joseph was laid to rest in the sepulchre of his fathers, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, between the mountain of Zion and the mountain of Olivet.

Chapter 21. Power of St Joseph in heaven. Reasons for our confidence.

Ite ad Joseph. (Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do - Gen. 41:55)

Not always is the glory and power of the righteous on earth the sure measure of the merit of their holiness; but not so of that glory and power with which they are clothed in heaven, where each is rewarded according to his works. The more holy they have been in the eyes of God, the more they are raised to a sublime degree of power and authority.

Having once established this principle, must we not believe that among

the blessed who are the object of our religious worship, St Joseph is, after Mary, the most powerful of all with God, and the one who deserves our trust and our homage most justly? That Joseph is, after Mary, the most powerful of all with God, and the one who most justly deserves our confidence and our homage? Indeed, how many glorious privileges distinguish him from other saints, and must inspire in us a deep and tender veneration for him!

The son of God who chose Joseph for his father, to reward all his services and to give him in return the demonstrations of the tenderest love in the time of his mortal life, loves him no less in heaven than he loved him on earth. Happy to have the whole of eternity to compensate his beloved father for all that he has done for him in the present life, with such ardent zeal, such inviolable fidelity, and such profound humility. This makes the divine Saviour ever willing to listen favourably to all his prayers, and to fulfil all his wishes.

We find in the privileges and favours with which the ancient Joseph, who was but a shadow of our true Joseph, was filled, a figure of the all-possessing credit enjoyed in heaven by Mary's holy husband.

Pharaoh, in order to reward the services which he had received from Joseph the son of Jacob, established him as the general steward of his house, the master of all his possessions, desiring that all things should be done according to his command. After he had established him as viceroy of Egypt, he gave him the seal of his royal authority, and gave him full power to bestow all the graces he wished. He ordained that he should be called the saviour of the world, so that his subjects might acknowledge that to him they owed their health; in short, he sent to Joseph all who came for any favour, that they might obtain it from his authority, and show him their gratitude: *Ite ad Ioseph, et quidquid dixerit vobis, facile* - Gen. 41:55; Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.

But how much more marvellous and capable of inspiring us with boundless confidence are the privileges of Mary's chaste husband, the foster-father of the Saviour! It is not a king of the earth like Pharaoh, but it is God Almighty who has willed to shower this new Joseph with his favours. He begins by establishing him as master and venerable head of the Holy Family; he wants everything to obey him and be subject to him, even his own son equal to him in all things. He makes him his viceroy, wanting him to represent his adorable person to the point of giving him the privilege of bearing his name and of being called the father of his only-begotten. He places this son in his hands, to let us know that he gives him unlimited power to do every grace. Observe how he makes it known in the Gospel for all the earth and in all ages, that St Joseph is the father of the king of kings: *Erant pater et mater eius*

mirantes – Lk. 2:33. He wishes him to be called the Saviour of the world, since he nourished and preserved him who is the salvation of all men. Finally, he warns us that if we desire graces and favours, to Joseph we must turn: *Ite ad Ioseph*, for he it is who has all power with the King of kings to obtain all that he asks.

The holy Church recognises this sovereign power of Joseph since she asks for through his intercession what she could not obtain by herself: *Ut quod possibilitas nostra non obtinet, eius nobis intercessione donetur.*

Certain saints, says the angelic doctor, have received from God the power of assisting us in certain particular needs; but the credit of St Joseph has no limit; it extends to all necessities, and all those who have recourse to him with confidence are certain to be promptly granted. St Thérèse declares to us that she never asked anything of God through the intercession of St Joseph that she did not quickly obtain: and the testimony of this saint is worth a thousand others, since it was founded on the daily experience of his favours. The other saints enjoy, it is true, great credit in heaven; but they intercede as servants and do not command as masters. Joseph, who has seen Jesus and Mary submitted to him, can undoubtedly obtain all he wants from the king his son and the queen his wife. He has unlimited credit with both, and, as Gersonne says, he commands rather than begs: *Non impetrat, sed imperat.* Jesus, says St Bernardine of Siena, wants to continue in heaven to give St Joseph proof of his filial respect by obeying all his wishes: *Dum pater orat natum, velut imperium reputatur.*

Is it a fact that Jesus Christ could deny anything to Joseph, who never denied him anything during his lifetime? Moses' vocation was no more than the leader and conductor of the people of Israel, and yet he had such authority before God that when he prays to him on behalf of that rebellious and incorrigible people, his prayer seems to become a command, which in a certain way binds the hands of the divine majesty, and reduces it to being almost unable to chastise the guilty, until he has made them free: *Dimitte me, ut irascatur furor meus contro eos et deileam eos.* (Ex. 32).

But how much greater virtue and power will not the prayer that Joseph addresses for us have with the sovereign judge whose guide and adoptive father he was? For if it is true, as St Bernard says, that Jesus Christ, who is our advocate before the Father, presents to him his sacred wounds and the adorable blood that he shed for our health, if Mary, for her part, presents to her only Son the bosom that bore and nourished him, may we not add that St Joseph shows the Son and the Mother the hands that laboured so much for them and the sweat that he shed to earn their sustenance on earth? And if God the Father can deny nothing to his beloved Son when he prays to him for his sacred wounds, nor the Son deny nothing

to his most holy Mother when she begs him for the womb that bore him, are we not bound to believe that neither the Son, nor the Mother who has become the dispenser of the graces that Jesus Christ deserved, can deny anything to St Joseph when he prays to them for all that he has done for them in the thirty years of his life?

Let us imagine that our holy protector addresses this moving prayer to Jesus Christ, his adopted Son, for us: "O my divine Son, deign to pour out your most abundant graces upon my faithful servants; I ask this of you by the sweet name of Father with which you so often honoured me, by those arms which received you and warmed you at your birth, which carried you to Egypt to save you from the wrath of Herod; I ask you for those eyes whose tears I wiped away, for that precious blood which I collected at your circumcision; for the travails and labours which I bore with such contentment to nourish your infancy, to bring you up in your youth. .." Could Jesus so full of charity resist such a prayer? And if it is written, says St Bernard, that he does the will of those who fear him, how can he deny doing that of the one who served and nourished him with such faithfulness, with such love? *Si voluntatem timentium se faciet; quomodo voluntatem nutrientis se non faciet?* (A pious writer in his commentaries on Psalm 144:19).

But what must double our confidence in St Joseph is his ineffable charity in our regard. Jesus making himself his son, put into his heart a love more tender than that of the best of fathers.

Have we not become his children, while Jesus Christ is our brother and Mary, his chaste bride, is our mother full of mercy?

Let us therefore turn to St Joseph with a lively and full confidence. His prayer united with that of Mary and presented to God in the name of the adorable childhood of Jesus Christ, cannot find refusal, but must obtain all that it asks for.

St Joseph's power is unlimited; it extends to all the needs of our soul and body.

After three years of severe and continuous illness which left her with neither rest nor hope of recovery, St Teresa had recourse to St Joseph and he soon obtained her health.

It is principally at our last hour, when life is about to leave us like a false friend, when hell will redouble its efforts to kidnap our souls on the passage to eternity, it is at that decisive moment for our salvation that St Joseph will assist us in a very special way, if we are faithful to honouring and praying to him in life. The divine Saviour, in order to reward him for rescuing from death by delivering him from the wrath of Herod, gave him the special privilege of rescuing those who placed themselves under his protection and are dying, from the snares of the devil

and from eternal death.

This is why he is invoked with Mary throughout the Catholic world as the patron saint of a happy death. Oh how happy we would be, if we could die like so many faithful servants of God, pronouncing the all-powerful names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph. The Son of God, says the Venerable Bernard of Bustis, having the keys of paradise, gave one to Mary, the other to Joseph, so that they might introduce all their faithful servants to the place of refreshment, light and peace.

Chapter 22. Propagation of the cult and institution of the feast of 19 March and the Patronage of St Joseph.

Qui custos est domini sui glorificabitur. (anyone who takes care of a master will be honoured. – Pr. 27:18)

Just as Divine Providence decreed that St Joseph should die before Jesus publicly manifested himself as the Saviour of mankind, so too it decreed that the cult of this saint should not spread before the Catholic faith had universally spread throughout the world. Indeed, the exaltation of this saint in the early days of Christianity seemed dangerous to the still weak faith of the people. It was most fitting that the dignity of Jesus Christ should be instilled, that he was born of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit; now, to put forward the memory of St Joseph, the husband of Mary, would have overshadowed that dogmatic belief in some weak minds, not yet enlightened about the miracles of divine power. Moreover, it was important in those centuries of battle to make the main object of veneration those holy heroes who had shed their blood by martyrdom to uphold the faith.

As the faith was then consolidated among the people and many saints were raised to the honour of the altars who had built up the Church with the splendour of their virtues without passing through torment, it soon seemed most fitting that a saint of whom the Gospel itself gave such ample praise should not be left in silence. Therefore the Greeks, in addition to the feast of all the ancestors of Christ (who were righteous) celebrated on the Sunday before Christmas, dedicated the Sunday in this octave to the cult of St Joseph, the husband of Mary, of the holy prophet David and of St James, the Lord's cousin.

In the Cofti calendar under 20 July there is mention of St Joseph, and it is believed by some that 4 July was the day of our saint's death.

In the Latin Church, then, the cult of St Joseph goes back to the antiquity of the first centuries, as appears from the very ancient martyrologies of the monastery of St Maximin of Trier and Eusebius. The order of mendicant friars was the first to

celebrate the office, as can be seen from their breviaries. Their example was followed in the 14th century by the Franciscans and Dominicans through the work of Albert the Great, who was the teacher of St Thomas Aquinas.

Towards the end of the 15th century, the Milan and Toulouse churches also introduced it into their liturgy, until the Apostolic See extended its worship to the entire Catholic world in 1522. Pius V, Urban VIII and Sixtus IV finalised this.

Princess Isabella Clara Eugenia of Spain, heiress of the spirit of St. Theresa, who was very devoted to St Joseph, went to Belgium and obtained a feast day on 19th March in the city of Brussels in honour of this saint, and the cult spread to the neighbouring provinces, where he was proclaimed and venerated under the title of the preserver of peace and protector of Bohemia. This feast began in Bohemia in the year 1655.

A part of the mantle with which St Joseph enfolded the Holy Child Jesus is kept in Rome in the Church of St Cecilia in Trastevere, where the staff that this saint carried while travelling is also kept. The other part is kept in the church of St Anastasia in the same city.

Just as witnesses handed it down to us, this mantle is yellowish in colour. A particle of this was given as a gift by Cardinal Ginetti to the Discalced Carmelite Fathers of Antwerp, kept in a magnificent box, under three keys, and is displayed for public veneration every year at Christmas.

Among the supreme pontiffs who contributed with their authority to promote the cult of this saint is Sixtus IV, who was the first to establish the feast towards the end of the 15th century. St Pius V formulated the office in the Roman Breviary. Gregory XV and Urban VIII endeavoured with special decrees to revive the fervour towards this saint that seemed to have waned in some peoples. Until the Supreme Pontiff Innocent X, yielding to the requests of many churches in Christendom, also eager to promote the glory of Mary's most holy husband and thus make his patronage more effective for religion, extended its solemnity to the entire Catholic world.

The feast of St Joseph was therefore fixed for the 19th day of March, which is piously believed to have been the day of his most blessed death (contrary to the opinion of some who believe this to have occurred on the 4th day of July).

Since this feast always falls in the season of Lent, it could not be celebrated on a Sunday, since all the Sundays of Lent are privileged: therefore it would often have passed unnoticed if the ingenious piety of the faithful had not found a way to make up for it otherwise.

Since 1621, the Order of Discalced Carmelites which has solemnly recognised St Joseph as the patron and universal father of their Institute, has

dedicated one of the Sundays after Easter to celebrate his solemnity under the title of the Patronage of St Joseph. At the fervent request of the Order itself and of many Churches in Christendom, the Sacred Congregation of Rites by decree of 1680 fixed this solemnity for the third Sunday after Easter. Many Churches in the Catholic world soon spontaneously adopted this feast. The Society of Jesus, the Redemptorists, the Passionists and the Society of Mary celebrate it with their own octave and office under the double first class rite.

The Sacred Congregation of Rites finally extended this feast to the whole universal Church in order to encourage and animate more and more the piety of the faithful towards this great saint with a decree of 10 September 1847 at the request of His Eminence Cardinal Patrizi.

If ever there were calamitous times for the Church of Jesus Christ, if ever the Catholic faith turned its prayers to Heaven to implore a protector, these are the present days. Our holy religion, assailed in its most sacrosanct principles, sees numerous children torn with cruel indifference from its motherly bosom to give themselves madly into the arms of unbelief and unruliness, and by becoming scandalous apostles of impiety to lead so many of their brethren astray, and thus tear the heart of that loving mother who nourished them. Now, while devotion to St Joseph would draw copious blessings upon the families of his devotees, it would procure for the desolate bride of Jesus Christ the most efficacious patronage of a saint who, just as he was able to preserve the life of Jesus unharmed by Herod's persecution, will know how to preserve the faith of his children unharmed by the persecution of hell. Just as the first Joseph, son of Jacob, was able to maintain the abundance of the people of Egypt during seven years of famine, the true Joseph, the happiest steward of the heavenly treasures, will know how to maintain in the Christian people that most holy faith to establish that God, whose god and guardian he was for thirty years, descended to earth.

Seven joys and seven sorrows of St Joseph.

Indulgence granted by Pius IX to the faithful who recite this chaplet which can serve as practice for the Saint's novena.

The reigning Pius IX, extending the concessions of his predecessors, especially those of Gregory XVI, granted to the faithful of either sex, who after having recited the following acts of obeisance and respect, commonly called the *seven Joys and the seven Sorrows of St Joseph*, for seven consecutive Sundays, at

any time of the year shall visit, with confession and communion, a Church or public Oratory, and there pray according to his intention: a Plenary indulgence also applicable to the souls in Purgatory, on each of the said Sundays.

For those who cannot read, or who cannot go to any Church where these acts of obeisance and respect are publicly made, the same Pontiff granted the same Plenary Indulgence provided that, while visiting the said Church and praying as above, they recite, instead of the aforesaid acts of obeisance and respect, seven Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be's in honour of the holy Patriarch.

Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows and Joys of St Joseph

1. O chaste Spouse of Mary most holy, glorious St Joseph, great was the trouble and anguish of thy heart when thou wert minded to put away privately thine inviolate Spouse, yet thy joy was unspeakable when the surpassing mystery of the Incarnation was made known to thee by the Angel! .

By this sorrow and this joy, we beseech thee to comfort our souls, both now and in the sorrows of our final hour, with the joy of a good life and a holy death after the pattern of thine own, in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

2. O most blessed Patriarch, glorious St Joseph, who was chosen to be the foster father of the Word made flesh, thy sorrow at seeing the Child Jesus born in such poverty was suddenly changed into heavenly exultation when thou didst hear the angelic hymn and beheld the glories of that resplendent night.

By this sorrow and this joy, we implore thee to obtain for us the grace to pass over from life's pathway to hear the angelic songs of praise, and to rejoice in the shining splendour of celestial glory.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

3. O glorious St Joseph, thou faithfully obeyed the law of God, and thy heart was pierced at the sight of the Precious Blood that was shed by the Infant Savior during His Circumcision, but the Name of Jesus gave thee new life and filled thee with quiet joy.

By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us the grace to be freed from all sin during life, and to die rejoicing, with the Holy Name of Jesus in our hearts and on our lips.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

4. O most faithful Saint who shared the mysteries of our Redemption, glorious St Joseph, the prophecy of Simeon regarding the sufferings of Jesus and Mary caused thee to shudder with mortal dread, but at the same time filled thee with a blessed joy for the salvation and glorious which, he foretold, would be attained by countless souls.

By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us that we may be among the number of those, who through merits of Jesus and the intercession of Mary the Virgin Mother, are predestined to a glorious resurrection.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

5. O most watchful Guardian of the Incarnate Son of God, glorious St Joseph, what toil was thine in supporting and waiting upon the Son of the most high God, especially in the flight into Egypt! Yet at the same time, how thou didst rejoice to have always near you God Himself, and to see the idols of the Egyptians fall prostrate to the ground before Him.

By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us the grace of keeping ourselves in safety from the infernal tyrant, especially by flight from dangerous occasions; may every idol of earthly affection fall from our hearts; may we be wholly employed in serving Jesus and Mary, and for them alone may we live and happily die.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

6. O glorious St Joseph, an angel on earth, thou didst marvel to see the King of Heaven obedient to thy commands, but thy consolation in bringing Jesus out of the land of Egypt was troubled by the fear of Archelaus; nevertheless, being assured by the Angel, thou dwelt in gladness at Nazareth with Jesus and Mary. By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us that our hearts may be delivered from harmful fears, so that we may rejoice in peace of conscience and may live in safety with Jesus and Mary and may, like thee, die in their company.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

7. O glorious St Joseph, pattern of all holiness, when thou didst lose, through no fault of thine own, the Child Jesus, thou sought Him sorrowing for the space of three days, until with great joy, thou didst find Him again in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors.

By this sorrow and this joy, we supplicate thee, with our hearts upon our lips, to keep us from ever having the misfortune to lose Jesus through mortal sin; but if this supreme misfortune should befall us, grant that we may seek Him with unceasing

sorrow until we find Him again, ready to show us His great mercy, especially at the hour of death; so that we may pass over to enjoy His presence in Heaven; and there in company with thee, may we sing the praises of His Divine mercy forever.

Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.

Antiphon. And Jesus Himself was beginning about the age of thirty, being the son of Joseph

V. Pray for us Saint Joseph.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray

O God, Who in Thine ineffable Providence didst vouchsafe to choose Blessed Joseph to be the spouse of Thy most holy Mother, grant we beseech Thee, that he whom we venerate as our protector on earth may be our intercessor in Heaven. Who lives and reigns forever and ever.

R. Amen.

Other prayer to St Joseph

God save you, O Joseph, full of grace; Jesus and Mary are with you; you are blessed among men, and blessed is the fruit of the womb of your bride Mary. St Joseph, foster-father of Jesus, virgin spouse of Mary, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen

Collected from the most accredited authors, with the novena in preparation for the feast of the Saint.

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Sac. BOSCO GIOVANNI

With Ecclesiastical Permission.

Today the Church grants indulgences (*Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* no.19) for prayers in honour of Saint Joseph:

“A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who invoke Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with a legitimately approved prayer (for example, To you,

O blessed Joseph).

To you, O blessed Joseph, do we come in our tribulation, and having implored the help of your most holy spouse, we confidently invoke your patronage also. Through that charity which bound you to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God and through the paternal love with which you embraced the Child Jesus, we humbly beg you graciously to regard the inheritance which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood, and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities. O most watchful Guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ; O most loving father, ward off from us every contagion of error and corrupting influence; O our most mighty protector, be kind to us and from heaven assist us in our struggle with the power of darkness. As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril, so now protect God's Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity; shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection, so that, supported by your example and your aid, we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven.
Amen.

(Pope Leo XIII, Oration to St. Joseph, encyclical Quamquam pluries)