

THE LIFE AND GLORIES
OF
ST. JOSEPH

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.

NUM INVENIRE POTERIMUS TALEM VIRUM, QUI SPIRITU DEI PLENUS SIT? ...
NUMQUID SAPIENTIOREM ET CONSIMILEM TUI INVENIRE POTERO? TU ERIS
SUPER DOMUM MEAM, ET AD TUI ORIS IMPERIUM CUNCTUS POPULUS OBEDIET.

GENESIS 41:38-40

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.

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by Burns & Oates in London
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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. José 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 prece-

Some pages have been removed here from this preview..

Chapter 1

**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

¹ ST III, q. 24, a. 1

of His Providence, from all eternity, 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,² 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;”³ 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

² Col. 1:26

³ Rom. 1:4

so accomplished.⁴ 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 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.”⁵ 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

⁴ ST III, q. 24, a. 4

⁵ Prov. 8:23

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.”⁶

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 ineffable 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,”⁷ 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

⁶ *Sermo de S. Joseph.*

⁷ 1 Pet. 1:12

privileged and exalted to be the guardian and patron of the Universal Church.

Chapter 2

**JOSEPH INCLUDED
IN THE ORDER OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION**

Whatever God disposes is disposed in a marvellous and perfect order. Wherefore the Church which Jesus came to found on earth imitates the Heavenly Sion. As in Heaven there are angelical hierarchies, and in these hierarchies there are divers orders, so also on earth there is a hierarchy of grace, and in that hierarchy are included various orders, or ministries, which, according to the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, excel each other in proportion to their approximation to God.¹ The highest of all these orders, whether angelic or human, is the order of the Hypostatic Union, in which is Christ Jesus, God and Man. By the Hypostatic Union is meant that the Eternal Son of God, in His Incarnation, assumed human nature, and united it to Himself in Personal unity; in other words, that in the one Divine Person of Jesus Christ, the two Natures, the Divine Nature and the Human Nature, ever distinct in themselves, became inseparably and eternally united. If a wonderful order is displayed in all the works of nature, an order supremely perfect is displayed in all the works of grace, especially in the great work of the Incarnation. Among these orders of grace some precede the mystery of the Incarnation, others follow it. Among those which precede it the most remote is the order of the Patriarchs, chosen to prepare the progenitors of Jesus down to St. Joachim and St. Anne. To some of

¹ ST I, q. 107, a. 6

these, as to Abraham and to David, it was expressly revealed that of their blood and of their family the Saviour of men should be born into the world. The next is the Levitical and sacerdotal order, which was preordained by God to figure in all its rites the Priesthood of Jesus, His Church, His Sacraments, the Bloody Sacrifice of the Cross, and the Unbloody Sacrifice of the Altar. The third is that of the Prophets, destined to foretell and announce to the world, so many centuries before the coming of Jesus, His Birth of a Virgin, His country, the place of His Nativity, His flight into Egypt, His Apostles, His preaching, His miracles, His Passion, His death, His Resurrection, His glorious Ascension into Heaven. Greater than all these Prophets was John the Baptist, because destined and preordained to be the immediate Precursor of Christ, and to point to Him as being actually present on the earth; whence Jesus Himself affirmed that among those who were born of woman there was not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.² These are the orders which under the Old Law preceded Jesus.

Others succeeded Him; and these are the various orders or ministries of Holy Church, which form the ecclesiastical hierarchy, beginning with the Apostles. The Apostles were to render to the whole earth and to all ages their solemn testimony to the Divinity of Jesus Christ; they were to announce to all His doctrine, His Law, His Sacraments; they were to found and to spread His Church throughout the world, so that all might attain to salvation. And, as the Apostolic order was nearer than any other to Jesus, even so,

² Luke 7:28

says the Angelic Doctor, did the Apostles receive greater grace than any saints in the other orders³ of the Church. Of the inferior orders we need not here speak. Now, above all these orders rises supreme the order of the Hypostatic Union. All the other orders, comprising even the angelic, are subordinate and subject to it; for this reason, that Jesus is the beginning, the author, and the head of this order, and on Jesus, as Sovereign Prince, depends every hierarchy, every sacred principedom in Heaven and on earth, since Jesus, as the Apostle says, is the end of the whole law.⁴ Jesus is the chief cornerstone⁵ upon which rests the whole sacred edifice of the Church. Jesus, according to the Prophet Isaias, is set up as an ensign to the people,⁶ the desire of all nations, the centre of universal hope. Jesus is the sole and true source of salvation to all men. By faith in Him who was to come all were saved who lived justly from Adam until His day; and all those who have lived and shall live justly since His coming have been and shall be saved by Him alone. In Him alone, from Him alone, and through Him alone, is truth, salvation, and life; so that, even as the planets in the firmament revolve round the sun, receiving from it light, heat, and power, so also around Jesus, the Eternal Sun of Justice, all the various orders of grace circle, from Him alone receiving light, virtue, and power to fulfill faithfully the holy offices to which they are ordained; and so much the greater or the less grace and dignity do they receive as they

³ *In Epistolam ad Ephes.* i. 8

⁴ Rom. 10:4

⁵ Eph. 2:20

⁶ Isa. 11:10,12

are more or less approximated in their ministry to Jesus, the author of grace, just as one who is nearer to the fire participates more largely in its heat. It is clear, then, that the order of the Hypostatic Union transcends and surpasses the other subaltern orders, even as the sun transcends the inferior stars.

Now, Joseph by divine predestination was placed in this sovereign order. Three only composed it—Jesus, Mary, Joseph. Jesus is true God and true Man; Mary is true mother of God and mother of men; Joseph is true spouse of Mary and putative father of Jesus. Jesus is the principal subject of the Incarnation, and the author of the Redemption of the world; Mary is the immediate co-operatrix and, so to say, the executrix of the Incarnation itself; Joseph, the faithful depositary of these two most precious pledges, was to provide that this sublime mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption should be brought about with the greatest possible congruity, so that the honor of the mother and of the God-Man, her Son, should remain intact.

That Joseph should be comprised in this supreme order is not a mere devout opinion or the fruit of pious meditation; it is a sure decision of the soundest theology. Suarez, that eminent theologian, after having spoken of the order of the Apostles, upon which he said the greatest grace was conferred, goes on to say: “There are other ministries appertaining to the order of the Hypostatic Union, which in its kind is more perfect, as we affirmed of the dignity of the Mother of God, and in this order is constituted the ministry of St. Joseph; and, although it be in the lowest grade of it, nevertheless, in this respect, it

surpasses all others, because it exists in a superior order.”⁷ Thus spoke Suarez, the learned theologian of Granada, about three hundred years ago, when the opinion of the faithful respecting St. Joseph and the devotion due to him had not been so openly and generally displayed.

But the doctors who followed spoke still more clearly. Giovanni di Cartagena, contemporary of Bellarmine and Baronius, and very dear to Pope Pius V for his piety and science, out of the numerous learned homilies which he wrote, devoted thirteen to the praises of Joseph. After having spoken of the Apostolic order, he passes on to treat of the order of the Hypostatic Union, and says that in its kind it is more perfect than the other, and that in this order the first place is held by the Humanity of Christ, which is immediately united to the Person of the Word; the second place is held by the Blessed Virgin, who conceived and brought forth the Incarnate Word; the third place is held by St. Joseph, to whom was committed by God the special care, never given to any other, of feeding, nursing, educating, and protecting a God-made-man!⁸ After Cartagena comes P. Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani, highly praised also by Benedict XIV, who, almost two centuries ago, wrote thus of St. Joseph: “He, as constituted head of the Family immediately belonging to the service of a God-Man, transcends in dignity all the other saints; wherefore he is happily established in an order which is superior to all the other orders in the Church.”⁹

⁷ Tom. ii. disp. viii. sec. 1.

⁸ Lib. iv. Hom. viii.

⁹ *Il Divoto di S. Giuseppe*, Novena, Gior. vi.

We might adduce other Doctors of high authority, but we will proceed to consider some of the legitimate consequences which flow from this doctrine.

1. It is an exceeding honor to Joseph to be comprised in the same order wherein are Jesus Himself, the Son of God, the King of kings, and Mary, Mother of God and Queen of the universe, to be united with them in the closest relations, and enjoy their most entire confidence. The nobles of the earth deem themselves to be highly honored in being brought into near association with monarchs of renown, holding the foremost places in their courts, and being the most trusted in their councils. What, then, shall we say of Joseph, who, placed in the order of the Hypostatic Union, was destined by God, not only to be the first in His court and the closest in His confidence, but even to be the reputed father of the King of kings; to be, not only the confidential friend, but the very spouse of the most exalted of all the empresses in the universe? Next to the Divine Maternity, no honor in the world is comparable with this.

2. To be comprised in the order of the Hypostatic Union implies being, after Jesus and Mary, superior to all the other Saints, both of the Old and the New Testament; and the reason is clear: for, this order being superior to all the other orders in the Church, it follows that whosoever has a place in this order, albeit in its lowest grade, as Joseph has, ranks before all who are even in the highest grade of a lower order, such as that of the Apostles, which is the most eminent among them.

3. It follows that Joseph is superior, not in nature, but in dignity, to the angels themselves, since the orders of angels are subject to the order of the Hypostatic Union, subject to Jesus, their King and their Head, subject to Mary, their Queen; hence, as the Apostle declares, when the Eternal Father sent His Divine Son upon earth He commanded all the angels to adore Him.¹⁰ And on account of Jesus the angels became subject also to Mary and to Joseph: thus we find them hastening gladly to serve them, to warn them, to console them; and were they not sent expressly from Heaven to act as attendants on Joseph, at one time to assure him that his Spouse has conceived the Son of God Himself; at another to make known to him the plot of Herod, so that he might place the Virgin and her Divine Son in safety by flying into Egypt; and, again, to announce to him that now he may joyfully return into the land of Israel?¹¹

4. We conclude that Joseph was comprehended in this order because he was truly the head and guardian of this Divine Family. To rule and govern this august family belonged of right to Jesus, who was God. Mary and Joseph, exalted as they were in dignity, were, nevertheless, only creatures; but Jesus willed to give an example of the most perfect humility. It was His Will to magnify our saint, and to concede to him this high glory, making him the head and guardian of His family; so that Joseph had rule and authority over the Son of God Himself and over the very Mother of the Son of God. And Joseph, being thus destined to be the head and

¹⁰ Heb. 1:6

¹¹ Matt. 1:20,21; 2:13,19,20

guardian of Jesus, the head and guardian of Mary, became at the same time the patron and guardian of the Church, which is the spouse of Jesus and, in a manner, the daughter of Mary. Whence Pius IX, of blessed memory, in proclaiming Joseph Patron of the Church, did not so much confer a new title of honor upon him as affirm and declare this his most ancient prerogative, which had not before been so expressly promulgated by Holy Church.

5. It follows that Joseph was comprised in that order and in that family by the highest representation which it is possible to conceive, inasmuch as he was made the very representative of the Divine Father, who alone has the right to call Jesus His Son, having begotten Him from all eternity; and yet that same God, who by the mouth of Isaias¹² protested that He would never give His glory to another, that God who, in communicating to the Word and to the Holy Spirit His Divine essence, does not in any wise communicate to them His Divine paternity, was so generous to Joseph as to concede to him His glory, and communicate to him His name and His paternity; not actually, for that was impossible, but so that he should be in His place and stead, and should be called the father of Him who was the Divine Word, and that the Word Himself should call Joseph by the sweet name of father, so that he might with true joy appropriate to himself that passage in Holy Scripture: "I will be to Him a father and He shall be to me a son."¹³ Herein we see manifested the great love of the Three Persons of

¹² Isa. 42:8

¹³ Heb. 1:5

the Blessed Trinity for our saint and the confidence They reposed in him; for the Eternal Father committed wholly into his charge His well-beloved Son; the Divine Son delivered Himself entirely to his care and to his will; the Holy Spirit consigned and committed to him His most immaculate Spouse; so that this Holy Family, of which Joseph became the head, was another Triad on earth, a resplendent image of the Most Holy Triad in Heaven, the Ever-Blessed Trinity: Joseph representing the Eternal Father, Jesus representing and being in very truth the Eternal Word, and Mary representing the Eternal Love, the Holy Spirit. This thought is borrowed from the new Doctor of the Church, St. Francis de Sales. “We may say”—these are his words—“that the Holy Family was a Trinity on Earth, which in a certain way represented the Heavenly Trinity Itself.”¹⁴

6. Finally, it follows that Joseph, in that he was comprised in that sublime order, superior to that of all the other saints, must as a natural consequence have been predestined to receive greater gifts and graces than all the other saints, that he might be made worthy to be so near to Jesus and Mary, and fitted to discharge most faithfully those high ministries to which he was elected. Hence the pious Bernardine de Bustis makes this bold assertion: “Since Joseph was to be the guardian, companion, and ruler of the Most Blessed Virgin and of the Child Jesus, is it possible to conceive that God could have made a mistake in the choice of him? Or that He could have permitted him to be deficient in any respect? Or could have failed to make him most perfect?”

¹⁴ *Entretien*, xix.

The very idea would be the grossest of errors. When God selects any one to perform some great work He bestows upon him every virtue needful for its accomplishment.”¹⁵

Let us rejoice, then, with our most loving Patriarch that he has been exalted to so sublime an order, and has obtained such grace, power, and dignity as none other, after Jesus and Mary, has ever received, to the glory of God, who made him so great, and for our profit and that of the whole Church.

¹⁵ *Mariale*, Sermo xii.

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