

Novena Sancto Joseph dies tertio  
In a world of greed, Ioseph Amator Paupertatis

In the Name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Dear Canon, very dear faithful, today is the third day of our novena to Saint Joseph in preparation for the feast day on March 19<sup>th</sup>. After hearing about Joseph Most Just, and Joseph Most Chaste, the theme for today's homily taken from the Litany of Saint Joseph is *Amator Paupertatis*, Lover of Poverty in a world of greed. We know from the Gospel of Luke 2:24 that Saint Joseph and Our Lady offered a sacrifice of two turtle doves, or pigeons as set by the Law for those who had no means for the usual sacrifice after the birth of their first-born male. This was considered the offering of the poor according to the book of Leviticus (12:8). However, we know from the Gospels that Saint Joseph worked as a carpenter. Our Lord was referred to as the son of a carpenter. The Holy Family was unlikely to be in a state of great want. They were poor simply in that they were not rich.

What is opposed to the spirit of poverty is the vice of greed. Greed is seen all over our world. Today it is easily considered a virtue. Acquiring riches at any price, even by immoral means, is considered a good thing. Those who have done so are lifted up as role models for others, and praised for their success. We see the consequences when those who have souls steeped in immorality, and not satisfied with the riches they have acquired are willing to grab more power in order to obtain even more. The consequences of the concentration of such a quantity of riches in the hands of a few greedy souls are quite plain to see today.

However, contrary to what many may think, greed is not the desire to be rich. It is an excessive preoccupation with money and other possessions. Let us open the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas (II-II, q.118, aa.1-8), and take a close look at the vice of greed, and see how Saint Joseph's example as the Lover of Poverty can save us from a lot of anxiety in our lives.

Saint Thomas explains that greed or covetousness is a sin against the virtue of justice in two ways: in the unjust acquisition of goods more than one needs, and in the immoderation in one's attachment to these goods in that one gives less than what is appropriate. In both cases, one is preoccupied with one's possessions. In the case of unjust acquisition of riches, greed is opposed to the virtue of justice itself, and in the case of one's desire or affection for riches and goods, by

which one is stingy in giving, greed is opposed to the virtue of liberality or generosity. One can be greedy about any worldly possessions beyond a proper and good measure. Most often, though, this is about money. We need some possessions without which we are unable to live here on earth. Even to grow in virtues, such as the virtue of generosity, we need some goods that we can give away. However, Saint Thomas points out here that it is the inordinate desire for material goods that is the problem here. There is a proper and right measure for the possessions that we acquire according to justice. However if we exceed this measure of acquisition then we sin against this virtue. If this attachment and desire for goods is opposed to charity, the love of God, for example so that we give in to the temptation of theft, then we are committing a mortal sin. If we count the love of God important enough, that we give something, however inordinately less than we should, then we commit a venial sin. Greed or avarice is an immoderate love of possessing. Even though it can apply to the inordinate desire for possessing anything, it applies specially to money since money is often the means by which one possesses things.

The virtue of justice allows us to know how much we should give. By the virtue of generosity, we are able to give without being attached to things, because of which we give begrudgingly. Saint Joseph's poverty was in opposition to this attitude. He devoted his entire life to the mission to which he was called, which in his case was his duty of husband to the Blessed Virgin, and father to the Son of God.

In his Introduction to the Devout Life (Part III, c.15), Saint Francis de Sales gives us four principles by which to grow in this spirit of poverty, no matter how many possessions we have. First, we must take care of what we have since it is not ours. Ultimately, it belongs to God. Secondly, if the opportunity arises, we must increase our wealth. He says, God has given them to us to cultivate and He wishes us to render them fruitful and useful by taking care of them. It is essential that we take more earnest care of our possessions than unbelievers do because we are working for God's love, they are working only for love of themselves. Self-love is a restless, anxious, over-eager love, and so the work done on its behalf is troubled, vexatious, and unsatisfactory, whereas the love of God is calm, peaceful, and tranquil, and so the work done for its sake, even in worldly things, is gentle, trustful, and quiet. It is an act of gratitude to God to be diligent in our care for our earthly goods, and even to increase them if some legitimate opportunity

arises and our situation calls for it – that is not only by justice, but also by kindness and charity. Thirdly, we must be wary of self-love, which can cause our care of our possessions to degenerate in to avarice. Therefore, it is important often to give a portion of our riches with which God has endowed us to the poor and needy. Lastly, when misfortune befalls us, we must accept them cheerfully. Again, if some unforeseen events (storm, flood, fire, drought, theft, or lawsuit) causes us to lose some portion of our riches, then this is the real time to practice poverty, accepting the loss quietly, and adapting ourselves patiently to our altered circumstances. The Doctor of Charity counsels us to accept such occurrences cheerfully, rejoice in them, and bear them willingly. If we give these things the care that God wants us to have for them, then when we lose them, we will not lose our peace of soul.

Saint Francis de Sales warns us about this vice of greed. Almost no one confesses it, because we can easily come up with some good reason for accumulating more. We make the excuse of providing for our children, or foresight for future misfortunes. We know we suffer from greed when we get angry or filled with anxiety over financial matters, or other possessions. Remember, greed is undue preoccupation, or worry about financial matters. It is not about wanting to be rich.

The anxiety about financial things, betrays a lack of trust in God, and His Divine Providence. More exactly, greed comes from a failure to trust that if we do our part, if we fulfill our responsibilities, God will provide us our daily bread. It is precisely when we fail to trust, that we grab all we can for a rainy day.

Our Lord tells us in the Gospel of Saint Luke: Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, nor about your body, what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ...Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves... with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12: 22-34).

In Saint Joseph, the Lover of Poverty, the just man, we do not see any of this anxiety. He had very few material possessions. Surely, he would have wanted the Son of God, his own son, to be born in something more than a stable. Surely, he would have preferred to give his wife and Son more of the comforts of life. However, he understood that the Incarnation happened according to the Will of God. When it was required of him to protect his family by fleeing to Egypt, he did so at the indication of the Angel. Upon his return to Israel, he continued to fulfil his responsibilities as husband and father in providing for his family using the means at his disposal. He taught his Son, to observe the prescriptions of the Law of God by accomplishing his religious duties in the Temple and Synagogue. In everything, Saint Joseph fulfilled his responsibilities to God, to his family, and to others around him. He is the example of the counsel of Our Lord to seek first the Kingdom of God, and all the rest we will be given in abundance. One could be financially poor, but have no understanding of poverty. The opposite can be true as well. However, this is not the case with Saint Joseph. He was not rich, and he was not attached to material goods. Therefore, he was free to enrich himself in grace, and virtues. While poverty itself has no real moral value, the practice of poverty, to be detached from earthly things, to know their proper place and their proper use in order to acquire the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven, //this is virtuous. It requires great fortitude to persevere in this difficult life, temperance to use things in the right way, prudence to discern the necessary from the unnecessary, and justice to treat God and man in the right way despite the difficulties that present themselves.

Let us turn to Saint Joseph, the just man, the lover of poverty to grow in this spirit of poverty by which we are freed from worldly expectations. Saint Joseph can teach us to pray more knowing that God can correct and satisfy our desires. He will teach us to live more simply in gratitude for the beautiful things that God has given us in our lives. He will teach us to trust in God's Providence knowing that if we fulfil our responsibilities, we will have no reason to be anxious about our material needs. With his help, we will be able to be generous even if we have little to spare, knowing that God will see our generosity, and reward us greatly in heaven. Saint Joseph personifies the beatitude: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. *Sancte Joseph, Amator Paupertatis, ora pro nobis.*

In the Name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.