

St. Joseph Preparatory Novena, Day 6

St. Joseph Shrine, March 16th 2021

“In a world of pride, *Joseph Oboedientissime*” Joseph Most Obedient.

Dear Canons, Very Dear Faithful,

One of the predecessors of Pope Francis wrote these words: “During periods of stress and trial - chiefly when every lawlessness of act seems permitted to the powers of darkness - it has been the custom in the Church to plead with special fervor and perseverance to God, her author and protector, by recourse to the intercession of the saints - and chiefly of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God - whose patronage has ever been the most efficacious. The fruit of these pious prayers and of the confidence reposed in the Divine goodness, has always, sooner or later, been made apparent. Now, Venerable Brethren, you know the times in which we live; they are scarcely less deplorable for the Christian religion than the worst days, which in time past were most full of misery to the Church. We see faith, the root of all the Christian virtues, lessening in many souls; we see charity growing cold; the young generation daily growing in depravity of morals and views; the Church of Jesus Christ attacked on every side by open force or by craft; a relentless war waged against the Sovereign Pontiff; and the very foundations of religion undermined with a boldness which waxes daily in intensity. These things are, indeed, so much a matter of notoriety that it is needless for Us to expatiate on the depths to which society has sunk in these days, or on the designs which now agitate the minds of men. In circumstances so unhappy and troublous, human remedies are insufficient, and it becomes necessary, as a sole resource, to beg for assistance from the Divine power.”

That was Pope Leo XIII, writing in 1889, from his encyclical on Devotion to St. Joseph. These words seem written as much, if not more, for our age, especially when we might be tempted to believe that no other age has had challenges comparable to our own.

We read in the book of Wisdom, “for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it” (Wisdom 2:23-

24). Pride is “unwillingness to live in accordance with the truth; it seeks that which is beyond one’s state; it judges oneself greater than he is” (Ripperger).

The obedience of St. Joseph stands in opposition to the pride and disobedience of the world—a pride which is manifested in innumerable ways which seem to multiply daily. The world refuses to render to God what is due to God in worship, praise, thanksgiving, and charity, especially the charity regarding one’s neighbor. In the pride of the world we see mankind’s disobedience to the very first command given to man by God: “...male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it....” (Gen 1:27-28). In our time, it wasn’t enough to defy God in openness to new life within marriage, so the world in its pride even seeks to deny the very nature of male and female.

“*Ob audire*” to hear, to be attentive to—these are the Latin words from which the word “obedience” comes. Following Our Lady’s “fiat” spoken in response to the message of an angel, so, too, St. Joseph’s “yes” came in his acceptance of God’s will through the message of an angel. St. Joseph’s obedience to God mirrored the obedience of the Savior whom God had entrusted to his care. St. Joseph’s obedience guided the Holy Family in fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament as the Evangelists and writers of the New Testament letters would frequently point out.

“...Behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name JESUS. For he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him....” (Matt 1:20-24).

Of this event, Pope St. John Paul II said, “One can say that what Joseph did united him in an altogether special way to the faith of Mary. He accepted as truth coming from God the very thing that she had already accepted at the Annunciation. The Council teaches: "'The obedience of faith' must be given to God as he reveals himself. By this obedience of faith man freely commits himself entirely to God,

making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals,' and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him."(Dei Verbum, 5) This statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth.

“And it came to pass, that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled.... And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David, [5] To be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child” (Luke 3,4-5).

It is interesting that in several documents written by second and third century Christian writers we come to know that this “enrollment” or “census” document which would have recorded the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph was actually preserved in the archives in Rome at one time. Whether it still exists or was lost or simply came to be disbelieved as authentic, we don’t know. But the obedience of St. Joseph in carrying out this burdensome decree served purposes beyond simply proving the scriptures.

The giving of a child’s name was a religious obligation of the father and St. Joseph fulfilled this obligation in obedience to the message of the angel. Likewise, he accompanied Our Lady and the infant Jesus to the temple, obedient to the Law, and so witnessed Simeon’s prophesy, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

“Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him. Who arose, and took the child and his mother by night, and retired into Egypt: and he was there until the death of Herod: That it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt 2:13-15).

When the angel of the Lord commanded, it was God, Himself, commanding. Each passage in the Gospels concerning St. Joseph is an account of Joseph being obedient to the command of God as given through an angel or the Law. And each time St. Joseph was prompt to render to God what was due to God. But it was not simply compliance. The obedience of St. Joseph was offered willingly and generously.

We read, “obedience, which makes a man yield up the most dearly prized stronghold of the individual soul (that is, one’s will) in order to do the will of his Creator, is accounted the greatest of the moral virtues” (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Obedience does not mean having all the answers ahead of time and confidently rendering one’s duties at the appointed time. Our obedience to God both requires and expresses a profound trust in God’s Providence. Our Lady said to the child Jesus in the temple, “Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? did you not know, that I must be about my father's business? And they understood not the word that he spoke unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them” (Luke 2:48-51). In the beginning exhortation from the Rite of Matrimony, the priest says to the couple, “And so, not knowing what is before you, you take each other for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death.”

Pope John Paul commended the Church to the patronage of St. Joseph saying, “Already at the beginning of human redemption, after Mary, we find the model of obedience made incarnate in St. Joseph, the man known for having faithfully carried out God’s commands” (RC 30).

In this time of so many dangers, falsehoods, pride and disobedience: Joseph oboedientissime, ora pro nobis. Amen.