

Maronite Monks of Adoration

Most Holy Trinity Monastery ❖ Petersham MA 01366-9725

WITH A FATHER'S HEART

Due to Holy Week's earliness this year, St. Joseph's feast has been transferred; but since this month is traditionally dedicated to him, it is still opportune to consider the Crucifixion and Resurrection through the eyes, or rather, through the heart of our Savior's foster father.

Though he had died a few years before Jesus was tortured, executed, and raised to immortal life, Joseph was surely not ignorant of his son's—the Son of God's—destiny. The first premonition came when he and his virgin wife had presented the newborn Jesus at the Temple:

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:33-35).

Joseph and Mary were familiar with the Prophets who had foretold not only the glories of the Messiah, but also the trials that He would undergo. As descendants of David, both were aware of God's judgment on David, who had arranged for the murder of Bathsheba's husband: *"You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife*

to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house..." (2 Sam 12:9-10).

That curse no longer belonged to a remote past: through Simeon's voice it was made as close as the Son of God—now "Son of David" —bundled in Mary's arms. Very shortly, in fact, the Holy Family would be fleeing from Herod's sword, which, unable to drink the blood of the infant Messiah, would slake its thirst with that of at least forty other boys.

And so, the contradicting of the incarnate Word, initiated by the jealous king, began His mother's martyrdom—and also Joseph's. For even though Simeon spoke only of Mary's soul being pierced (thus prophetically implying that only she would be alive to witness the full opposition), the soul of the Virgin's husband shared in her sorrow. Though most chaste and faultless in celibacy, he was not an impassive stoic; nor was he merely a legal guardian of the Child: dutiful and kindly, yet somewhat aloof. The eternal Father had chosen this young Jewish craftsman to be His own representative, to be the human heart of a father towards this, His well-beloved Son. Like Mary, Joseph treasured everything concerning his foster son and God, everything that He did and said.



More than any other persons in history, or yet to come, Joseph and Mary *loved the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might* (cf. Deut 6:5). They were prepared to accept—indeed, ardently longed to share—whatever trials this Divine son of theirs would have to endure. True love is not satisfied with halves, but wants to share in the beloved’s bad times as well as the good; it would feel excluded if prevented from suffering with the beloved.

Surely, if Jesus often spoke to His Apostles about His impending death and resurrection (and, beginning with Paul and with the Galatians, had revealed scenes of His Passion, inviting so many mystics to share in it, even to the point of stigmatization), He must have shared details of this supreme act of love with His two most intimate and greatest disciples, who by their unparalleled faith and love had become literally His mother and, by virtue of espousal to the Virgin, His father as well as brother (cf. Lk 8:21). This family of three hearts, children of David, would share together the sword that would complete the self-emptying of Divine Love.

If John and James yearned so greatly to share the Lord’s sufferings and to be immersed in the same bath of pain with Him; if Paul, who had only ever seen the risen Lord in several visions, vehemently desired *to share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (Phil 3:10), even boasting that he bore the marks of the Lord’s sufferings (cf. Gal 6:17); and if, as St. Bonaventure wrote of St. Francis of Assisi, “the memory of Jesus Christ crucified was ever present in the depths of his heart like a bundle of myrrh, and he longed to be wholly transformed into him by the fire of love”, even to the very sharing of His wounds—as also in our day the holy Padre Pio emulated the desires of Paul and Francis by sharing in the

Passion and Death for over 50 years—are we to imagine that the man who for nearly 30 years **lived** with, worked for, cared for, played with, instructed, celebrated feasts with, prayed with Jesus could have a lesser desire than any of these to suffer with Him?

Could Abraham have been more distraught over being asked to sacrifice his beloved Isaac? Could Jacob be more inconsolable on beholding the bloody tunic of Joseph, his favorite? David, whose heart the Lord God found to be most like His own, had fasted and prayed that his first-born son by Bathsheba would not perish; and he mourned piteously when he learned that, contrary to his orders, Joab’s soldiers had thrust lances through the heart of his rebel son Absalom while hanging helplessly from a tree. Could Joseph, a son of David, feel any less toward the son who was also his God, *the God who is Love* (1 Jn 4:8), and who had *come to cast fire upon the earth* (Lk 12:49)?

I believe that St. Joseph knew extensively of what was in store for Jesus, and that it brought about his own death prematurely by compassion. St. Francis de Sales certainly implies this in his treatise **On the Love of God**, in the chapter “Concerning Those Who Died by Divine Love and for Divine Love”:

“Among sacred lovers there are some who so completely devote themselves to exercises of divine love that its holy fire devours and consumes their life. Sometimes grief keeps the afflicted from drinking, eating, and sleeping so long that finally they become so weak and ill that they die.... Thus, my dear Theotimus, when the ardor of holy love is intense, it makes so many assaults upon the heart, wounds it so many times, causes such languors within it, melts it so constantly,

and bears it off into so many raptures and ecstasies that by such means the soul is almost entirely taken up with God.... O God, Theotimus, how happy is such a death!"

De Sales does go on to say of Joseph in a subsequent chapter that "A saint who had loved so much in this life could not die except from love." And after affirming the same about Mary, he wrote: "It is the noblest of all deaths, and therefore the death due to the noblest life ever lived among creatures. It is the death of which the angels themselves would wish to die if they were subject to death."

With St. Paul, the just man Joseph could well declare: *For [Christ Jesus my Lord's] sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but*

that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:8b-11).

What Paul desired, Joseph is believed to have attained: resurrection from the dead. Sts. Augustine, Bernard, Bernadine of Siena, Francis de Sales, and Leonard of Port Maurice, among others, believed that Joseph is now body and soul with Jesus and Mary, interceding for as many as possible to join them. The Holy Family is still at work, preparing for the final Day when all the resurrected members of Christ will be living forever with them, *one heart and one soul* (Acts 4:32) in the bosom of the Father. †