

26th April 1874

Feast of St Joseph, Patron of the Church

Today we are celebrating the feast of Saint Joseph who, a few years ago, the Pope declared the principal patron and protector of the universal Church. This makes it one of the most important feasts of the Church.

As daughters of the Church, we should celebrate it with great devotion and pray in a special way for the Pope and for the whole Church. It is one of our first duties, and I do not need to remind you that in all your devotions, in your communions, in your times of prayer, in all your dealings with Our Lord, you should talk to him about things that concern the interests of the Church. We must live for her; we must offer our lives for her, especially these days, when all hell is bent on destroying her.

One cannot open the daily newspapers of different countries without seeing that the Church is persecuted there. This is true in far distant regions which still give martyrs; it is true in Central America, in these countries which Spain had made so deeply catholic. It is true in Germany, it is true in Switzerland, it is true to some extent, in a very insidious way, in Italy. And in France we are threatened every day with persecution from the radicals. As you know, one of the deported convicts in Caledonia answered a missionary, "We detest your religion. Our only thought is to destroy it." In the end, the Church is the object of hatred for evildoers everywhere, and it seems that the reign of Antichrist is very close.

Everything which is born of God, everyone who has received life and strength through the sacraments of the Church, everyone who like us has been surrounded by every possible grace, must have as their

chief devotion to pray for the Church of God which is everything that God loves here on earth. Saint Anselm used to say that God loves nothing as much as the freedom of his Church. The Church is in actual fact the body of Jesus Christ here below, God's Spouse, his very love on earth.

When we pray, God wants us to ask for the things that are dear to him, so as to give them to us. That is why Our Lord makes us say in the Our Father, Your will be done. Certainly the will of God is always done; but when we make this petition he grants that it will be done perfectly on earth, and we put our hearts and wills in union with all God wills.

Talking about dear St Joseph celebrated today, I will just mention two or three things where we should to try and imitate him: his simplicity, his obedience, and especially his abounding love. His love was for Jesus and Mary, Jesus and Mary were everything to him. Jesus and Mary were his life, his love, everything centred on them, and he could talk of nothing else. There he is our model.

There was nothing extraordinary in St Joseph's life. He did everything which God told him in simplicity. He observed God's law with simplicity. In his simplicity, he became the greatest of the saints after the Virgin Mary, because he kept his eyes on Jesus and Mary and lived only for them. When as head of the Holy Family he had to tell them what to do, he was not following his own will, but God's, doing it with great simplicity, completely, without asking why, without any ifs or buts, without hesitating.

That's how we can all be. Always doing what God wants, as he wants it, because he wants it. Doing his least wishes to the letter, walking uprightly and with simplicity before God, living only for Jesus and Mary and making that the basic principle of our life, our aim, our peace, the reason for our smallest as for our greatest actions.

In this simplicity, which permits no reasoning or objection, lies the complete obedience which, when it realises that something is God's will - it knows or has been told - starts to do it. That is the meaning of the line in the psalms: *when she heard my voice she obeyed me.* (Ps 17, 45). We can say it was St Joseph's motto: in the middle of the night he got up without grumbling or complaining to do God's will. Likewise, a religious who is perfectly obedient leaves no interval between God's call and putting it into action, between the command and its execution. She does not comment or remark.

Saint Joseph was already like that before he was given Our Lady. The Gospel tells us he was an upright, just, pious and obedient man. That is why God chose him to be the spouse of our most blessed Lady. This was his great reward and also his great means of sanctification.

As for us, from early childhood, from our first years, we have been given Jesus and Mary. Let us find in them our whole love, our whole life, our whole conduct. Let them be the ones we talk to most, and then all other ideas, all self-seeking will fall away from us.

That is the right kind of devotion to have for St Joseph. Certainly, since he provided for the Holy Family, we can ask him for everything we need, but that is not so important. We should put our real devotion into imitating his fidelity to the law, his prompt obedience, the simplicity of his love, and then he will see that we are souls who honour him in the way he wants to be honoured.

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