

**PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

# Joseph on JOSEPH

I must admit that I have always considered it my very good fortune that my loving parents decided to call me Joseph. In doing this, they gave me a patron who has always been a source of great strength to me. And today, his feast day, has always been a day of real celebration for me. Allow me to share with you a few thoughts about St. Joseph, my patron and the patron of the universal Church.



There are those who have bemoaned the fact that we know so little real history concerning this man who lived in such close proximity to our Savior. Matthew's Gospel tells us that he was a "righteous" man (1:19); that he was a carpenter by trade (13:55); that he was informed of the special circumstances of Jesus' birth by the message of an angel (1:19-25); and that he was given the care of Jesus and Mary during the troublesome flight into Egypt (2:13-14). Luke tells us that Jesus was "obedient" to him as a young man (2:51). Here the references stop. Joseph fades into the background. But in order to make up for this lack of information, pious souls over the centuries have been fond of supplying additional material regarding Joseph's life and thereby hoping to shed more light on this saint.

Perhaps in doing this, we have missed the point. Joseph's place in the gospel narratives, is not an historical one. The facts that are presented are few. In fact, Matthew and Luke do not even agree on the name of Joseph's father (Matt 1:16; Luke 3:23). Rather, Joseph plays a most important role in the **theology** of the Gospels. I would ask that we look then at Joseph as a theological figure. To do this, the readings of the lectionary for this special feast are a great help.

The first reading from II Samuel speaks of the promise made to David that his descendants would enjoy an everlasting relationship with God. They would have an eternal covenant with him. Paul, in writing to the Romans, speaks of the promise made to Abraham by which we learn that his descendants would be many and would inherit the world. It is in order to connect the three readings that the first verse of the Gospel refers to the genealogy of Jesus. What this gospel wishes us to know is that Joseph is in the theological line of Abraham and David. The promises made to Abraham and David are now about to be fulfilled through Joseph's line, that is, through Jesus.

Perhaps the key to our understanding of Joseph is to be found in Paul's statement to the Romans: "The promise was made on the grounds of faith, in order that it might be a matter of sheer grace;" or as the New American translation puts it, "Hence, all depends on faith, everything is a grace." (Rom 4:16). Joseph's virtue was that he believed in

the power of God to bring about the impossible. He was willing to open his eyes to see that everything that God was doing for Israel was a grace, a gift, the very life of God Himself being imparted to the people. Thus, Joseph allowed the promise of God to happen through him, just as Mary had done by saying 'yes' to the angel. God wishes to save, but man must be willing and open to His coming.

I think you can begin to see why I have always used Joseph as a model. There are many times as Bishop of this Diocese when I wonder where God is leading us in our history of salvation. There are times when I am overwhelmed by the realization that we stand in the line of Abraham and David, of Joseph and Jesus, of John XXIII and Paul VI. Again and again, I must remind myself — and all of you — that "All depends on faith, everything is a grace."

This year as we celebrate his feast day, let us once again renew our devotion to Joseph. As we all continue to work for renewal and reconciliation, let us use Joseph as our model. We can do well to imitate his patience, his faith, his willingness to cooperate with God's plan, his eagerness to act on God's word. Joseph's awareness of his role in the history of salvation can strengthen and encourage us. And finally, let us imitate the theological stance of Joseph. If we can believe as he did and, as he did, recognize everything as grace; we too can truly cooperate in God's loving plan of salvation.

## vatican news

### Reforms on Pontiff's Desk

# Jesuits End General Congregation

Rome [RNS] — The 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus ended a three-month session here, March 7, with the approval of final documents outlining the future direction of the 435-year-old religious order of priests and lay brothers founded by St. Ignatius Loyola.

The extent of proposed changes in the 29,600-member order, which has declined by 6,000 in 10 years, will be known only when Pope Paul VI approves the documents adopted by the order's highest governing body and authorizes promulgation.

The pontiff in a Feb. 15 letter told Jesuit Superior General Father Pedro Arrupe that the congregation must submit all decisions to him before publication.

Jesuit sources here said, however, that the texts approved by the congregation concerned "Jesuit identity," social and political problems, the order's vows of poverty, the training of Jesuits, and ways of dealing with tension and dissent within the order.

The General Congregation also bowed to a papal veto of a reform proposal earlier endorsed by a

two-thirds majority of nearly 250-member assembly.

At issue was the structure of the Society of Jesus, with its special "fourth vow" of fealty to the Pope.

Following final vows, there are three distinct "grades" in the Society: the "professed," "spiritual coadjutors," and lay brothers.

The first two grades are ordained priests. The members of all grades take final solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, vows assumed by all members of religious orders.

One group of Jesuits — the professed — take in addition a solemn "fourth vow" promising "special obedience to the Supreme Pontiff with respect to accepting assignments anywhere in the world."

Recommendations for the 32nd General Congregation were sought from all Jesuits. Many objected to the grading system for the professed, arguing that it is anachronistic and divisive, as it separates priests from their fellow priests, and downgrades the lay brothers.

Earlier, test votes, in the

congregation showed that a majority of the Fathers supported proposals to eliminate the privileged position of the professed and make all members of the Society eligible to take the special vow.

Pope Paul, however, let it be known that he was opposed to any such change in the "sacerdotal" character of the Society of Jesus, as set up by Ignatius and approved by Pope Paul III in 1540.

When Father Arrupe reported to Pope Paul in an audience following the close of the General Congregation, the pontiff voiced confidence that the session would be beneficial to Jesuits, to other religious orders, and to the entire Church. The Pope also stressed the special relationship between the Jesuits and the papacy.

Pope Paul gave Father Arrupe a crucifix of dark wood about a foot and a half high used toward the end of the 16th Century by St. Robert Bellarmine, the Jesuit cardinal and theologian who was a key figure in the Catholic counter-reformation.

Jesuit-operated Vatican Radio, in a report on the General Congregation remarked that the session "will certainly go down in history on account of the pastoral interest and authoritative directives with which the Holy Father followed its preparation, works, and conclusion."

Referring to the Pope's message to Father Arrupe during the audience, the broadcast said the pontiff expressed his "great affection" for Jesuits.

"Because of our great affection for members of the Society of Jesus," said the Pope, "we thought it necessary to intervene. We believed ourselves obliged

to do so in the consciousness of our office as supreme protector of the formula of the (Jesuit) institute and as universal pastor of the Church."

"Perhaps," the pontiff went on, "some believe that in order to guarantee a new vitality for the society it is necessary to introduce radical innovations into the formula of the institute, in its basic constitution."

But we could not share this idea of a metamorphosis of a religious institute, so characteristic and so tested by the experience of its history and by

manifest signs of divine assistance.

"We are of the opinion that renewal is needed according to the logic of the principles of the Gospel and of the (Jesuit) institute, but not a renewal that transforms and deforms those fundamental norms which define the identity of the Jesuit."

Vatican Radio said the Pope told the Jesuit Superior General that he would continue to take "a lively interest" in the affairs of the Society and would "intervene whenever the good of the Society and of the Church requires it."



**Pope Greets Prime Minister**

Pope Paul VI shakes hands with Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau of Canada during a private audience at the Vatican. The Canadian leader was in Italy for talks with government leaders. (RNS)

### Vatican Cancels Seal of Approval

Vatican City [RNS] — The Vatican has abolished the title, "Purveyors to the Papal Household," used on a variety of Roman and other Italian products, ranging from wax to wine, as a badge of special quality.

It a statement, the Vatican said

the title had not been granted to new clients for a number of years and that in 1973 the decision had been taken to suspend its use. Observing that in the time elapsed, "those concerned have been able to accustom themselves to the 1973 decision," the statement declared: "As of May 1, 1975, no firm may legitimately use the title."