

St. Joseph: Man of Divine Election

Following are excerpts from a meditation given by Pope John Paul II on the Feast of St. Joseph.

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."



We find these words in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. They, especially in the second part, sound similar to those that Miriam, that is Mary, heard at the moment of the Annunciation found in the Gospel according to Luke.

Subsequently Matthew notes again that, after Mary's marriage to Joseph, "before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit."

In this way, therefore, there was accomplished in Mary the mystery which had had its beginning at the moment of the Annunciation, at the moment when the Virgin replied to Gabriel's words: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word."

As Joseph became aware of the mystery of Mary's maternity, "being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, (he) resolved to divorce her quietly," as Matthew's description says.

And precisely then, Joseph, Mary's betrothed and before the law already her husband, receives his personal "Annunciation."

During the night he hears the words we quoted earlier, the words which are an explanation and at the same time an invitation on the part of God: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife."

At the same time God entrusts to Joseph the

mystery, the fulfillment of which had been awaited for so many generations by the race of David and the whole "house of Israel," and at the same time He entrusts to him everything on which the fulfillment of this mystery depends in the history of the People of God.

From the moment when these words reached his consciousness, Joseph becomes the man of Divine election: the man entrusted with a special responsibility. His place in the history of salvation is defined. Joseph takes this place with the simplicity and humility which reveal the man's spiritual depth; and he fills it completely with his life.

"When Joseph woke from sleep," we read in Matthew, "he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." In these few words there is everything. The whole description of Joseph's life and the full characteristic of his holiness: "he did." Joseph, the one we know from the Gospel, is a man of action.

He is a man of work. The Gospel has not preserved any word of his. It has on the contrary described his actions: simple everyday actions which have at the same time a limpid meaning for the fulfillment of the divine Promise in the history of man; works full of spiritual depth and mature simplicity.

Such is Joseph's activity, such are his deeds, before there had been revealed the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, which the Holy Spirit had effected in his betrothed. Such also is Joseph's subsequent work, when — already aware of the mystery of Mary's virginal maternity — he remains at her side in the period preceding the birth of Jesus and above all on the occasion of the Nativity.

Then we see Joseph at the moment of the presentation in the temple and of the arrival of the Three Wise Men from the East. Shortly afterwards the drama of the new-born babies in Bethlehem commences. Joseph is again called and instructed by the voice from Above on what to do.

He undertakes the flight into Egypt with the Mother and the Child.

Shortly afterwards, he returns to his native Nazareth.

There he finds again at last his house and the workshop, to which he would certainly have returned before if Herod's atrocities had not prevented him. When Jesus is 12 years old, he goes with Him and Mary to Jerusalem.

In the temple of Jerusalem, after they have both found Jesus whom they had lost, Joseph hears these mysterious words: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Thus spoke the 12-year-old boy; and Joseph, like Mary, knows very well about whom he is talking.

Nevertheless, in the house at Nazareth, Jesus was obedient to them both, to Joseph and Mary, just as a son is obedient to his parents. The years of the hidden life of the Holy Family of Nazareth pass. The Son of God, sent by the Father, is hidden from the world, hidden from all men, even from those nearest. Only Mary and Joseph know his Mystery. They live in his circle. They live this Mystery daily.

The Son of God, the Word Incarnate, remained hidden for 30 years of his earthly life, hidden in the shadow of Joseph.

At the same time, Mary and Joseph remained hidden in Christ, in his mystery and his mission.

The Church has always been aware of the one who, in the eyes of men, passed for the father of Jesus, the perfect incarnation of fatherhood in the human and at the same time Holy Family.

Since we are preparing for the Synod of Bishops, the subject of which is "the role of the Christian Family," we feel all the more need of the intercession of St. Joseph.

The Church which calls herself the Family of God, also sees St. Joseph's very special place with regard to this great Family and recognizes him as her special Patron.

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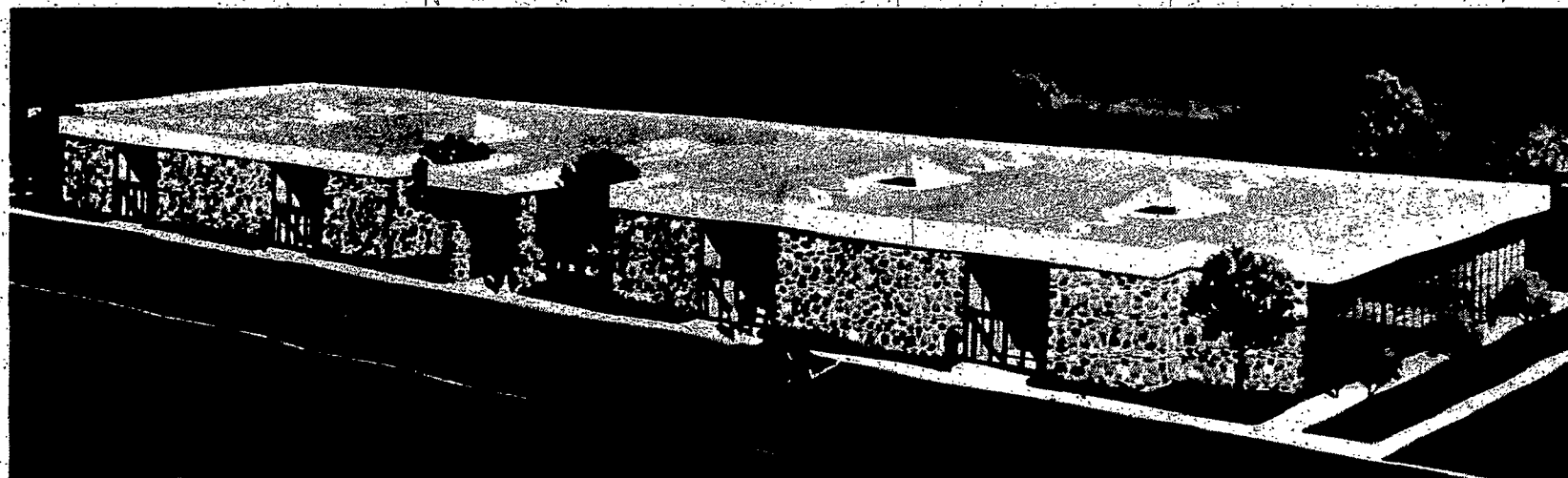
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The Open Window

By Father Louis J. Holman

The Church Does Permit Cremation

Dear Father Holman,

Many people — Catholics and others — seem to be convinced that cremation is a sign of the "irreversible" idea of the resurrection of the body. It was a mockery of that doctrine, as much as to say that if you burnt a body to cinders there was no way it could be restored in the resurrection. That particular mockery and threat has long since ceased, and the Church has seen fit to allow this particular practice as long as it does not carry with it that connotation. As a matter of fact, I called Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, and they have a plot for cremated remains.

(Signed) M.M.O.

Dear M.M.O.,

We have answered the question before. The Church has not seen fit to prohibit the fact that cremation is a legitimate form of in-

terment. The idea of cremation is not in any sense "irreversible," but some time ago the Free Masons of Europe made cremation a sign of the "irreversible" idea of the resurrection of the body. It was a mockery of that doctrine, as much as to say that if you burnt a body to cinders there was no way it could be restored in the resurrection. That particular mockery and threat has long since ceased, and the Church has seen fit to allow this particular practice as long as it does not carry with it that connotation. As a matter of fact, I called Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, and they have a plot for cremated remains.

One other comment — it seems to me that the time will come when cremation will be a necessity, just in some of our countries of land. I think that is way beyond our own lifetime, but eventually it will become a reality. In certain places it is already.