

WORSHIP IN WORK

PAUL FRANCIS SMALL, O.P.

"Art, as far as it may do, follows nature,
As a pupil imitates the master.
Thus your art must be, as it were,
God's grandchild."

A Paraphrase of Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XI
by Edmund Walsh, S.J., in *The Woodcarver of Tyrol*.



CHRISTMAS, the song of worship in the souls of men! The blessed memories of those precious moments of celestial grace and earthly charm still linger like the lightsome shadows of childhood days. The memory of worship clings, yet in these cold frosty days of March the reality of worship seems to have departed amidst fierce gusts of wind. In living the cold reality of work one easily forgets the loveliness of worship. Who is there to teach us the sweet prayer, blending the labor of daily toil with the worship of love? Things come to mind now that were hidden in the joyous song: "Peace on earth to men of good will."¹ There is the vision of one who blended work with worship and worship with work. In his life work became full of the spirit of worship and worship was made constant by the hard effort of practical labor. For Saint Joseph had to work in his worshipping of the Infant God. Jesus, the eternal Waif, was caught in the net of earth's most immutable law. The groans of the grave were meant for Him, too. God needed food, clothing, shelter. And good Saint Joseph, "a just man,"² became the provider in the path of God from the crib to the cross.

Saint Joseph is as the Saint of Saints, touching the fringe of Mary's mantle. Saint Joseph was commissioned with the sublime vocation of watching over the Son of God in the dawn of His earthly life. His was the mission of consecrated and humble silence. The sweet message of the Gospels would have us understand that Saint Joseph did not glorify Mary and her Eternal Son by powerful words to the world, speaking in the voice of the Holy Spirit in pagan lands. No, Saint Joseph found rich favor in the sight of God and man by

¹ *Luke* ii, 14.

² *Matt.* i, 19.

captivating Mary and her Divine Son with his service of worship and work in the humility of silence. In the accounts of the Gospels there are isolated words that gleam like tall spires of a lofty Gothic cathedral. There is no spire so beautiful in its gleaming as those inspired words: "Being a just man."³ The Evangelists built well the eternal cathedral of the life of Jesus Christ but we should whisper a word of gratitude too, for their phrases concerning Our Lady and Saint Joseph. "Being a just man":⁴ let these words, like water from a cool mountain stream, flow down the barren hillsides of life, over the low plains of desolate hearts, to soothe our fretful hours until the moment when we are lifted gently into presence of the Sacred Heart.

To Saint Joseph work was not the stigma of hate but the seal of love. Work for him was the mirror of worship and not the forgetfulness of earthly ambition. How terribly busy he must have been during those spring years of Mary's joyous Motherhood and during the helpless years of the Infant God! Those dependable hands, how practical they were in managing the thousand and one details after the miraculous birth of the King of Kings! Those nimble fingers kindled the warmth of a cozy fireplace. Those broad shoulders strong as the oak tree, bore the basket of life's necessities for Mary's hungry body whose pure breast gave suck to the tiny mouth of God. Then, too, he had a holy responsibility as porter at the heart of "the Eternal Galilean." He was vigilant, kind, attentive to the human calls of the world. He stood like a dependable sentinel at the threshold of Eternity, a welcome in his eyes, a welcome in his heart, so that the whole world might find a glad welcome in coming to Christ.

Then came the first purple shadow. The memory of Mary's immaculate achievement was dimmed by a sorrowful prophecy. Simeon, after holding the Infant, had risen and pointed to a faint, far cloud. Saint Joseph made ready for a silent departure from the quiet duties of porter. He was transformed into a militant soldier of Jesus Christ when, late at night, he heard the warning of the angel. Plans were made in accordance with the provident care of God in His high councils of heaven. The tiny army, destined to conquer the world for the eternal years, left the consecrated and hallowed village of Bethlehem. The Holy Family ascended the steep heights of rocky roads in the solitude of night. Their hidden, mysterious retreat into fertile Egypt found Saint Joseph anxious but not disquieted, full of deep tranquillity yet not sentimental, hopeful but fully aware of the troublous shadows lingering around his little Family.

³ *Matt.* i, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Herod died. But still Saint Joseph remained in prudent exile. He was seeking a cloistered silence where he could educate the Infant God in the human ways of life. In a little town of Galilee, Nazareth, he found refuge. Here Saint Joseph educated Jesus in the craft of carpentry. In a humble workshop the hand of God was trained in the perfection of the workman. The hours there were spent in simple, useful labor until the silent tearful hour came, when Saint Joseph, after living wholly for Jesus and Mary these unknown years, died peacefully in their sacred presence.

Jesus Christ still lives in the Blessed Sacrament. Mary is ever present to the sons of men who chant the memorial of her rosary. Saint Joseph is present too, the ever-watchful patron of the Catholic Church. As members of Christ's Mystical Body it is our wonderful privilege to be guided by the "just man" in our flight from the slavery of sin, in our escape from the courts of hell. We are in a foreign land but with his aid we shall safely reach a haven of rest and peace.

In every Catholic home Saint Joseph ought to be invited to assume the guidance of children in a flight from the erring trends of modern culture. If our Catholic generation is to be free from the false artificialities of a popular world we, indeed, must implore the counsel of the foster-father of Christ. The basis of all that is good and noble in life is the tranquillity of simple joys and humble needs. The gay laughter of children in the evening twilight should not be lost in a modern taste for sickly entertainment. Evening benediction calling Saint Joseph to be the silent witness of the family Rosary will be a philosophy for our young. Yes, and love, a deep and lasting love for the workshop of the humble carpenter of Nazareth should be fostered in the hearts of children. For work well done is the immortal engraving of man's personality on the face of this earth.

The song of Christmas, then, will not be forgotten in the rush of labor for Saint Joseph will help to blend work into worship and worship into work. This is his special vocation for the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. He is very near in this workaday modern world. He will surely come to us if we plead for his strong companionship.

Saint Joseph teach us the value of saying "Our Father." Lean over and whisper for us: "Hail Mary." Show us how to make our working hours the fine art of being God's grandchildren. Make our isolated moments of life the beauty of Christ-like days. O Watchman of the world, O Watchman of the night, O Watchman of the flight, call your children from their slumber in a sinful world!