

# DOMINICANA

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## ST. JOSEPH AND THE ROSARY IN ART



DOMINICANS everywhere, but especially in St. Joseph's Province, will be interested in this bit of Dominicana that comes to us from Professor Erwin Panofsky of The Institute of Advance Study in Princeton, New Jersey. The information is important because it comes from a well known scholar. Professor Panofsky is a distinguished historian of Christian Art whose work has been widely published in Europe and in America. His books on Abbot Suger and Albrecht Dürer are definitive works on the two men, and did much to secure the author's position of preeminence in his chosen field.

In a letter to the writer, Professor Panofsky describes a painting of the Nativity attributed to Petrus Christus, a Flemish artist of the fifteenth century, (c. 1410—1472) who represents St. Joseph bearing a Rosary, the painter's tribute to St. Dominic. The picture, now in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City came from England. But the donor and the original destination of the painting are unknown. This work of Petrus Christus says Panofsky "is one of the two only instances (in art) where St. Joseph carries a Rosary." The painting and an enlargement of the figure of St. Joseph are here reproduced. (See frontspiece and picture following.)

According to Professor Panofsky, "the other case of St. Joseph carrying a Rosary is a picture formerly in the Gulbenkian Collection, showing only the upper part of the saint's body which together with another fragment (representing a female saint), originally formed part of what must have been a magnificent 'Holy Family Attended by Saints' which can be reconstructed, with the help of old copies, from the two Gulbenkian fragments and a St. Magdalene preserved in the National Gallery in London." The connection between these three pictures was discovered by Mr. Martin Davies, Deputy Keeper of the Na-

tional Gallery in London, who will write a special article about it. Professor Panofsky says a reproduction of the St. Joseph may be found in either M. J. Friedlander, *Die alniederländische Malerei*, Berlin, Vol. II, Plates XXXII—XXXIII, or J. Destrée, *Rogier de la Pasture*, Paris and Brussels, 1930, Plate 120. "As long as the original context of the fragment was not known there was some doubt of the saint's identity," says Professor Panofsky, "because the foster father of Our Lord," he continues, "does not normally carry a Rosary; but the appearance of the Kansas City *Madonna* has now dispelled these doubts."

And thus Professor Edwin Panofsky adds his voice to other authorities in the world of art, to establish the connection between St. Dominic's devotion, the Rosary, and the Holy Family, in this instance represented by St. Joseph.

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The painting reproduced on the preceding page, "Madonna and Child in a Gothic Room and St. Joseph in the Distance," was probably done around 1450. It is oil on panel and measures 27 by 20 inches. The iconography and style are typical of the period and the Flemish primitive school, with no significant evidence of originality or innovation. The artist, Petrus Christus, was born around 1410 in Baerle, Flanders. He is thought to have been a student of Jan van Eyck. In 1444 he received his mastership at Brugs, where he lived until his death in 1472.

The picture on the opposite page is an enlargement of a detail in the original painting. It shows the figure identified as St. Joseph carrying a "short" Rosary. Men commonly carried such Rosaries in the Middle Ages, as is evident from illustrations and paintings of this period.

*Dominicana* is indebted to the staff of the Nelson Gallery and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, Kansas City, Missouri, for both reproductions. The original painting is in the William Rockhill Nelson collection there.