



The Transitus of St. Joseph

ST. JOSEPH AND SOCIAL PEACE

The fiftieth anniversary commemorating the happy event of honoring St. Joseph with the title, Patron of the Universal Church, calls forth from Pope Benedict a timely message. After calling upon the Catholics throughout the world to celebrate worthily this memorable occasion, His Holiness goes on to show from a consideration of existing conditions in society, "how opportune is the moment to intensify devotion and to spread it widely among Christian people."

In naturalism, which denies the existence of the supernatural and, consequently, of grace and flatters itself that it is able to establish the reign of justice upon purely natural principles, the Sovereign Pontiff sees the plague of the century. . . . "The effects of which, wherever it takes root, is to lessen the desire for celestial blessings, quench the flame of divine charity and withdraw men from the healing and sanctifying grace of Christ. In the end the light of faith is taken from him, only the corrupt forces of nature are left, and he is delivered to be the prey of the very worst passions."

It cannot be denied that social evils have been aggravated by the war. Some few serving their own interests and led on by the desire for worldly possessions have taken the opportunity to hoard large fortunes, while the burdens fell more crushingly upon the shoulders of the masses. Consequently, the chasm between rich and poor widens and the conflict between capital and labor becomes more and more menacing. Another distressing circumstance to which the Holy Father directs attention is the fact that conjugal fidelity and parental authority have been greatly impaired. Pagan manners and customs are once more asserting themselves. "So we note with deep sorrow," says the Pope, "that public manners are far more depraved than they were before, and on that account, too, the so-called 'social question' has increased in gravity so far as to threaten irreparable ruin."

Many hope to remedy these evils by the establishment of a socialistic or communistic state. Of such the Holy Father writes: "There has indeed matured in the desires and expectations of all the seditious-minded the advent of some sort of universal republic. This state, they aver, is to be founded on the absolute equality of men, community of possessions, in which there is no distinction of nationality and no further occasion for the recogni-

tion of the authority of father over children, of public power over citizens, of God over the collective body of men. All these things, if by unfortunate chance they should be brought about, would give rise to terrible social convulsions, like that which is at this moment desolating no small part of Europe. And for this very purpose,—of bringing about among other peoples a similar condition of things,—we see the masses of the people roused by the unprincipled madness of a few and serious disturbances continually taking place.”

Society is indeed very sick and but too ready to swallow every “nostrum of Charlantry,” while it rejects the one infallible remedy. Nor could fallen human nature ever discover that remedy. Only the revelation of God can show where it is to be found. The only hope for society—as many even outside the Church are beginning to see—is a whole-hearted return to the love and service of God.

How providential then that the universal propagation of devotion to St. Joseph should be reserved for these days, when his protection and guidance are so sorely needed. Naturalism on the one hand is the hater of Faith, the enemy of Grace, and the despiser of the merciful hand which heaven extends to lift up and strengthen frail human nature; devotion to St. Joseph on the other, banishes from the hearts of his clients the poisonous breath of infidelity and gains for them the grace of Christ to advance rapidly along the way that leads to true happiness, viz., the knowledge and love of God.

The Holy Father insists very strongly that Christian families, especially, should avail themselves of the Patronage of St. Joseph; for from him they will obtain the aid necessary to realize their noble ideal. History teaches that when there is a decline in the morality of family life there is a corresponding decline in social progress, for the family is the unit and foundation of society. Our own beloved country has every reason to fear this evil, for divorces are more numerous in the United States than any other country in the world, there is a growing tendency to permit the Federal authorities to usurp parental duties and the family circle is fast disintegrating under the craze for the “movies,” dance hall and other kindred amusements. This then makes the reigning Pontiff’s letter of supreme importance to the Catholics of the United States. Truly do the following words merit our earnest consideration: “With increase of devotion to

St. Joseph will come corresponding increase of devotion to the Holy Family of Nazareth, of which he was the august head, for the one naturally arises from the other. From St. Joseph we go directly to Mary and through Mary, to the fount of all holiness—Jesus Christ, Who consecrated the domestic virtues in His obedience to Joseph and Mary. It is then by these great examples of virtue that we desire Christian families should be inspired and restored. It is thus—and thus only—because the family is the fulcrum and the basis of the community, giving to domestic life the strength of holy purity, faithfulness and concord, that a new strength, and we might almost say a new blood, will circulate in the veins of the whole human society which will have new life given to it by the healing virtue of Jesus Christ. Improvement will follow not only in private customs, but in public and civic discipline.”

These words of the Pope reveal the secret of the powerful intercession and influence of St. Joseph. Not only is there his own personal influence, which is indeed very great, but, moreover, as head of the earthly Trinity he is the most powerful agent for the transmission of the graces of Mary, his spouse, and of those which flow from the Source of all grace—Jesus Christ, his adopted Son. Let us confidently supplicate the “Head of the Holy Family” to aid us by healing those wounds that disfigure the family of today, and to deliver it from the many evils which threaten the unity of the matrimonial bond and the Christian education of children. . . . For then only can the Christian family hope to attain its noble ideal: like the Holy Family of Nazareth—*‘unamimes in domo,’* one in Faith and one in the love of God.”

In St. Joseph, the Holy Father sees the model and patron par excellence for the laboring man. Did not St. Joseph in truth “live a life like theirs”? “So true is this, that Our Lord Jesus Christ while He was the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father, willed to be called ‘the Son of the Carpenter.’ But with how many and glorious virtues did He adorn that humble condition—virtues indeed which it was meet should shine in the Spouse of Mary Immaculate, the reputed father of Christ Jesus.” A direct descendent of David, he was contented with poverty—the protector of the Lord of All, by the sweat of his brow he provided for the daily needs of the Holy Family—destined to poverty, want and humiliation, he saw in all the Hand of God. “Therefore, let all

learn from St. Joseph how to look on passing events in the light of the eternal things to come, and seeking consolation for the inevitable troubles of human life in the hope of celestial blessings, aspire to these with all their strength, resigned to the will of God, living soberly according to the rules of piety and justice."

Lastly, the Holy Father exhorts the Bishops of the Catholic world to propagate and foster, in the many ways approved by the Holy See, devotion to St. Joseph. And as the Holy Patriarch is in a special way the Patron of a Happy Death, the Pope urges pastors to promote and support among their flocks such sodalities as those of the "Bona Mors," the "Transitu of St. Joseph," and the "Pro Agonizantibus." This fact should be especially noted by Dominicans of the United States, for during the past year the Holy See has entrusted to the members of St. Joseph's Province the propagation in America of the sodality, "Transitu of St. Joseph."

In the presence of such critical conditions as threaten society of today it behooves the children of the Church to harken to the fatherly advice of Benedict XV: "Go to Joseph." For just as it pleased Almighty God to entrust the care of the "Holy Family" to him, so now it is fitting that he should be patron of the whole human family.

"To commemorate the Pontifical Decree (of Pius IX,—in the year 1870), we ordain and enjoin that within a year from the eighth day of December next (1920), there shall be celebrated throughout the Catholic world in honor of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, a solemn function, the time and manner of which is left to the discretion of each Bishop; and to all those who may assist, we now grant plenary indulgences on the usual conditions." Benedict XV (July 25, 1920).

—Bro. Bernard Walsh, O. P.