

SAINT JOSEPH

The Just Man

1. St. Joseph: A Just Man Acclaimed by the Gospel

Who is a just man? Generally speaking a just man is one who observes the laws of the country, provided they are based on truth and justice. Justice means to do the right thing to the right person at the right time. This should not be because of the punishment; but based on true love which makes human beings holy and through them the divine *rhythm* is made operative all over the world. The paradise was an excellent symbol of this situation and also a reality, until the first sin was committed. Here the main culprit was the Satan who came in the form of a snake. In Indian philosophy snake is also a symbol of human consciousness, called to the higher degrees of consciousness, from the lower levels of sense and earth-bound pleasures. After sin the most beautiful green garden

of paradise became great desert producing thrones and thistles (Gen.4:17-18).

Now in course of time St. Joseph the just man has to play a decisive role, when the time came for the total restoration of justice by Jesus son of Mary, who was already betrothed to Joseph. Seeing Mary as pregnant, without his own knowledge, Joseph had reservation and suspicion. In this context Joseph who never doubted her innocence was facing a dark night before him regarding the way, how to handle the problem of Mary. There are stories about this. One story which I have seen long ago in a film goes like this: Joseph goes to consult a Rabbi regarding the problem of pregnancy of Mary. Hearing this, the rabbi immediately denies it as impossible in the case of Mary. He says: "she is the best girl in the whole village". But Joseph says: "she has accepted the truth of her pregnancy". The Rabbi was deeply shocked when he heard this. Then he went and picked up the book of Deuteronomy, from the Old Testament and read out the

passage which says that such a woman should be stoned to death (Deut.22:20-21, see No. 3, page 105). But Joseph felt with in himself: "This is not possible". For him this was a conscience problem: "I will never do this, I want a message from God".

The Indian Sanskrit word '*ni-nay*' which means 'to lead', helps us to understand the meaning of justice. From this root we have the word '*nayaka*': leader (the one who leads) and the past participle (*nita*:, *nita* and *nitam*:. as what is being led forth, whether a man, woman or a thing respectively). '*Niti*' is justice, namely the right person or thing is led forth to the right place. In the heart of heart Joseph had always believed that Mary is most innocent, humble "full of grace" as actually angel said to Mary. But this message is not known to Joseph. Hence the problem before Joseph was how Mary should now be led forth (*nita*) to her proper destination. He was in a sad dilemma and in need of a sign from above. Yes, St. Joseph was also a man of deep faith. So he looked at God

of Israel for a sign and accordingly she would be led forth, as God decides. Yes, the angel Gabriel came with a very happy message, the message of real Incarnation, namely the mystery of the Word (Divine Consciousness) becoming flesh in Mary. Thus Mary was rightly led forth (*nita*) to the formation of the first Christian family on earth, which was the beginning of the Church.

The Gospel according to Mathew clearly says that Joseph was a just man. This means that for Joseph justice is one of his supreme values. In the Gospel context this expression could mean that Joseph was a man performing his duties perfectly well, also taking care of the human rights of other persons involved and leading everything, responding to the natural and divine obligations. A just man respects everybody's human rights and will do accordingly. So when Gospel says Joseph is a 'just man', no matter what situation is, Joseph would rightly lead every event and its consequences to the just destinations. This

was the immediate problem Joseph had to face, when he found his betrothed girl, Mary, the young beautiful virgin girl from Nazareth, is pregnant. This was certainly an unexpected situation. Now he faces the problem, what to do with this lady! This was really a problem of a good conscience.

Joseph was in dismay and silence for a moment..., then he said, "No, I can't do this" and he immediately left the place. He was in a dark night; he thought in his heart: There is no question of leaving her on the road to be stoned to death. Then what about justice (*nīti*): How to lead her to proper destination? Certainly he would have prayed for some light from God. Then he thought: I would leave her in a safe place, that God may see to her future. When all these painful deliberations were over, then the answer from God came through the angel Gabriel: "Joseph descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you

will name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins”(Mt.1:20b).

2. St. Joseph: A Man of Silent Eloquence

In all the four Gospels we do not see in the Gospels, St. Joseph uttering a single word. But he knows his mission and he is very keen and determined to fulfil this mission, as time comes. His silence does not mean that he is not interested or does not really cooperate. It is just the opposite; he is always ready with his action plan and carefully got it done immediately. In India we have an ancient saying: “silence is the treasure (*bhūshanam*) of the erudite man”. He does not speak, but in silence he ponders over the meaning of message (for example, sudden journey to Jerusalem or to Egypt), serenely calculates the risks and quickly proceeds to fulfil the mission. The power he has is not of the human calculations, which of course is really needed to make long journeys through the desert. But his main power is

that of unwavering faith and unfailing trust in the words of God uttered to him through the angel. So these serene ponderings now become illumined by his faith in God and suddenly get transformed into luminous rays, showing the way to the destination. What is silenced is the rational thinking of the mind, but the super-natural light of God to the soul does work peacefully and beautifully.

3. St. Joseph: The Chaste Husband and Protector of Mary's Life on Earth

According to the Jewish law of the Old Testament, any lady with child and if the father refuses to own the child as his own, this lady along with the baby should be stoned to death. Thus the book of Deuteronomy 22:13-21 deals with this problem. The text concludes as follows: "But if the thing (complaint) is true, that the tokens of virginity were not found in young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and

the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has wrought folly in Israel by the playing the harlot in her father's house; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you" (Deut. 22:20-22).

According to the divine plan of Incarnation, this was an actual dilemma St. Joseph had to face: he finds Mary as pregnant. The Annunciation incident was a surprise for Mary too and she dared to ask: "How this is possible, because I am a virgin" (Lk.1:34). This is a mystery known to Mary alone. Later God will send the same angel and reveal the mystery hidden in Mary's pregnancy. See above No.1.

4. Joseph: The Patron of Workers in This World

When God created the world, it was a world of perfect divine *rhythm*. There was *ṛta* everywhere. What is *ṛta*? *Ṛta* is the primordial divine Order and Harmony which was reigning in the universe. Paradise was not only a symbol of this harmony,

but also a fact of original state of human being whom God created in his own image in unblemished splendour. All creatures, vegetative or animalistic, all were readily serving the humans and the simple stainless loving presence of the first parents of humanity was very pleasing to them and none of the creatures knew what is the exclusive self-centeredness; all were open to the other in their own capacity. Because the Divine rhythm was overflowing in and through everything, there was no need of work or labour, as we understand today.

But this divine melody of nature came to a sudden stop. Why? Because the hidden human Ego of our first parents rose up and approached them in the form of Serpent (snake). In the ancient Indian philosophy serpent is a symbol of human consciousness which starting from the level of earthly pleasures, rise up to the level of thousand eyed vision (*sahasrāra-chakra*) which is

considered to be divine, namely all pervading eyes of perfect vision.

The serpent represents the rise of distorted and Ego-centred consciousness in the first parents, which brought down their highly elevated divine consciousness to the level of a silly pleasure of eating a fruit, which God has asked them not to eat, though they were allowed to enjoy infinite items of various delights in the garden of the paradise. The forbidden fruit represents the obligation to avoid any temptation that may rise up from our distorted nature against the salutary divine Law for the holy and healthy maintenance of the *garden* of our human nature. But alas! The first parents failed to keep the order of the Lord and they ate the forbidden fruit. Suddenly, the great green garden in the world became the hottest sandy desert on earth which produced only thorns and thistles representing pain and difficulties. The flow of divine rhythm was completely lost. For their own daily food,

now they have to work hard and earn bread through the sweat of their brows. Today work is a law, binding all of us. That is why when Jesus decided to come down to the earth to redeem mankind, he decided to be born of a woman, Mary Immaculate betrothed to a man named Joseph who was a daily worker. Tradition says he was a carpenter. The people of his time would have considered Joseph as a daily worker, faithful to his professional duties. In course of time the Catholic Church has seen and acknowledged him as a model for all workers. Thus time and again the Church presented him as a friend, model and inspiration to the working class of the world. In 1889 Pop Leo XIII presented St. Joseph as a model for "proletarians, workers and the under-privileged". On May 1955 Pop Pius XII instituted the liturgical feast of St. Joseph the worker and assigned it to the 1st day of May¹.

¹ A.J.M. Mausolfé and J.K. Mausolfé, Saint Companions for Each Day, St. Paul society, Bombay. P.158

5. St. Joseph: The Patron of Good Death

Every human being is born to die. As far as we humans are concerned, death is certain; but all the details of our death, such as where, when and how are uncertain. Therefore for the people who do not believe in God or religion, death can be a threat of nothingness. After death what is going to happen? Nothing! They see only a big Zero before them. This negative way of looking at death brings anxiety about the uncertainty of one's own future and sometimes this anxiety and uncertainty has led some to the unwanted extreme step of committing suicide. But those who look at God as our own Heavenly Father who created us to bless us with an eternal life in heaven, death is an invitation to the next stage of our life, which would be ever peaceful and joyful as well.

Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, has developed a tradition of devotion to St. Joseph and considers him as the patron of

good death. The reason for this could be the real context of his death. He had the singular fortune of dying in the presence of Jesus and Mary, the humblest and holiest persons ever lived on earth. Jesus is God or the Word who became flesh in Mary. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Who will get such a great favour, to give up his soul to the heavenly Father, who has carefully chosen him to be a legally allowed marital companion to Mary and a foster father to the baby Jesus. This will take us to the next point.

6. Indian Devotion to St. Joseph

The Catholic Church has fostered devotion to St. Joseph. The Catholics in India has expressed great devotion to St. Joseph. All the three congregations which were founded in France, namely, Congregation of St. Joseph of Tarbs, Cluny and Tenessy have their own houses in India and are doing wonderful services in this country. I would like to specially mention that my own congregation,

the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, when it started in the year 1855, just one year after Mother Mary's declaration in Lourdes: "I am the immaculate conception", the first house of the congregation was dedicated to St. Joseph. This is our first motherhouse at Mannanam, on a small but lovely hill in Kerala, near Kottayam. Now it is a flourishing pilgrim centre, especially after the canonization of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who is the founder of CMI congregation with the whole hearted support of his own two formatores². In India most of the Catholic families have a tradition of special devotion to St. Joseph. Month of March is dedicated to St. Joseph. There is a booklet known as "The monthly devotion to St. Joseph" which contains for each day a small treat on St. Joseph, with a small story or event, which took place through the mediation of St. Joseph.

² Frs. Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara, both of them died before the realization of the cherished dream of the foundation of the new congregation.

7. May I conclude my reflections in the form of a sutra-vakya,³ summarizing my meditations on St. Joseph:

*“Tasya maunena sarvam sadhyate,
sarvatra niyate, sada sevenartham”*

By his silence, everything is made possible and led forth everywhere, always as service is needed.

Indeed, the angel Gabriel came with a very happy message, the message of real Incarnation, namely, the mystery of the Word (Divine Consciousness) becoming flesh in Mary. Thus, Mary was rightly led forth (*nīta*) to the formation of the first Christian family on earth, which was the beginning of the Church.

³ *Sutra* is defined in Sanskrit as follows: “*Laku alpaksharam saram*”: small sentence of few alphabets with deep meaning.

