

REDEMPTORIS CUSTOS / 8

The Eucharist and St Joseph, model for priests

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Speaking of sharing in the one Fatherhood of God (Eph 3:15), on March 18, 2009, during his apostolic journey to Cameroon, Benedict XVI urged priests to imitate St Joseph in their daily ministry, that is, to live their spiritual fatherhood by serving the divine will wisely and faithfully (cf. [Celebration of Vespers, Basilica of Mary Queen of Apostles, Yaoundé](#)). In the same speech, Joseph Ratzinger recalled the profound bond that the

priesthood has with the Eucharist: in its celebration “the person of the priest cannot occupy centre stage; he is a servant, a humble instrument pointing to Christ, who offers Himself in sacrifice for the salvation of the world”. The priest must therefore stand before the Eucharistic mystery with the same feelings of humility and reverence that St Joseph, by reason of his paternal role, held in caring for, treating, and even commanding Jesus, the Word of God.

For centuries the Church has reflected on the special relationship between St Joseph and the Eucharist. The biblical parallel between the ancient Joseph (son of Jacob), who during the famine distributed to the people the grain stored up in times of plenty (Genesis 41), and the glorious Guardian of the Redeemer is well known. To the former, the Pharaoh had entrusted the administration of all his goods, to the latter God had entrusted His Son. St Leonard Murialdo, developing a concept already expressed by St Bernard and St Bernardino, wrote that Mary’s spouse “did much more than the ancient Joseph: he kept the living bread that came down from heaven; he kept it not only for Egypt and a few Israelites, but for the whole world. Yes, Joseph saved from Herod the living bread that came down from heaven, so that after 30 years it could be given as food to the apostles and, through them, to all those who hunger for eternal life and happiness. Joseph hid this wheat of the elect for 30 years: Joseph’s house was a mysterious tabernacle; his arms a pyx; his chest a paten on which Jesus slept... And this most holy body of J.C., which nourishes us for eternal life, was nourished by Joseph’s labours”.

The inclusion in 1962 of the name of St Joseph in the Roman Canon, the oldest and most important Eucharistic prayer of the Church, clearly filled a gap, as had long been requested by pastors and the faithful (the first petition to this effect dates back to 1815). It is noteworthy that this mention was introduced by St John XXIII, who repeatedly pointed to Josephine spirituality as a fundamental characteristic of the priest.

Among other things, the gesture of breaking bread is the same one that Jesus saw his virginal father perform so many times. “The bread that Joseph broke was ‘for’ Jesus”, noted Father Tarcisio Stramare, adding immediately afterwards: “Jesus was nevertheless well aware that ‘the broken bread’ was Him. Joseph, too, was aware of it in his heart, though he did not know when or how this would be. He had sensed it in the words addressed to Mary on the occasion of the presentation of Jesus in the temple: “A sword will pierce your own soul too” (Lk 2:35). He had feared it in his hasty flight to Egypt to avoid Herod’s assassins. He had suffered it in the anguished (v. 48) search for Jesus who had remained in the temple [...]”. (*San Giuseppe. Fatto religioso e teologia* [Saint Joseph.

Religious Fact and Theology], Shalom, 2018, p. 512).

Although with less knowledge of the divine plans than Mary, the Co-Redemptrix

, Joseph too was therefore accompanied by sorrow for what was to be the Passion of Jesus and the simultaneous suffering of his own spouse. An apostle of the Eucharist such as the Frenchman Saint Peter Julian Eymard wrote about this: “He [Saint Joseph] saw through, so to speak, the coarse garment of Jesus: his faith went as far as the Sacred Heart and, illuminated by the divine light, he saw in advance all the states through which Jesus would pass, and he adored them and united himself to the grace of those mysteries. He adored Jesus in His hidden life; he adored Him in His passion and death; he adored Him from then on in the holy Tabernacle”.

Coming closer to our times, the founder of the Josephine Movement, Father

Angelo Rainero, vividly explained the similarity between the salvific mission of Saint Joseph and that of priests: “First of all, God obeys the priest, as He obeyed Saint Joseph. The priest takes the Holy Host, lifts it up, places it on the altar, puts it in the ciborium, closes it in the tabernacle, carries it in procession, brings it to the sick, distributes it to the faithful... just as St Joseph took the Divine Infant, carried Him in his arms, placed Him in the cradle, gave Him into the arms of the shepherds and relatives, carried Him to one place or another, commanded Him and subjected Him in all things to his orders”, just as the Gospel teaches. One can see then what greatness and centrality the Eucharist has in priestly ministry and why, as Cardinal Robert Sarah explained, today’s crisis of faith is largely due to the decline of faith in the real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

A priest devoted to the Eucharist, on the other hand, produces a number of other beneficial effects, which Father Rainero again summed up as follows: “The

priest, moreover, is the born protector and, in a sense, the saviour of Jesus. He protects His glory against the attacks of unbelief through his teaching; he removes irreverence and sacrilege from His adorable Presence in the Eucharist; he preserves the life of Jesus in souls by fighting against all the evil influences that conspire to extinguish it. Does he not, perhaps, share in this respect the prerogatives and sublime functions of our Patriarch in his most noble task as guardian of Jesus?”

St Joseph also shows the way to priests with regard to perfect chastity, which is periodically called into question by currents within the Church itself, despite the many testimonies of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium. Above all, we recall Pius XII’s *Sacra Virginitas*, which includes, among other things, a quote by the Doctor of the Church Saint Pier Damiani: “If our Redeemer so loved the flower of intact modesty that He not

only wanted to be born from the womb of a Virgin, but also wanted to be entrusted to the care of a virgin Guardian, when he was still an infant whimpering in the cradle, to whom, then, tell me, does He want to entrust His Body, now that, immense, He reigns in heaven?".