



Sunday – October 29, 2023

A Tale of Three Josephs

Dear Thomas,

I once worked in the same shop with **an old Italian man** who was at the end of his working life at a time when I was at the beginning of mine.

He took me aside one day to tell me a story. It was something that had never happened to me before, so **I was all ears**.

“Imagine this scenario,” he said. “Jesus rises from the dead and forty days later He ascends into heaven.”

That part I already knew. But **the enthusiastic storyteller** was just getting started:

“Now, just for the sake of argument, imagine that *you yourself* are present at that **scene high above us** when the very gates of heaven are thrown open to receive the great King who has just conquered death and is now entering into His glory. All the angels are there—imagine!”

Now he had me. What a scenario! I had **never imagined** something like that before. He continued:

“So, as you’re watching this, you see Jesus take His seat upon a glorious throne in heaven. And after He is seated in power at the right hand of the Father, He begins to look around at all the souls who have **accompanied Him from the land of Sheol**.

“These were the ones who **waited many long years** and even centuries for a Savior to come and release them from bondage.

“But soon, you notice that Jesus is looking for *someone in particular*. He eventually fixes on one person and calls him out. Surprisingly, **the one who emerges from the crowd** is an old man...like me.

“The people seem to know the old man well so **they make way** for the venerable figure as he slowly walks forward, almost embarrassed to receive such recognition.

“As he **approaches the throne of grace**, Jesus smiles a smile that fills even heaven with



its light.

"Then He does something amazing. **The King takes off His crown** and descends from His high place to embrace the man below. The man doesn't know what to say, so he says the first thing that comes to mind:

"Son...it's been so long. *How is your mother?*"

Ah, blessed St. Joseph! That amazing, silent saint. Beloved of Jesus and Mary. Worthy of all respect and veneration.

Images of St. Joseph in Various Art Forms



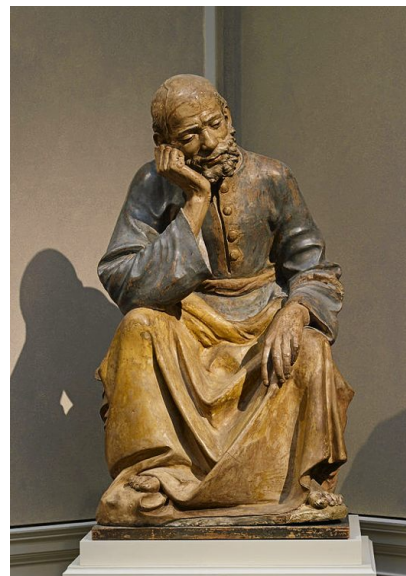
Stained Glass Windows - St. Aidan's Cathedral, Enniscorthy, Ireland



Cathedral Exterior Carving - St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hartford, CT



Joseph as Initial Letter "I" in Illuminated Manuscript, 1500s



Painted terra cotta statue, Italian Renaissance, ca. 1475

Among the Dead

The Italian man's touching story also preserves a theological truth about St. Joseph. Since he died prior to Christ's own Death and Resurrection, even the great foster father of Jesus **did not have access to heaven**. It wasn't possible for any human soul to enter until the gates opened for Christ at His Ascension!

Joseph, then, must have been among the disembodied “spirits in prison” (1 Pet 3:19) who St. Peter tells us **Jesus went to preach to on Holy Saturday**. Wow.

And though Joseph plays such an important part in the life of the Savior, it's astonishing that not a single word of his is recorded in Scripture. **We see only Joseph's actions in scripture**. God seemed to think that that was enough for us to know about Joseph, and the rest of the story we can get directly from him in heaven.

One of Three Josephs

But although he is silent, St. Joseph does not stand as an isolated figure in salvation history. We must think of him as one of *three Josephs* in scripture who form **a single unified tale**, each one shedding light on the other.

Joseph, the **Old Testament Patriarch**, and **Joseph of Arimathea** are the other two Josephs who, in a way, surround the foster father of Jesus and teach us his true significance.

St. Joseph the Dreamer



Rembrandt, ca. 1650



James Tissot, ca. 1890



Anton Mengs, 1771

Old Testament Dreamer

You may remember from the Book of Genesis (chapters 37-50) that the Patriarch Joseph was **the 11th son of Jacob**, whose sons formed the twelve tribes of Israel. This Joseph, flamboyant in his multi-colored robe, was the favorite son of Jacob, being the child of his old age.

Joseph dreamed a lot, which set him **at odds with his brothers** because his dreams seemed to exalt Joseph over the others.

“Here comes that master dreamer,” the brothers said on the day they intended to kill him. Instead, they threw him into a pit and then sold him to some travelers going to Egypt. As time would tell, **Egypt was the place of destiny** for the family of Jacob and for the whole people of Israel.

The Real Master Dreamer

St. Joseph's dreams and his flight to Egypt so closely parallel the Old Testament experiences that they **cannot be coincidences in God's plan**. But they also represent a sort of spiritual augmentation of everything Joseph the Patriarch went through:

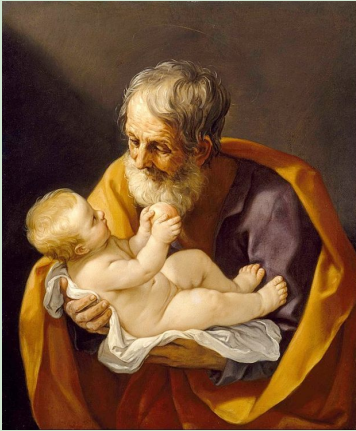
- Joseph of Nazareth also dreamed dreams (Mt 1:20-24; 2:13, 19, 22), but he received them expressly at the hands of **an angel of the Lord** who spoke to him personally—these mystical experiences were something the Old Testament Joseph never knew;
- Joseph of Nazareth **also went to Egypt** as the result of a crime (the massacre of the Innocents). Most importantly, as St. Mathew tells us, he went to fulfill a biblical prophecy related to the chosen people, “Out of Egypt I will call my son” (Hosea 11:1; Mt 2:15).

By the way, if you watched the first season of the hit show, *The Chosen*, there is one episode where Jesus meets an Egyptian woman and speaks to her in her native language.

The disciples are surprised to hear Him speaking a foreign language and **asked Him how He knew Egyptian!** Jesus told them He spent a portion of His youth there, when His family fled from Herod. The scene is based on a nice detail that is biblically accurate.

So, in sum, **St. Joseph was the real master dreamer**, but His dreams were not those of supremacy or interpretations of other people's dreams. They were direct messages from God for Joseph's role in a larger plan.

St. Joseph, Patriarch and Protector



Guido Reni, 1640



Esteban Murillo, ca. 1680



Hermann Joseph, 1700s

The Last or the First Patriarch?

Egypt is probably where Joseph understood his calling to be a patriarch. There, Joseph became the last of the Old Testament patriarchs or perhaps it's better to say **he became the first patriarch of the New**.

In a spiritual sense, the experience of the two Josephs is like a set of bookends on Israelite history. Joseph the biblical Patriarch was the reason the people of Israel found themselves in Egypt and subsequently endured **450 years of slavery**.

St. Joseph, the New Testament Patriarch, ended that much longer slavery of the entire human race to sin when he literally escorted the Messiah *out of Egypt* and back to the Holy Land to **begin His mission of salvation**.

The Church has always seen **spiritual slavery** as a worse affliction than any physical ailment, and St. Joseph *opened the way for us* to be free of that type of slavery.

St. Joseph, Head of the Holy Family



Peru Cusco School, 1725



El Greco, 1595



Nicolas Poussin, 1655

The Resourceful Man of God

Again, as we know from our biblical history, the ancient Joseph **proved his value as a competent manager** during his slavery, so much so that eventually he rose to the rank of second in the Kingdom of Egypt.

The happened because he interpreted a dream for Pharaoh about a famine that would come upon the world. **Pharaoh wisely put him in charge** of keeping people alive during the famine and is the one who spoke the very words that follow St. Joseph into Church history:

The **other famous quote**, later applied to St. Joseph from this period, comes from the psalms:

“God made him master of his household and put him in charge of all that he owned”
(Psalm 105:21).

The parallels with the life of St. Joseph are abundantly clear: **Joseph is the provider** for the Holy Family. Jesus “went to Joseph” His entire young life for His physical protection, His human nourishment, and His joy.

God put St. Joseph “in charge” for a time of His most precious gifts to the human race: the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Divine Savior. Wow. Let’s look at the parallels all together in one chart:

Circumstance	Old Testament Joseph	New Testament Joseph
Dreamer	(Psychological) Dreams of exaltation / interpretation	(Mystical) Dreams of the Plan of God
Victim of Injustice	Sold by brothers	Pursued by Herod
Exile	Sent to Egypt for a divine purpose	Fled to Egypt to fulfill a divine prophecy
Provider	Managed Pharaoh’s household	Managed God’s Holy Family
Protector	Kept his own family and others alive in famine	Kept the Holy Family safe and secure before and after Egypt
Slavery	Led Israel into Egypt	Led the Messiah out of Egypt
Divine Plan	Sees Will of God only <i>after</i> 40 years	Believed and obeyed Will of God <i>before</i> it happened

Cradle and Cross, Cave and Cloth

Speaking of “bookend” experiences, the third Joseph—of Arimathea—bears another striking parallel with St. Joseph (**actually four parallels**), which are pretty straightforward. Again, nothing in God’s plan involving St. Joseph is coincidental.

1. **WOOD:** St. Joseph was present at the beginning of Jesus’s earthly life and laid the Baby in the wooden manger, and *another Joseph* was present at the closing of Jesus’ life when He was hanging on the Wood of the Cross.
2. **CLOTH:** St. Joseph swathed the Baby Jesus in swaddling clothes to present Him to the world. Joseph of Arimathea swathed the Body of Christ in a burial cloth (which we now know as the ***Shroud of Turin***), presenting the mystery of Christ to all of history.
3. **HANDS:** St. Joseph’s hands were the first human hands to touch the sacred Body of the Savior (presuming Joseph himself delivered the Child). Joseph of Arimathea’s hands were the last human hands to touch the sacred Body of the Savior (prior to the Resurrection).
4. **RESTING PLACE:** St. Joseph provided a cave in the earth for the Savior’s birth. Joseph of Arimathea provided a tomb in the earth for His burial.

The Story of Three Josephs

I’m sure my old Italian friend told of Joseph’s place in history better than all these facts, but they all amount to the truth that **God really used Josephs** to save the world.

Here are the basic facts as we have summarized them:

Joseph, Son of Jacob	St. Joseph	Joseph of Arimathea
Patriarch	Father	Saint
Israel	Messiah	Church

- The first Joseph *discovered* the Plan of God for the twelve tribes of Israel.
- The second Joseph *obeyed* the Plan of God for the Holy Family.
- The third Joseph *carried out* the Plan of God in and through the Church.

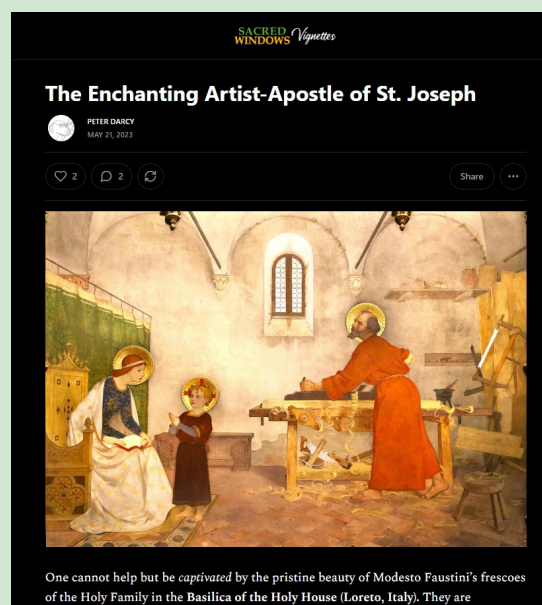
It should be clear now that with St. Joseph on our side—provider, patriarch, protector, mystic, and beloved of Christ—**what more could we need?**

Features

I'm happy to say that St. Joseph is **a running theme in Sacred Windows** as well as the subject of a humble website I manage for a friend of mine, www.GoToJoseph.com. Give it a look when you have a minute.

We also have a **mini-window dedicated to a marvelous St. Joseph painting** by the French artist [Georges La Tour](#), who captured a moment when Joseph was speaking to the Child Jesus in his carpenter's studio. Which one is the teacher in that image?

Our Sacred Windows *Vignettes* page is also endowed with **the blessing of Joseph**. You will be enamored with the works of Italian artist Modesto Faustini, who I call [the Artist Apostle of St. Joseph](#). I'm sure you'll easily see why.



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Thank you and God bless you!

Peter Darcy

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