

23 March: St Joseph—His Tried Life

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We will meditate tomorrow upon the second characteristic of the life of St Joseph; it was a tried life, and tried just by those who were dearest to him; his charity was put to the proof by Mary, his faith by Jesus, his obedience by God the Father, his patience by Providence. After these four considerations we will make the resolution: first, to receive all the trials of life with calmness and peace, without allowing ourselves to give way to impatience, to murmurs and discontent, and lovingly to obey in all things the good pleasure of God; second, carefully to avoid rash judgments with regard to our neighbour, and want of faith with regard to God. We will retain as our spiritual nosegay the words of the Apostle: "*The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come*" (Rom. VIII:18).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore the great design of God, who exposes His dearest friends to trials (Job XII:13). We find a difficulty in understanding, here below, this arrangement of Providence (Acts XIV:2), but let us have patience, and we shall understand it hereafter (John XIII:7). Meanwhile let us adore without understanding, and let us lovingly bless God, who does all things well (Mark VII:37).

THE CHARITY OF ST JOSEPH PUT TO THE PROOF BY MARY

Mary, after the Incarnation of the Word, could not either hide her situation from St Joseph, or explain to him the mystery of it, since the slightest enlightenment would have turned to her praise. What a trial for the charity of Joseph. On one side he will not either condemn or suspect Mary: charity thinks no evil and judges no one; on the other side, he asks himself what this mystery can be. How is it that Mary does not herself say something to tranquillise so cruel an anxiety? In his embarrassment, he was about to separate himself from her in accordance with the precepts of the law, when an angel descended from heaven to reveal to him this mystery, and to change the trouble of his soul into a delightful sentiment of admiration, of respect, and of love. Is it thus that we observe reserve in our judgments with regard to our neighbour? Do we not often permit ourselves to indulge in evil suspicions respecting the intentions and the designs of our brethren? and, what is worse still, do we not communicate to others our bad impressions? Do we take care in as far as we can to cast a veil over the faults of our neighbour, to excuse them, to hide them, and to turn the conversation when others speak of them?

THE FAITH OF ST JOSEPH PUT TO THE PROOF BY THE WORD INCARNATE

In the state in which Jesus showed Himself to Joseph, what was there which announced Him to be a God? Like other children, He was feeble and delicate, His limbs were powerless and weak, from His eyes tears escaped, and wailings from His mouth. How amidst so much weakness was it possible to recognise the God who by one word gave being to everything that exists; who by one single glance makes the world tremble; who

with His hand measures the breadth of the heavens and with a finger sounds the depth of the seas? Again, during the three last years of His life He sustained His seeming weakness by miracles; but here nothing gives any sign of His power, nothing but weakness alone, forsaken, even unnatural, if we are to judge by appearances, for it was necessary to shelter this Child by flight from being pursued by a man; it was necessary to save Him under cover of the darkness, and He could not return until those were dead who had sought the life of the Child, even as though a God would not be in safety as long as they were alive. What a trial for the faith of Joseph! But he comes out of it a conqueror, and without asking for miracles like the incredulous Jew, he recognises his God in this Child; in this external powerlessness he adores the supreme power which commands everything. The annihilations of the Incarnate Word increase his charity, which admires the principle of them (St Bernard), but without in any degree diminishing the vivacity and simplicity of his faith. What a lesson for us in presence of the Holy Eucharist!

THE OBEDIENCE OF ST JOSEPH PUT TO THE PROOF BY GOD THE FATHER

Go to Bethlehem, He had said to him, by means of the command of a heathen king; fly into Egypt, an angel came to tell him; return to the land of Israel, another heavenly messenger came to say to him. But, O my God, what could not Joseph have brought forward in opposition to all these commands? To go to Bethlehem! but Mary was approaching the term of her pregnancy, and the journey would expose to peril the life of the Child. To fly into Egypt! but what can a God fear from a man? To fly that same night! but why not wait for the daylight? To fly to so distant a country! but with what resources sufficient to defray the expenses of the journey and the needs of three persons in an unknown land? Joseph does not hesitate in presence of these trials; he obeys with simplicity, he sets off instantly and without questioning. O prompt and perfect obedience, simple and upright, courageous and intrepid! What a fresh lesson for me!

THE PATIENCE OF ST JOSEPH PUT TO THE PROOF BY PROVIDENCE

We do not read that before the birth of Jesus Joseph was exercised by great tribulations; he doubtless led the kind of humble and modest life which finds its happiness in what suffices. But after the birth of the Divine Child, the life of Joseph was nothing but one long martyrdom; until then he had not been without a home; afterwards, his retreat was a stable. Until then, he had lived tranquilly, surmounting his poverty by labour; afterwards, he was persecuted, and constrained to lead a life of exile in a strange land. Until then, desiring little, he had known but little anguish; afterwards, his compassionate soul was torn when he heard the old man Simeon say to Mary: "*Thy soul a sword shall pierce*" (Luke 11:35); until then, possessing little, he had little to lose; afterwards, he had Jesus, and he lost Him at Jerusalem. What an affliction! Ah, rather have lost all, for without Jesus, what is the whole earth? He does indeed find Him at last, but death comes to separate him from Jesus a second time, and he quits Him, not to see Him again until, on the day of His resurrection, He visits limbo. It is thus that the patience of St Joseph was tried by a series of tribulations, and, in the midst of it all, Joseph was calm and resigned. He understood that tribulations are the crucible in which God purifies the virtue of those whom He loves, that the way of the cross is the only one which leads to heaven, that all the just must pass along it, and that Jesus never visits a soul without taking His cross

with Him. Are these our dispositions? Do we not imitate, on the contrary, the man of the world who lives only for pleasure, who will always have his comforts and be at his ease, who will deprive himself of nothing, mortify himself in nothing, and who is irritated by suffering and contradiction?

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.