

22 March: St Joseph—His Hidden Life

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

It is not enough to honour and to invoke St Joseph, as our preceding meditations have taught us to do: we must also imitate him; and that we may do so we will study the characteristics of his most holy life. The first characteristic, which will be the subject of our meditation tomorrow, is, that it was a hidden life, a life hidden: first, in retreat; second, in silence; third, in obscurity and forgotten by the world. We will then make the resolution: first, not to go into the world, except from necessity; second, never to say anything which is to our own advantage; third, not to endeavour to parade ourselves and attract notice. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of the Imitation: "*Love to be ignored and counted as nothing*" (I Imit. 11:13).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore the Holy Spirit depicting to us a feature in the life of St Joseph. He was a just man, the gospel says (Matt. 1:19), that is to say, perfect, and so remarkable for holiness that several holy doctors believe that he was, like St John the Baptist, sanctified in the womb of his mother. Let us ask this great saint for some share in his grace, above all in his humility, the base of all virtue, which made him so much love a hidden life.

ST JOSEPH LEADS A HIDDEN LIFE IN RETREAT

This admirable saint does not go into the world excepting when he is obliged to do so; he goes to Bethlehem when the edict of the emperor constrains him; into Egypt when a heavenly command calls him thither; to Jerusalem when a religious duty invites him there. Beyond that, he appears nowhere. He is never seen in the town mingling in conversation and in worldly joys, in society and at the feasts of the children of men; his delight is to be in his beloved solitude of Nazareth. It is there that he enjoys God and His Divine Son, whilst occupying himself with the duties of his state; it is there that he spends his days sweetly, recollected in God and occupied with His sanctification. Let us learn from his example not to love the world, which dissipates and seduces the heart; to cherish a life of retreat, in which we study and know ourselves, where solid virtues are formed, and where we become accustomed to that calm, to that interior recollection, without which all progress in piety is impossible. Let us recall to ourselves the words of the wise pagan who said: "*Every time that I have gone amongst men, I have come back less a man than I was*" (I Imit. xx:2), and the words of St Leo the Great: "*The dust of the world necessarily soils even the most religious hearts.*"

ST JOSEPH LEADS A HIDDEN LIFE IN SILENCE

St Joseph was descended in a direct line from the greatest kings of Judah, and from the most illustrious patriarchs. The guardian of the secrets of the Most High, he lodged in his house a God, who honoured him with the title of father. Nevertheless, humility made him keep silence respecting so lofty a birth, so much greatness, and so much glory. Others would have imagined that it would be necessary, at any rate for the honour of Jesus, to divulge the nobility of his origin, to make himself the apostle and the evangelist of the

Divine Child, in order that all might come and adore Him; but Joseph, wiser in humility, felt that it was better to be silent than to say a single word which would be to his own advantage, and left it to God to make His Son to be known. Not a single neighbour, not a friend is admitted into the secret; and at the end of thirty years, the Son of the Eternal Father is only known as an artisan, and the Son of the carpenter Joseph (Matt. XIII:55; Mark VI:3). O marvellous silence! Joseph has in his house what was sufficient to attract the eyes of the whole world; and the world knows nothing of it; he possesses a God-Man, and he does not say a word about it. The Magi and the shepherds come to adore Jesus; Simeon and Anna proclaim His greatness, and Joseph says nothing to them: Joseph who had been so thoroughly instructed by the angel with regard to the divinity of the Child, Joseph who knew, because he had been a witness to it, the miracle of his birth. What father would not have spoken of such a son? Joseph faithfully keeps his secret, and carries it to his grave. A beautiful lesson, which teaches us never to say, or even to hint anything to our own advantage, and never to take vanity as our counsellor in whatever we may say.

ST JOSEPH LEADS A HIDDEN LIFE IN OBSCURITY AND FORGOTTEN

This man, so great before God, is unknown to the whole world; it is much if a few neighbours know him by the title of a poor artisan. He who was made to occupy the throne of kings inhabits a poor dwelling; he who might have asked for honour and glory from Him who disposes at His pleasure of sceptres and empires, prefers to remain in obscurity. If we would know the reason of this preference we have only to ask him, and in the bottom of our hearts we shall hear him reply: "Every day I saw before my eyes, subject to the weakness and abasement of in fancy, Him whom all heaven adores with trembling; Him who has but to say a word and the angels, swifter than lightning, go to execute His commands; and seeing all this, the love of glory and of celebrity, the desire to parade one's self and to attract notice seems to me to be folly; a hidden life, in which one is forgotten appears to me to be the only real glory, and I bless Heaven to have made me descend from the lofty rank occupied by my ancestors; I prefer my humble dwelling to the palaces of kings, my food and my coarse raiment to the purple of the great and the delicate viands on their tables." We may, indeed, easily conceive that a man of the world, who has not meditated upon Jesus Christ, and who sees nothing beyond the tomb, runs after the rumour which is called renown, and endeavours to aggrandise his littleness by exterior pomp; but the Christian who has reflected for a few moments upon the abasement of the Incarnate Word, and who beholds, beyond this life, a new world and a new heaven, where, in exchange for being forgotten and being obscure here below, he will have glory which is at once incomparable and immortal, such a Christian ought to disdain, as being quite below him, so false a possession, so temporary as is the glory of the world and the esteem of men, and aspire only to the glory of eternity. Are these our dispositions?

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.