

The theme for this year's Novena, in preparation for the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, centres on that particular quality of Saint Joseph, that might not be familiar to most of us, and that is, that Joseph is 'a friend', 'my friend'. Let us, enter into these Novena-days, seeking the grace of enlightenment and wisdom, so that our lives may follow the Divine Will. May Saint Joseph be a friend to each one of us, as we let him guide us on our spiritual journeying, our personal growth, and our relationship with our neighbour.

Joseph, My Friend

A GUIDE ON MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEYING

Photo: Marjke Desmet



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Originally from the Philippines, Nicolas Matias Sengson was ordained in 1980 as a priest of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). He was then sent to Chile for his first mission appointment. Fr. Sengson is specialized in liturgy. He obtained his licentiate in Sacred Liturgy at the *Pontificio Istituto Liturgico Sant'Anselmo*, at Rome and a PhD in Theology, with a specialization in Liturgy and Sacraments, from the *Institut catholique de Paris*. Fr. Sengson also holds a master's degree in music. He is a composer and his works include varied genres, among other things, vocal and choral poems for liturgy. He is currently Priest-Administrator at Sainte-Madeleine d'Outremont Parish, in Montréal.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS (*Matthew 1:18-25*)

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.

Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.



Joseph and his quest for righteousness

Joseph followed his family and religious tradition, as is manifested by his betrothal to Mary, but he had his own moral principles that guided him in choosing what is right over what is wrong. He didn't blindly follow what was considered 'right' by society, while provoking harm on Mary. Joseph was righteous, because he safeguarded the well-being of the other first, and sacrifice his own personal interest.

May we all follow this quest for righteousness.



Joseph follows the Divine Plan

The Gospels remind us unceasingly that they are happy who hear the Word of God and put it into practice. Saint Joseph is a friend, because he is not only an attentive listener, a peaceful person, but above all, one who puts into practice that which he believes in. He reminds us of that saying, actions speak louder than words. In this sense, Saint Joseph, my friend, foreshadows the public ministry of Jesus, whose concrete actions witness to the power of the words that he utters. *"When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him."*

May we speak words of truth and honesty, and manifest the sincerity of our intentions through the actions that we put into practice.



Joseph listens to the 'inner voice'

Joseph was a person with a deep sense of interiority. There was an 'inner voice' that kept on striking his spiritual sense. As the biblical texts describes, this 'inner voice' is not only to be heard but to be seen: *"the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said..."* The occurrence in a 'dream' might suggest a state of 'interior silence'. Silence, we all know, does not take place automatically, it needs to be desired, planned, and put into practice. Silence demands a certain effort to go beyond the distractions that surround us, and inhabit our heart and mind.

May we find effort and occasion to favour this entry into 'silence'.



Joseph names the new-born child, Jesus

"And he named him Jesus." Is this not a clear sign of true parental and paternal care? Joseph is divinely informed that Jesus is conceived and born by the foreshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and that Mary, his spouse, is a Virgin before and after conception and birth. Yet, Joseph assumed his vocation, and went beyond mere human tradition, to bravely and wholeheartedly provided the appropriate identity to the one who is to be proclaimed *"the Way, the Truth, and the Life."*

May we all keep in our hearts the reality behind the name 'Jesus', as Mary "kept all these things in her heart." And keep harking to our inner selves the question, "and you, who do you say that I am?."



Photo: Neémie Sauvageau

Joseph, My Friend

A COMPANION ON MY PERSONAL GROWTH

Did Joseph have the means to undertake such exile?

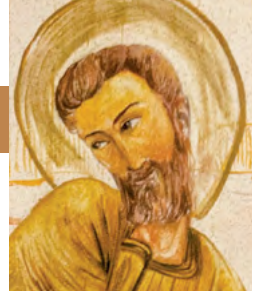
What arms did he have to protect Mary and Jesus on the road?

THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT (*Matthew 2:13-15*)

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

THE RETURN FROM EGYPT (*Matthew 2:19-23*)

When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazorean."



Joseph and his ability to make the right choice

Saint Joseph, my friend, is a singular guide to personal growth and well-being. He is a well-rounded person, attentive to the world around him, to the religious tradition of his people, and I dare say, ready to discover the socio-political situation of his time. The event of the 'flight to' and 'return from' Egypt gives us a glimpse of these qualities of him. In life, we are bound to make choices from alternatives that come our way. Often, we have no choice but to make quick decisions. Yet we desire to avoid errors, and make only the right choices. Saint Joseph is a model of a wholesome personality that we follow, in order to avoid indifference and self-isolation.

May we all be deeply inhabited by the Word and words of Jesus, so that we will be consistently transformed into wholesome persons, called to opt for the right choices in life.



Joseph, fearless stance in the face of crisis

"The angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph"... This Gospel narrative seems to indicate the inner strength of Saint Joseph. The Lord induced him to face a crisis, to reach a crossroad, and go through a critical situation involving his family. Was he well-informed about 'Egypt'? Did he possess enough knowledge on the routes leading to this unknown country? Did Joseph have the means to undertake such exile? What arms did he have to protect Mary and Jesus on the road? The biblical texts do not provide bountiful answers to these human questions. The only certain fact we know of is that Joseph "rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt."

May we all be guided by faith and inner courage arising from complete trust in God's providence, especially when crisis confronts us 'by night'.



Joseph, 'blooms where he is planted', in time and space

Saint Joseph stayed with his family in Egypt 'until Herod died'. We could only surmise the life that his family lived in an unknown country, with different customs and with strange people. Joseph, Mary and Jesus must have been treated as 'foreigners' and 'strangers', since they truly were so. We believe that Joseph probably continued to receive apparitions and messages from the Lord's angels, in a dream, and regarding situations affecting them. These were the times when this young family from Bethlehem started learning to live as a family, and where Joseph learned how to be a good father figure to the baby Jesus, about which he must have been introduced into a particular form of relationship with Mary, his spouse, who remained ever virgin, as well as a mother to Jesus.

May we all trust in God's abiding providence, especially when life-situations lead us to new forms of livelihood, at times we don't expect, and within human contexts we don't necessarily hope for.



Photo: Marjke Desmet

Joseph, My Friend

A MODEL ON MY RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

Joseph, the carpenter, must have taught Jesus to be a good ‘builder’, in private and in public.

THE REJECTION AT NAZARETH (*Matthew 13:53-55*)

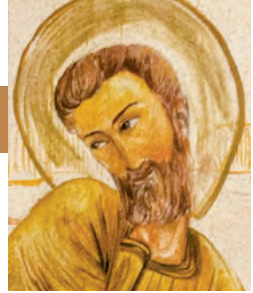
He came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, “Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas?”



Joseph and the vocation of parenthood

How is it to be related to a carpenter as one’s own father? What did Jesus learn from this man? It seems that the people clearly perceived Joseph as the father of Jesus, “... *is he not the carpenter’s son?*” Saint Joseph’s vocation as a parent, as a father to Jesus must have been very well lived, since Jesus grew up to be an effective preacher, an attractive public servant, and a powerful leader to many. The Gospel’s silence on the growing-up years of Jesus may signify that all this time, Joseph must have taught ‘his son Jesus’ values and qualities, including abilities and talents, that would later on prove effective tools for his public ministry. On the other hand, we could say that, yes, a parent could also be a true friend.

May we all assume the role of helping others to grow as persons, but especially witnessing to others the value of being closely related to a God, who is Father and Provider to all, a Creator letting his Son shine on all, on the good as well as on the bad.



THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE *(Luke 2:41-52)*

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom.

After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.

When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them.

He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favour before God and man.



Joseph and the way of human relationships

Saint Joseph is a friend who leads us to the best of friends, to Jesus! The length of time that Saint Joseph spent with Jesus is not the most important aspect in his fatherly vocation, but the quality of his relationship with the one whom he named 'Jesus'.

Jesus is the Divine Word, the Son of God, the Light from Light, True God from True God, the Immanuel God-with-us, the Lord, the Risen One! Jesus is also the Incarnate Word, born of Mary, through the Holy Spirit.

Saint Joseph was the adopted 'father' of Jesus. The human success of Jesus' public ministry likewise points to the quality of relationship that both him and Joseph lived. Joseph, the carpenter, must have taught Jesus to be a good 'builder', in private and in public.

It must have been Joseph, with Mary, who showed Jesus the value of good family relationships.

The narrative on Jesus' 'remaining in the temple' tells us that they "looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances." We can guess that their relatives might have suggested to go back to Jerusalem and search for their missing son over there. And at the end of this story, the parents of Jesus found him there...

May we all be appreciative of our family ties, our personal history, and the values that were transmitted from one generation to the rest. More importantly, may we live that communal dimension of our faith, and bloom into this community as a People of God.



Joseph! Make me your friend

Joseph!

You, the man with a heart
as open as the breadth of God's heart,
You, on whom Mary can lean
like a steadfast rock,
You, from whom Jesus learned
how to make his disciples his friends,
You, protector, model and confidant
for Brother André,
Make me your friend.

Joseph!

Be for me the friend who opens the door
to hearing the voice of God
in the tumult of this world.
Be for me the friend who teaches me
to discern the light of God
within the shadows of our existence.
Be for me the friend whose company
transforms everyday irritations
into a path of growth and life.

Joseph!

I want to be your friend,
like Brother André was.
I know I can count on you,
just like thousands of your friends
of all nations, languages, cultures
and religions throughout the ages.
With you beside me, my attention,
my compassion and my concern
for my sisters and brothers in need
will deeply take root in the Spirit
of the all-merciful Father.
Joseph! Make me your friend.

Amen!

“
**Go to Saint Joseph
and pray, he will
never let you down.**

Saint André Bessette, CSC

Photo: André Charron

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