



Ponderings On My Call as a Dame of Malta Through the Lens of the Life of St. Joseph

In the Year of St. Joseph December 8th, 2020 -2021

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“...forgetful of myself, learning ever from the Holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion, striving ever to promote God’s glory...” (From the Daily Prayer of the Order of Malta)

It seems to me that these words from our daily prayer could aptly describe St Joseph and the vocation he had to care for his wife, Mary and guard his foster son, Jesus. In this year dedicated to our dearest St Joseph I have often pondered on how our individual response to this call of a Knight or Dame in the Order of Malta very much parallels the life of St Joseph and his dedicated, quiet and humble service. He has gone mostly unnoticed and nothing much is even written about this man who was the first to adore the Infant Jesus and hold in his arms the Savior of the World. One could argue that there should be volumes written about his deep faith and knowledge of the scriptures and its prophecies but then he, St Joseph, would never have wanted that. His whole life was to be the undergirding that the young Jesus and his mother needed. God the Father desired that his vocation be that of hidden service – much the same as the charism of our Order.

From the little we know of his life Joseph was a man ***'forgetful of himself'***. Long before we read of his betrothal to Mary Joseph must have been a man of purpose, prayer, hard work, discipline, generosity, faithfulness and all the virtues of a righteous man. I don't know about you but it's not too normal to have a dream and know with certainty it was an angel of the Lord giving me a message. One can only surmise that Joseph had a deep union with the Father and lived his life of great humility always knowing who he was before God, open to say his 'fiat' whenever the Lord called without question, with alacrity, with joy. I wonder if we as Knights and Dames can say the same or do we get caught up in the trappings of our typically affluent lifestyles, our first world problems, over concern about our things, our time, our future or how we will be perceived? Are we as 'forgetful of ourselves' as we are called to be? If we heard God speaking to us (in a dream or not) to leave it all and go wherever he called us could we? Would we? How about our motivation? Would it mirror the total abandonment to the Lord's will as St Joseph's did? These are matters of the heart that only we can truly know for ourselves - but for me looking through the lens of how St Joseph lived his life gives me a deeper clarity of my call as a Dame of Malta. Being the unknown, behind the scenes one called to be the undergirding of good, generosity, kindness, service and presence to those I am called to serve in my little corner of the world, in my family, at work or to the stranger.

Since Joseph would have been Jewish he would have known the Old Testament in Hebrew and more than likely much of it was memorized. The Jewish faith is one in which every daily task and periods of the day are dedicated to God - were aligned with the Word and tradition. Joseph came from the long line of David and the Old Testament tells their stories which were as human as yours and mine. What we have the privilege and grace to read - and hopefully give us guidance and inspiration in our daily lives - they learned through some hard consequences as the chosen people of God. ***'Learning ever from the Holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion'*** was very literally the 'boots on the ground' daily life of these - very human - men and woman. Theirs was a time when they dared not even speak the name of God for it was so 'holy'. How do we learn from Joseph who is one of the characters in the Gospels how to have a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion? If Joseph was a Knight of Malta what characteristics would we see as his confrere?

One of our patrons, St John the Baptist, would have been well known to Joseph and his family. Joseph would have been an elder to John and one would suppose influenced the young John on those long walks to celebrate the Passover when the men and women would have been separated. Consider the many family feasts and holidays that would have brought this family together over the years. Joseph would have helped form him into the man whose whole life purpose was to create a path to Jesus, for Jesus and of Jesus. Knowing of the strong family unit and life of prayer of those days one could suppose that a pervasive spirit of generosity, commitment, knowing God as Father, humility of heart, prayer, sacrifice and service weren't the extraordinary, as it is in our day, but would have been the ordinary walk of a Jewish man or woman faithful to their covenant with the living God. How else would they have believed that Jesus was the Son of God? For he was their son, cousin, uncle, friend, nephew!

To be true any type of real Devotion always has roots in deep love. Joseph had to of loved with all his mind, all his strength and all his heart, 'Yahweh'. He must have trusted Him completely for his 'fiat' of love, his care and devotion for Mary shows the great Faith of Joseph. For we need to remember- Joseph was as human as you and me - unlike Mary who was conceived without original sin (she had more fullness of grace and knowledge - think of Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall). His daily life was

in the very presence of Jesus, the Living God and his wife, the Our Blessed Lady who was the most beautiful woman ever created. Whew! Joseph was truly a man among men!

For this very reason alone the greatness of St Joseph and the model he presents to us as Knights and Dames is absolute. He possessed Knightly qualities for he was the Knight of Knights he gave his life in service of the greatest woman who ever walked this earth his wife, the mother of Our Blessed Lord! He was the guardian of the Redeemer of the World and just like our call as knights and dames his whole life of service is hidden, unrecognized at the service of others not for our own gain but for souls, for the sick, for the poor. ***'Striving ever to promote God's glory...'*** was his whole life! Words fail me here and so I put to you the brilliant poem which is prayed daily by the Missionary Sisters of Charity and may I humbly suggest might be a daily prayer for all of us who said our 'fiat' in answering the Lords' call to this vocation in the Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and Malta. I give you the words of Cardinal John Henry Newman – it seems to me that praying this through the heart of dear St Joseph we may more fully know and live out the Gospel and promote the glory of God through all we do. Perhaps this prayer could give us all a truer portrait of St Joseph that Knight of all Knights who shows us the way to the heart of Jesus.

Dearest Jesus, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with Your Spirit and Life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly
that our lives may only be a radiance of Yours.
Shine through us and be so in us
that every soul we come in contact with may feel Your presence in our souls.
Let them look up, and see no longer us, but only Jesus!
Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as You shine,
so to shine as to be a light to others.
The light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be ours.
It will be You, shining on others through us.
Let us thus praise You in the way You love best, by shining on those around us.
Let us preach You without preaching, not by words but by example,
by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do,
the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear for You. Amen.

As a Dame of Malta it could seem that there is nothing for me as a woman in the life of this man. However, I believe there is much there for us as woman to ponder. In my experience most woman in the Order are strong, passionate, leaders, compassionate, advocates, protective of the weak, the vulnerable and the poor. Our gifts and talents are much needed but we can seem at odds with a mostly male dominated organization with a strong culture that not always favors the deeply spiritual nature and strength of its female members. In Genesis woman are called man's 'Ezer Kenegdo' (Hebrew) and I often have taken my queue on what my actions should be as a Dame (woman) from the rich meaning of these words. Our role comes from a different place: truly feminine and deeply relational. Living our authentic femininity opens the hearts and souls of our fellow Confreres and those we serve into a deeper relationship with God – a woman of Christian worth is more priceless than rubies- but it is precisely because her very dignity as a Dame is to draw all in as a mother would the poor, the lonely, the sick, the downtrodden; to allow those she is with to experience a bit of the love of the Father here on earth while in her presence. As the crescendo of God's creation we Dames (woman) have the royal charge of the

heart and soul of all. Perhaps pondering the way our Blessed Lady was with Joseph as her husband, the father of her son, how she was the mother of the Son of God or a friend to Elizabeth and Mary Magdalene, an aunt to John we might have a glimpse into our own feminine role. It is vital and it needs the underpinning of the masculine strength of good men who take St Joseph as a model.

There are so many aspects of St Joseph to ponder in this year dedicated to him. Below I share with you the titles of some of my favorite books about St Joseph. Some are no longer in print but perhaps, if you are like me, and like to hunt for literary treasures at Estate Sales and antique shops you might discover some of these treasures and I hope fall in love with dearest St Joseph as I did as a young girl. Perhaps, consider reading at least one book in the last few months of this year.

Currently in Print:

(2 stars denotes a favorite)

1. **Month of St. Joseph -St Peter Julian Eymard
2. Patris Corde -Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter for the 150th Anniversary of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church
3. *The Pious Union of St Joseph for the Salvation of the Dying -Fr Hugolinus Storff, OFM
4. **Year of St Joseph Prayer Book for the Archdiocese of St Paul & Minneapolis
5. **Consecration to St Joseph – the Wonders of our Spiritual Father – Fr Donald Calloway
6. **Priestly Fatherhood: Treasure in Earthen Vessels -Fr Jacques Philippe
7. The Life of St Joseph - Maria Cecilia Baij, OSB
8. **Brother Andre, Friend of the Suffering, Apostle of St Joseph -Jean-Guy Dubuc
9. An Hour with St Joseph - Daniel Korn, CSsR
10. **The Mystery of Joseph -Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe, OP

Out of Print:

1. Joseph the Just Man -Rosalie Marie Levy
2. **Go to Joseph -Rev Alexis M Lepicier, OSM
3. **Joseph: the man Closest to Jesus -Francis L Filas, SJ