



THE VISITATION

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The Transfiguration: A Guide for Lent

Allison Covey

Every August, the Church joyfully celebrates the Feast of the Transfiguration. But wait, isn't this the Lenten issue? You are correct but, as we enter into the season of Lent, the Transfiguration offers us valuable insight into how we should prepare ourselves for the joy of Easter.

Let's rewind a bit and take a good look at the Transfiguration first. The word itself, in English and in the original Greek (*metamorphe*), can be broken down into two parts meaning "change" and "form." In the Transfiguration, Jesus changes form to give us our first glimpse of His true glory. This event is so significant that it is covered in all three Synoptic Gospels. John hints at it but he is already so focused on Jesus' divinity that he does not need to cover this event to drive home the message that Jesus is both fully man and fully God. The Transfiguration makes it clear, even before His resurrection, that Jesus is not merely a wise teacher or a prophet but truly one in being with the Father.

Even with three separate accounts of Transfiguration, much of the richness of its meaning can be lost on modern readers without a little insight into Biblical times. Think back, way back to the Old Testament. What did the Babylonians do to get into trouble? Where did Moses receive the Ten Commandments? Where did Elijah go to stand before the Lord? Throughout salvation history, climbing up has, literally and figuratively, been a way of seeking God. Mountains especially were thought of as special points of contact with the divine, high places where Heaven and Earth meet. It is no coincidence then that Jesus leads His Apostles up a mountain before He is transfigured.

On the mountain, the Father speaks to them in a disembodied voice coming from a cloud. The only other time He does this in the New Testament is at Jesus' Baptism. The Jews of the time would have immediately associated this

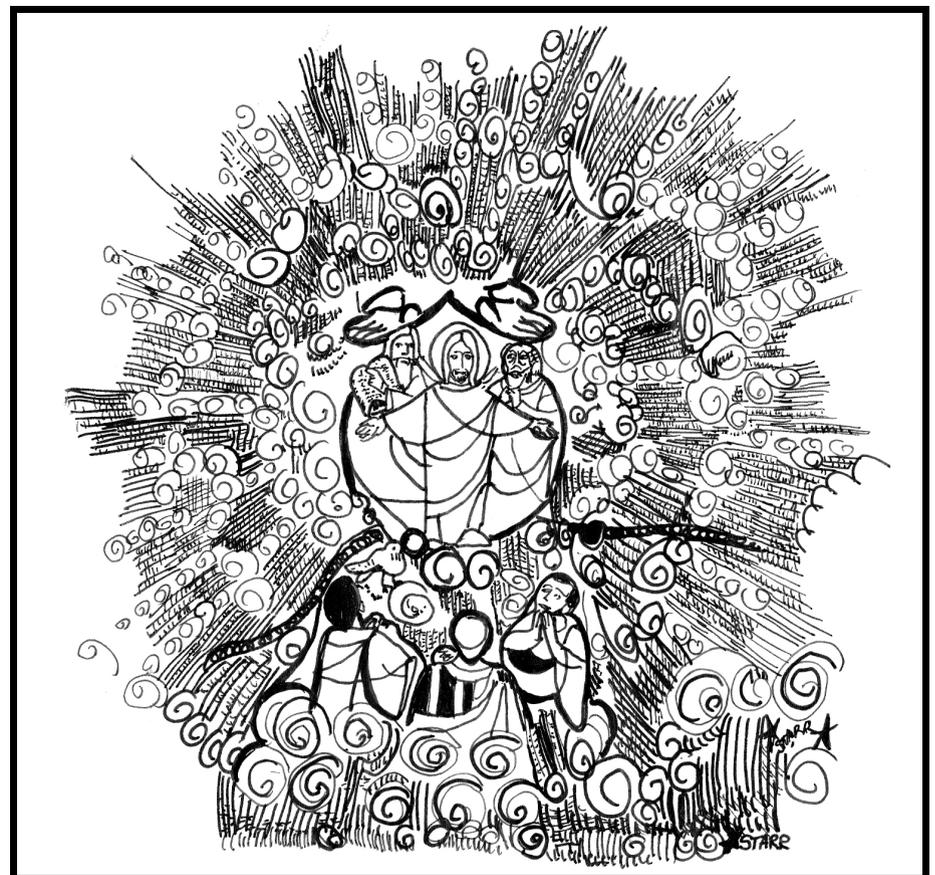
cloud with the pillar of cloud that spoke to Moses and lead Israel out of Egypt. In choosing this form, God shows the Apostles that He is still leading them just as He led their forefathers.

That Jesus chose Peter, James and John to witness His Transfiguration is also significant. Mosaic Law required two or three witnesses to attest to a fact. Not only does Jesus bring with Him three earthly witnesses but Elijah and Moses are also present as heavenly witnesses. This is not their only role, however. Moses represents the Torah or Law and Elijah represents the Prophets, two hallmarks of the Jewish faith. Their presence demonstrates that Christ is the continuation of Israel's tradition, the fulfillment of God's promises to His people. Jesus is revealed to be the embodiment of God's self revelation.

So what does this have to do with Lent? Now that we understand the broader symbolism, let's look at the finer details. His Transfiguration takes place while Jesus is praying, as Jesus always did before key moments in His life. He prayed during His baptism, He prayed before choosing His Apostles, He prayed before asking His disciples who they said He was and He prayed in the Garden. During Lent, we too are called to be people of prayer and careful discernment, asking for God's guidance in all of our choices.

Mark stresses in his account that the four men went up the mountain alone. They needed to get away from the crowds, the controversy, the details of their daily lives and focus entirely on God. Especially in today's hectic society, we too need to get away from it all and not necessarily on a sandy beach with a cocktail. A variety of Lenten retreats are offered in most dioceses. If you cannot commit to a full retreat this year, consider a Lenten day of reflection or mini retreat, offered in many parishes.

Peter, James and John were already men of faith and prayer and yet their



experience on the mountain frightened them, leaving them speechless. As Christians, we must be open to the mystery and awe of our God. Even when we are feeling pious and comfortable, the reality of Christ can surprise and overwhelm as well it should. We cannot be afraid to embrace wonder and accept that God far exceeds the limits of our human intellect.

Peter's response to the experience is one we might all have had. In his grogginess and his fear, he immediately suggests building three tabernacles (tents.) The Father interrupts Peter's churchy plans though and demands that the Apostles listen to His Son. During Lent, let us consider the way we worship. Do we recite our prayers and attend Mass on autopilot, just playing church, or are we really open to hearing what God has to say?

Peter's desire to stay on the mountain, to preserve that powerful moment is understandable. As soon as they come back down, people are running to Jesus with their problems again; things are as they left them. The Transfiguration shows us that we cannot preserve those

mystical moments indefinitely. At some point, we all have to come back down from the mountain, leave our retreat, and deal with the challenges of our daily lives. This does not mean that we put our prayer experiences behind us, however. The kings and priests of the Old Testament did not appear alongside Jesus during His Transfiguration, instead it was two of the greatest prophets. Prophets work amongst the people to spread God's message. Like Moses and Elijah, we too must we take the strength and inspiration we receive on our own mountains back down into the world and share it with others.

As we head into Lent, let us be inspired by the Transfiguration to be people of prayer, of discernment, of wonder and awe, of openness to the Word. Let us be prophets to the sick and the hurting and let us, overall, be transformed by the Gospel. 

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Say anything so absurd: A Sense of Balance

Justin M. Wozniak

Finding a healthy sense of proportion in a big project is a true challenge- it's easy to lean one way or the other or lose sight of the breadth of available directions. Sending a project or team off on the right path is like a barkeeper jovially dismissing a merrymaker on his walk home after hours. With a hearty slap on the back, he aims the man roughly toward home. Too far to the left and he will stumble into the wrong residence, too far to the right will trip him into the pond.

We've been thinking a lot about how to find the best course through planning for Nativity House, and realize that many others out there must have to work through similar resource management problems. For example, parish councils must struggle with this regularly. Some projects are just more natural, more easily supported, and more exciting. A common question might be: "What kind benefactor will fund our Parking Pothole Project?" Who wouldn't, with such a catchy name? Clearly, resources will have to be allocated from other more attractive projects to take care of business.

Managing problems like these is a process that involves a clear view of the facts at hand, a proportionate evaluation and decision-making process, and professional conduct and execution of plan milestones.

Many resources are props in the balancing act. Some of the obvious ones are time, financing, mental attention, and, honestly, enthusiasm. I don't have to mention the financial strain on contemporary projects. Additional hard constraints are the precious time available to clergy and parish employees.

Dwelling on simple subjects might seem really mundane to many project members. However, the pursuit of doing the right thing is, normally, a battle of proportions. The ancient list of the seven deadly sins (and corresponding virtues) comes to mind as a testament to the importance of balance in the moral life. The list is, of course, not a real list of sins, but of leanings or habits that tend toward discord. And while these moral guidelines may be difficult to apply to

decision-making in real life, they can be extrapolated to build a mental framework for reasoning about proportion in the decision-making process. Sloth can be thought of as a tendency toward the easiest way out of each decision, gluttony as the tendency to promote projects that benefit only those "within the walls of the church building." And who wouldn't recognize the impact of despair when faced with large-scale decisions and problems?

All of this is troubled by our limited ability as individual persons to "send things off" in a decent direction. We only have snippets of conversations, hurried monthly meetings, and e-mailed memos to keep things together as time proceeds. We do the best we can when planning, with the constant recollection that good decisions can wobble into problems after a while. Sometimes this reflects deficiencies in the planning process, sometimes a misuse of large organizations (which Chesterton famously warned can be "always disorganization.") Overall, though, balancing well based on a healthy mix of intellectual attention, insight into outcome probabilities, and realistic expectations of human processes will often lead to successes.

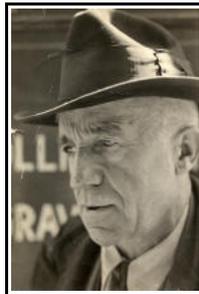
One approach to try when wrestling with a difficult decision is to exercise the best sense of the phrase "to take it personally," and to mentally work through the group issue as though you were an single person dealing with the problem. A personal response can be more creative than the beaten path that small group decisions often retreat, and expose new ways of viewing the solution space. This allows one to realize the human limits of possible solutions while opening up a conscientious, moral perspective from which to evaluate possibilities. Once opened up to the human approach to the issue, we can consider the balance that should be given to issues over time in a simpler way.

Of course, all of this should be taken into account with other forms of social problem solving, and the goal should be to work back to a communal solution. But maybe it helps to remember that, like the barman above, we recognize our limits and take the best aim we can. 

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Easy Essay: Freedom and Choice

Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



Freedom is a duty
more than a right

Man has a duty
to be intelligent

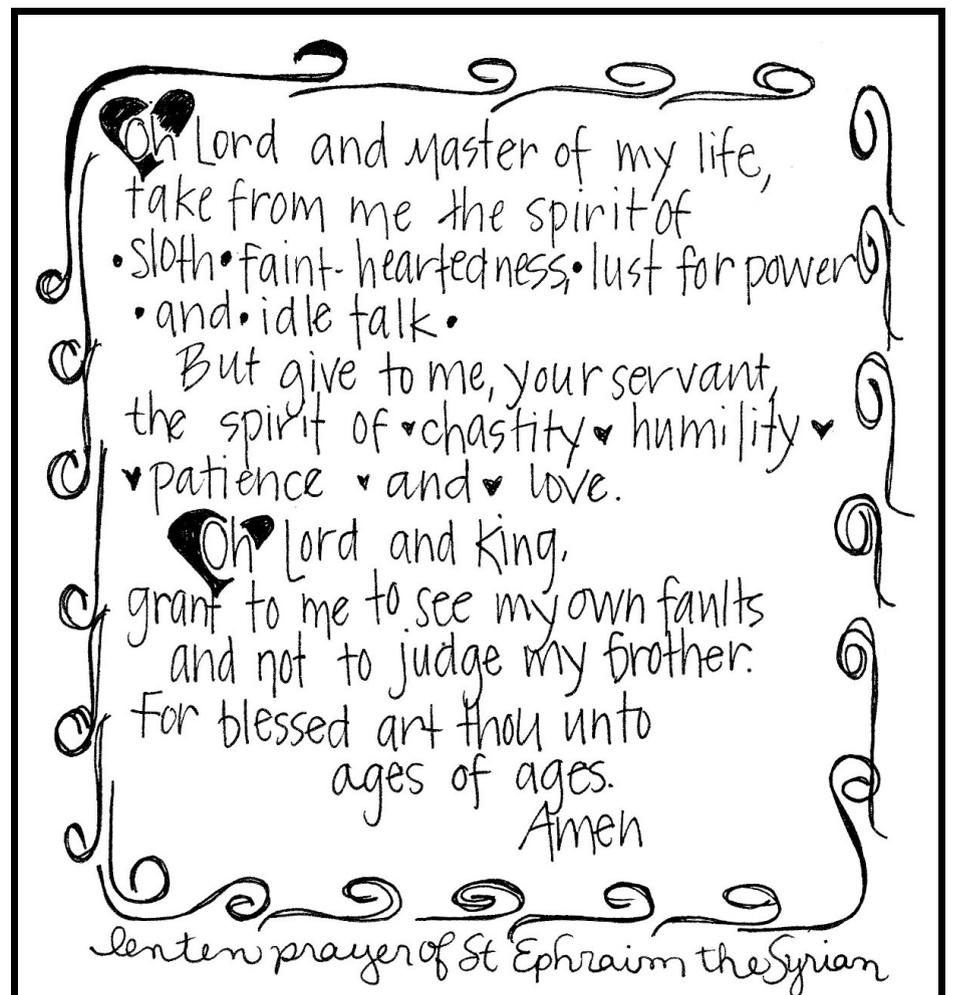
Man has a duty
to choose intelligently
between two alternatives

Man has a duty
to act intelligently,
using pure means
to reach pure aims

To use impure means
to reach pure aims
is to take the wrong road

You cannot go
where you want to go
by taking a road
which does not lead you
there

Having pure aims
and using pure means
is making the right use
of freedom.



The Call to Holiness Meeting Vulnerability

Venus Wozniak

A few months ago I was a pilgrim in a foreign place. I was constantly in limbo somewhere between being lost and found. At one particular instant, after driving for about an hour, only in a few circles, the destination was spotted. What an immense sense of relief.

We ventured inside the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Immediately upon entering, my smallness was addressed. Towering above me, at what I know now was about 200 feet high, was a mosaicked image of Jesus and four of his apostles. I looked into Jesus' eyes. At that moment a flood of all of my humanness washed over me. I was acutely aware of Jesus seeing to the core of my being. Part of me wanted to run behind the gigantic marble columns that lined the interior of the basilica and hide; part of me wanted to stay and hold the gaze of Jesus for as long as I could.

What I experienced that day was vulnerability. The part of me that wanted to run and hide obviously did not like being weak, powerless, small. There were things in the core of me that I was pretty sure I could keep hidden from Jesus. That day it was revealed to me as a falsehood. The part of me that wanted to capture that gaze forever was aware of the boundless possibilities of Jesus' unconditional love.

We are called to be vulnerable. It is the first of the Beatitudes, *blessed are the poor in spirit...* But the truth of the matter is, we live in a world that works overtime to sweep vulnerability under the rug. We are frequently reminded that the teachings of Jesus are either out dated, unattainable, or just plain ridiculous. Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche International, asserts *only when all of our weaknesses are accepted as part of our humanity can our negative, broken self images be transformed* (from *Becoming Human*.) Our very nature is weakness. What is it about weakness and vulnerability that is transformative? How can characteristics that are so despised in our society lead to beauty and goodness?

Jesus' own life was an example of vulnerability. *Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son*

of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:19-20.) Jesus was an itinerant preacher. He relied on the hospitality of others for food and shelter. In this particular case, Jesus presents his vulnerability as that of a homeless person. He offers this response to the scribe as a challenge. To follow Jesus is to embrace our vulnerability so that we may fully rely on the Father. That means we must be ready to accept God working through the presence of others in our lives.

Let's just imagine for a minute what the world would be like if everyone we knew was keenly aware of their weakness and therefore the necessity of total reliance on God the Father. If each of us knew and realized that *no money or power could spare [us] from suffering and death...we would be able to let go of self and everything that keeps us locked in to ourselves* (from *Ladder of the Beatitudes* by Jim Forest.) A major change of focus would occur from self to other. Since each person would be truly relying on God there would be no fear. We would be much more open to giving and receiving love. It would be heaven on earth *... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I turn again to Jesus' vulnerability. Jesus is the second member of the Trinity - Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Jesus is a member of a perfect community. At Jesus' baptism we are given a glimpse of this perfect community: *Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"* (Mark 1:10-11.) I can't help but think that the clouds opening up and the ominous voice reveal what is always present with Jesus. During the Last Supper discourses Jesus gives us an idea of how they work together: *The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ... If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you* (John 14.) Jesus' very identity is wrapped up in that he is a member of a community to which he is inseparable.

We are given a sense of Jesus allowing the other members of his identity work in him, for him, and through him. We learn that it is through Jesus that we come to know the Father and learn from the Spirit. We realize that Jesus, as a member of our three-in-one God, must decrease so that the other members may increase. We see this through Jesus' humanity.

Jesus' humanity is the ultimate example of vulnerability: *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.* (Luke 22: 41-44) Jesus knows what is coming - torture and death; he is afraid. He is in such anguish over what is coming that his sweat becomes like blood. But his humanity gives way to the divine so that the will of God may be met. The vulnerability of his humanity means that he can and will die, he will endure pain, he will be mocked and put to shame. At this pivotal moment, Jesus realizes his weakness as a human being, gives his will to God the Father and his weakness transforms - not only himself but the entire human race.

We are called to be vulnerable. It is when we are comfortable with our weakness that we gain glimpses of heaven. We will open ourselves to be agents of God's transformative love.



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Letters to the Editor

Dear Venus,

...He also shared your newspaper. That is the reason for this note to you. Venus, I was so very impressed. What a great and inspiring reading(s) it was.

Thanks,

Dolly Michael

Our Lady of Peace Parish

Good morning Venus,

I just received the first newspaper of Nativity House. You have an intriguing and exciting vision. I look forward to learning more in the months ahead.

Advent Blessings to you and all those associated with this new ministry.

Tom Garlitz

Diocesan Office, Joliet

Dear Venus,

This looks great! I love the artwork. LOVE the look of it and the message. I can't wait to see it [in print]

Colleen Connolly

University of Buffalo, NY

What is Nativity House?

Nativity House is a community project in progress. The community will soon include:

- A house of hospitality for first time mothers;
- A mothering community offering education and support for all mothers;
- A community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community; and
- A healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

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Call for Contributions

This is only the second issue of *The Visitation*! Please contact us if you would like to contribute.

We need help with:

- Articles and topics: news, views, reviews, letters, event listings, etc.;
- Art: hand-drawn or graphic design; or
- Web and outreach volunteers.

To get involved, email us at newspaper@nativity-house.org

Profile of a Saint

St. Joseph

David Salinas

March 19 Patron of the Universal Church, Fathers, Workers

We wish we could know more about St. Joseph - when and where he was born, how he spent his days and how he died. Scripture has left us with *being a just man* (Matthew 1:18.) Scripture also has Joseph coming from two different fathers, *Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary* (Matthew 1:16) and *Joseph, the son of Heli*, (Luke 3:23.) One thing scholars agree he is from the lineage of David.

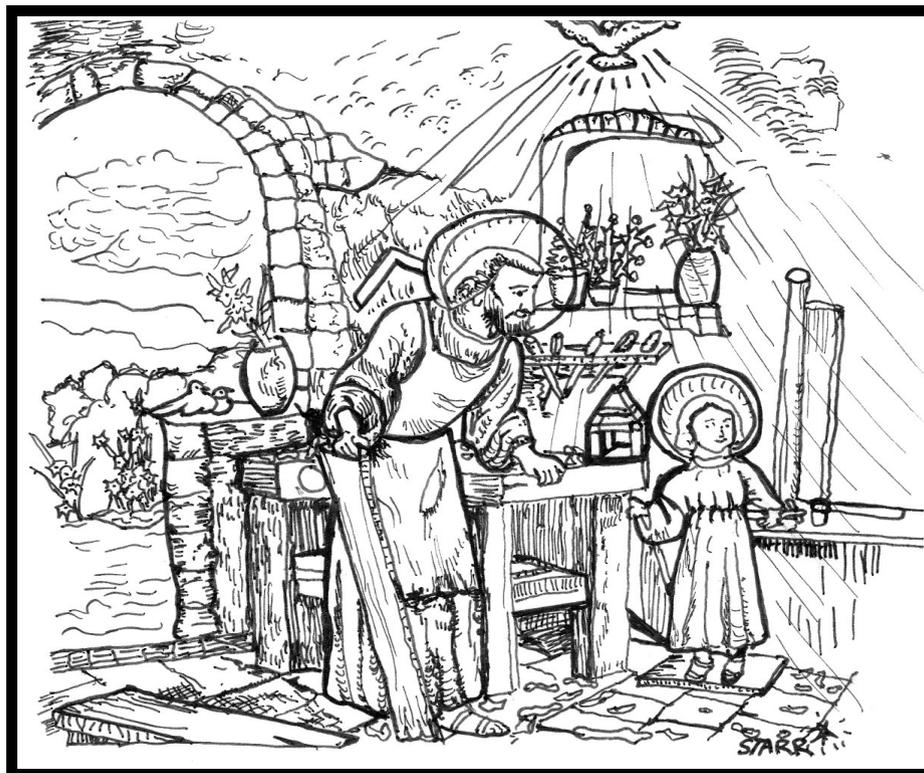
The Catholic Church celebrates two feast days for Joseph. Pius IX, himself singularly devoted to St. Joseph, was to extend to the whole Church the feast of the Patronage (1847.) In December, 1870, according to the wishes of the bishops and of all the faithful, he solemnly declared the Holy Patriarch Joseph, Patron of the Catholic Church, thus declaring his feast March 19 for Joseph the Husband of Mary. Pius XII instituted May 1 the feast of St. Joseph the Worker in 1955.

The highest type of worship or adoration referred to by Catholics, *Latria*, is given to Jesus Christ. The honor paid to Joseph and the saints is infinitely lower. When it is given to the saints, it is referred to as "dulia" and when it is given to Mary it is referred to as "hyperdulia" because it surpasses the veneration given to the angels and saints combined.

Joseph has three significant relationships - with Mary, Jesus, and the Heavenly Father. In his first dream, *Behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost . . . And Joseph, rising from*

his sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife (Matthew 1:19, 20, 24.) At that moment, Joseph echoes in a silent and simple way Mary's acceptance of the Annunciation - the decisive moment for all humanity. In those words Joseph changes and begins his silent journey as a humble faithful servant, leaving for all of us a model of life in faith.

In his second dream, *behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and*



said "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child and destroy him (Matthew 2:13-15.)

In his third dream, *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 (Matthew 2:19-20.)

In each dream God talks to Joseph and he is obedient.

Joseph and Mary were legally married at their betrothal. Being Mary's husband he became the custodian of two hearts with all the graces to fulfill his vocation. He became the custodian of the Heart of the Mother of God, Mary, by taking her as his wife when it seemed contrary to the law. The grace of love in which St. Joseph received from Holy Spirit makes him a participant in all the goods his wife possesses. This allowed them to grow to perfection. He had to possess much of the same virtues to a high degree as Mary

St. Joseph has been called *Shadow of the Father*. Like every father Joseph was called to be a living image of the heavenly father to his child. *By a special gift from heaven, all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father's heart can know* (Guardian of the Redeemer Pope Pius XII.)

St. Joseph lived faithfully and lovingly in his mission - entrusted to him by God - to protect and safeguard Christ and his Body, the Church. Joseph believed in the divine plan of God that would be fulfilled through his willing cooperation. Privileged to bear God in his hands, to kiss him, to dress him and watch over him much like Mary did. Jesus learned obedience from St. Joseph and St. Joseph learned obedience by obeying the Father with the gift of the person of Jesus. Like Mary, his heart was in total union with the Heart of Jesus and nourished by love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Work was the daily sharing. Work was the expression of love in the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The Gospel states St. Joseph was a carpenter. Luke recounts the episode that occurred in the Temple: *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.* (Luke 2:51.) Obedience should be understood as sharing in the work of Joseph. Sharing in the work, he is known as the carpenter's son.

Could the Family of Nazareth be an example and model for the modern family?

SAINT JOSEPH PRAY FOR US!

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