



YEAR of SAINT JOSEPH

“Show yourself a father, and guide us in the path of life”

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St Joseph – A Hidden Life

By Bishop Gregory Homeming OCD

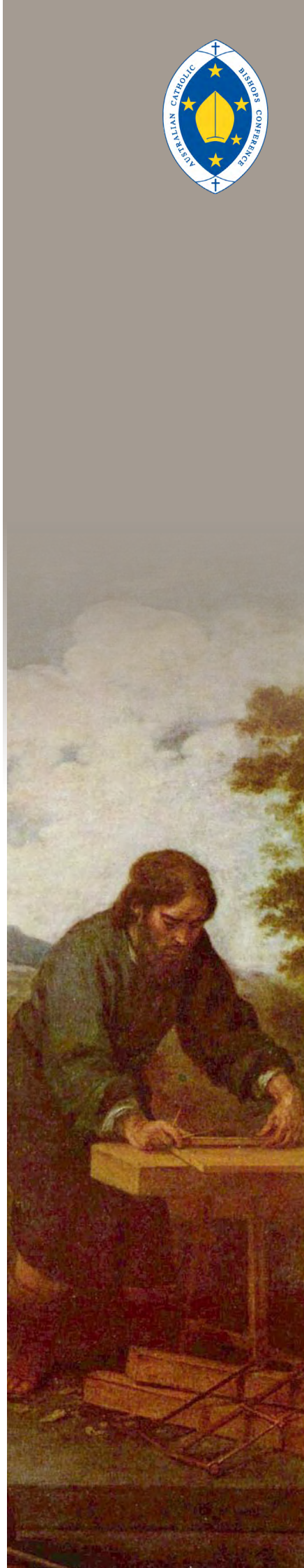
St Teresa of Avila dedicated 10 of the 15 monasteries which she founded to the care of St Joseph. Her devotion to him helped establish the place which the Church accords him today. In spite of the honour given him, very little is known about this man.

Like Prince Philip, the late husband of Queen Elizabeth, St Joseph took a lesser role compared to Jesus and Mary. He stood behind them, giving his support and love.

Even though he was not Jesus' father, Joseph does give Jesus a name and ancestry. Jesus, the carpenter's son, thought to be the son of Joseph, is of the house of Joseph and through this a descendant of David. While we may conjecture the role that Joseph played in the Holy Family, we cannot build an historical picture of the man. However, we may surmise the inner man by asking appropriate questions.

When we meet Joseph in Matthew's Gospel, he is about to informally divorce Mary because she is with child. He has a dream and as a consequence his life changes.

Why did he believe the dream? Few of us believe our dreams. Psychologists tell us that dreams are about the one who dreams, not the people who populate the dream. What does Joseph's dream and his response tell us about the saint?



“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Joseph could not have understood this. There are no other instances of women conceiving of the Holy Spirit, and it is doubtful that he would have known who or what the Holy Spirit was. Why did he follow the dream?

As is often the case, a dream taps into the depths of the inner person. In Joseph’s case, I think that he believed the dream because he wanted to. He loved Mary and did not want to divorce her. He believed because he loved. Here love and faith work together.

The darkest moment of Joseph’s life is the instant that he realises that Mary is pregnant and he is not the father. The dream speaks into this darkness and uncovers the depth of his love for Mary. Perhaps he didn’t know how much he loved her; nevertheless, the life which he will now live is proof of that love.

The dream, faith and love do not guarantee freedom from doubt. St Augustine tells us that to doubt is human. I wonder what Joseph expected. Perhaps he thought the child would be miraculous, a leader.

Tradition tells us that Joseph died before Jesus began his ministry and therefore Joseph was not privy to the miraculous signs worked by Jesus. For almost 30 years Joseph lived with and cared for a regular person. I’m not sure that Joseph ever saw anything spectacular. Did he ever doubt his dream? Did he ever wonder whether Jesus really was conceived miraculously?

This would have happened in the secrecy of Joseph’s heart. Since we all have questions and moments of doubt and uncertainty, we have access to the hidden recesses of St Joseph. We have wondered whether we are loved, we have laboured under uncertainty and we have made mistakes because of our doubt. How did Joseph cope and go on to live an integrated holy life?

He was a man of dreams. In the Carmelite tradition, this means St Joseph is a man with a profound interior life; he is a man of prayer. In the spiritual life, doubt, uncertainty and darkness furnish the inner sanctum of the soul. We search for God in this context.

Joseph is a master of this. In his struggles, he cries out “where are you hidden?” He does not wallow in his difficulties. He looks for God; this is a fruit of profound inner love. We all understand this because in similar circumstances, even though it does not feel like love, we find an inner strength which enables us to go on living and loving. We discover a love deep within ourselves which impels us; we share this with St Joseph.

Prayer is friendship with God. St Teresa of Avila took Jesus as her closest friend. As she grew in relationship with him, she grew in self-knowledge, and through self-knowledge she grew in knowledge of Jesus.

Part of St Joseph’s prayer was his relationship with Jesus and Mary. His love for them supported him in his trials. He experienced their love and he loved them. It was an intimate and real love. We can say that he was a master of prayer.

We might not have the biography of St Joseph, yet as we ponder him, we see that he had a profound hidden inner life which is relevant to us because we experience similar difficulties. His hidden life is also my life. He shows me how to navigate the ups and downs of life in such a way that I might draw closer to Jesus. In darkness we may find light, and in faith learn to love.

Bishop Gregory Homeming was named the Bishop of Lismore in 2016. At the time of his appointment, he had been serving as Regional Vicar (Major Superior) of the Discalced Carmelites in Australia.

