

ST JOSEPH AND THE INTERIOR LIFE

Among the many canonized saints of the Church we have the towering figure of St. Joseph. And as we reflect on the life of this great saint, one of the things we could ask ourselves is: What were the accomplishments of St. Joseph? What did he actually accomplish during his earthly life? And I think we have to admit that by the standards of this world he led a rather obscure and insignificant life: He was a poor artisan who raised and supported a small family from a humble, undistinguished village in Galilee during the 1st century. As far as we know, he did not make any great discoveries; he did not leave us any brilliant writings as did St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. When it comes to the history books, I imagine St. Joseph rarely even gets mentioned.

But if now, in our minds eye, we look forward to the end of time and consider the last judgment when God will make a final reckoning of what we achieved during our time on earth and we are finally able to see who it was that really made the greatest of contributions to mankind – in this light of eternity, I have no doubt that St. Joseph will be one of the greatest lights in the whole of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

And if we were to ask ourselves further: What is it about St. Joseph that accounts for this greatness of his? I think one way of expressing this would be to say that the source of his greatness lies, above all, *in the authenticity and depth and richness of his interior life*, the interior life of his soul, his constant communion with God and, of course, his intimate communion and relationship to Jesus Christ. It is especially in this regard that St. Joseph is a model for us all.

An authentic, deep and rich interior life is something that is open to everyone, without exception. It may be that God has not given us any great or outstanding talents; it may be that we have our fair share of faults and

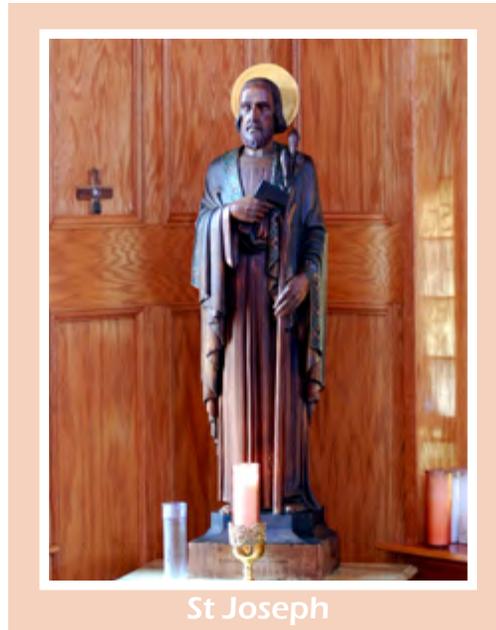
moral infirmities. But none of these are impediments to an authentic and deep interior life. One of the themes that Pope Benedict XVI frequently returned to time and again was that of the importance of cultivating a personal relationship to Jesus Christ which, of course, is a kind of relationship that can only take place within the interior of the soul in faith and hope and love.

What is it that stands in the way of having this kind of personal relationship with Christ? One could mention many possible obstacles, but it appears to me that one of the common obstacles is the fact that many people have a keen sense of their own misery

and brokenness and this somehow holds them back. It is perhaps especially religious and interior souls who are most aware of how much disorder and misery there is inside. And so, even though they would grant that an intimate relationship with Christ is a real possibility, they really don't believe it is possible *for themselves*.

And so in the light of this obstacle, I would like to share with you the experience of one man who was given a special grace in this regard. The man's name is Roy Schoeman. He is an American Jew from New York who converted to Catholicism some years back. He was raised a religious and practicing Jew but lost his faith during his years at college. He is a highly intelligent man who received his undergraduate degree from M.I.T. and then went on to get a doctorate at Harvard Business School where he did very well. In fact, he did so well that by the age of 29 he was a member of the faculty at Harvard. So, by the world's standards, he was very successful. But at the same time, interiorly he was going through a very hard time, questioning what life was all about and experiencing a deep sense of despair and interior darkness.

And it was in this mood that one day as he was walking on the beach on Cape Cod he was given the grace of



St Joseph

a mystical experience. This is how he describes his experience:

“I found myself in the presence of God, looking at my life, as though looking at it after death. And I saw in an instant everything I would be happy about and everything I would wish that I had done differently. And I saw that the two greatest regrets after I died would be, first, all the time I wasted in doing things that had no value in the eyes of heaven and, second, all the time and energy I wasted worrying about not being loved, when in every moment of my existence I was held in a Sea of Love greater than I can imagine, coming from this all-knowing and all loving God.

“I saw in an instant the meaning and purpose of my life, I saw that everything that we did had a moral content that mattered for all eternity... I saw that everything that had ever happened to me had been the most perfect thing that could have been arranged coming

from the hands of this all-knowing and all-loving God, especially those things that had caused me the greatest suffering at the time, those things that I thought of as the greatest catastrophes.

“And I knew from one moment to the next that the meaning and purpose of my life was to worship and to serve this God who was revealing Himself to me....

“In a sense, one of the most moving aspects of this experience was just becoming aware that I mattered to God, that God knew me as an individual, that He knew me by name, and that He had been watching over every moment of my existence and that this was the same God who created the whole universe and everybody and everything in it. I went home with a happiness and joy greater than I had ever experienced, with the knowledge that there was no need for anxiety at all, because everything was in the control of God.” ✕