



## Reflection 5

FOLLOWING CLELIA'S FOOTSTEPS  
TOWARD THE HEART OF JESUS

### **Joseph, Protector of Mary, Jesus, the Church, and all of us**

#### **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.

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"Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife" (cf. Mt 1: 24). Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries stressed that just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ's upbringing, he likewise watches over and protects Christ's Mystical Body, that is, the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model. (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, 1).

How does Joseph exercise his role as protector? Discreetly, humbly and silently, but with an unfailing presence and utter fidelity, even when he finds it hard to understand. From the time of his betrothal to Mary until the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem, he is there at every moment with loving care. As the spouse of Mary, he is at her side in good times and bad, on the journey to Bethlehem for the census and in the anxious and joyful hours when she gave birth; amid the drama of the flight into Egypt and during the frantic search for their child in the Temple; and later in the day-to-day life of the home of Nazareth, in the workshop where he taught his trade to Jesus.

How does Joseph respond to his calling to be the protector of Mary, Jesus and the Church? By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God's presence and receptive to God's plans, and not simply to his own. This is what God asked of David, as we heard in the first reading. God does not want a house built by men, but faithfulness to his word, to his plan. It is God himself who builds the house, but from living stones sealed by his Spirit. Joseph is a "protector" because he is able to hear God's voice and be guided by his will; and for this reason he is all the more sensitive to the persons entrusted to his safekeeping. He can look at things realistically, he is in touch with his surroundings, he can make truly wise decisions. In him, dear friends, we learn how to respond to God's call, readily and willingly, but we also see the core of the Christian vocation, which is Christ! Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation! *(Pope Francis, Homily, March 19, 2013)*

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### **Pope Francis**

Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally. He trusted in the angel's words. "The nobility of Joseph's heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity. Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger

picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment". Often in life, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow.

(Apostolic Letter - *Patris Corde*, 4)

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### **Mother Clelia**

I know, my God, that You keep watch over me, as over Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and that You will not deny me Your assistance, even though I have been unworthy of it because of my behavior directly opposed to Your divine will. Please! Through the merits of the Holy Family, through the readiness of their obedience, through the adversities they suffered during their long journey, from now on make me live a life of total surrender to You and to the one who guides and will guide in Your name; so that I might be the recipient of that care and predilection which You do not cease to use toward the souls who, completely forgetting themselves, trust fully in You, my God, my all. (*Diary*)

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### **Prayer**

O God, who entrusted to Saint Joseph the task of protecting Mary, Jesus, and the entire Church, grant that I too, following the example of our holy Patriarch, may conform myself to God's will with discretion, humility, silence, and complete fidelity even when I do not understand.

Grant that I may listen to your voice, look at things realistically, be guided by your will, and make truly wise decisions. Let me live my

Christian vocation with openness and readiness to protect Christ in my life, in the lives of others, and in creation.

Grant that I, with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as my companions, may protect those who live with me by being constantly attentive to you, to the signs of your presence, and to your plans. Teach me to lovingly care for each and every person, beginning with my family, especially children, the elderly, and those most in need.

Grant that I may know how to build sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness.

Show me how to care for myself, always aware that hatred, envy, and pride defile our lives. Help me to keep watch over my emotions, over my heart, the seat of good and evil intentions: intentions that build up and tear down. Let me never be afraid of goodness or even tenderness!

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### **PLEDGE: TO PROTECT**

- How do I protect my family, my children, my work, my relatives, GFASC, the elderly, those who are ill, those with whom I have difficulty, the Church, my parish, priests, creation? How do I care for my own life?

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*Saint Joseph, protector of the home of Nazareth,  
protect my family!*

