

Third Sunday of Lent
Third Sunday in Quadragesima (Latin Mass)
March 20, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“All the direction we really need regarding a devotion to St. Joseph is already to be found in the deposit of Faith safeguarded by holy Mother Church. Thus a true devotion to St. Joseph does not depend on any other revelations or apparitions as we shall see.”
(Dominic De Domenico, O.P., True Devotion to St. Joseph and the Church, p.8)

As a refresher, last month we reflected upon the fatherhood of Saint Joseph. We professed the belief that Saint Joseph is truly the foster father of Jesus through his marriage to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus. Everything the Church believes and teaches concerning Saint Joseph finds its foundation in this core belief. Now, we must ask the question: “Was Saint Joseph’s participation necessary for the Incarnation (also called the *Hypostatic Union*)?”

To answer this question, we must proceed slowly. Let us begin by defining the term “Hypostatic Union” for this term would become very important in the early Catholic/Christian Church. Due to the rise of the Emperor Constantine, circa 325AD, and his public proclamation of the freedom to practice Catholicism/Christianity, Catholics were now able to worship outside of secret locations. This would give rise to a new interest in these once persecuted Christians. With this rise, came new converts to the faith; men and women with questions and these questions needed answers. Now, as you can imagine, some of the early Church leaders (also called Church Fathers) were well suited to provide answers to these seeking individuals. Others, however, sadly were woefully unprepared, offering inferior answers. Some of these answers were both so very dreadful and contradicting of the faith, they would come to be defined as heresies. Their authors, priests such as Arius or Nestorius, would become the first heretics.

The first major heresies involved the understanding of the Incarnation of Jesus. They could be summarized in the question: “Could God become man?” To answer this question, the Church Fathers had to properly define the relationship of the two natures of Jesus. In the first Church Councils, the Fathers would state clearly that our Lord Jesus had, at all times present within Himself (in His person/substance - *Hypostasis*), both a fully human nature and a fully divine nature. Both of the natures, human and divine, cooperate fully in the person of Jesus, meaning the divine nature does not in any way overwhelm the human nature; nor does the human nature diminish the divine nature. What the Fathers of the Church said in their statement concerning the Hypostatic Union

is unique to the person of Jesus while being, at the same time, wonderfully amazing. Allow me to put it this way, God does not give to humanity a new natural or even supernatural gift, He does not make man more in His image or likeness, rather God chooses to elevate our created humanity into His divine self thereby crowning created human nature in a way which exceeds all other created things, including the angels.

I feel my words cannot impress upon you just how significant this declaration of the Hypostatic Union/Incarnation was and is. The great mind of Saint Thomas Aquinas would express his awe in these words: “The mind cannot conceive anything more remarkable than the immense reality contained in the expression: the Son of God, true God, became man.”

With the term Hypostatic Union/Incarnation defined for you, we can now return to our original question concerning Saint Joseph’s participation in the Incarnation. Was his cooperation truly necessary? One can begin by remembering that Mary’s cooperation is necessary. The Word of God would receive His flesh from her. Saint Joseph’s participation would not, therefore, find its meaning in a physical action. Rather, his participation in the Incarnation is found in his original consent to marry and his choosing to fulfill this consent by becoming married. For God wanted to come into the world in a proper way — through Marriage. By their engagement, when Mary said “Yes” to God becoming present in her womb, she naturally included the “Yes” of her husband, which we know would come later as expressed in his actions of “taking Mary as his wife.” (Matthew 2:24). We may conclude by stating: whereas Mary’s choice (for both Saint Joseph and herself) participated physically with the Hypostatic Union/Incarnation; Saint Joseph’s choice to marry Mary was a moral participation further affirming the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage; the equal nature expressed in these words — two become one flesh.