

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)
Dominica II Post Pentecosten (Latin Mass)
June 19, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“It is a spousal and paternal cooperation in which Joseph ministers to Christ and humankind. It is a cooperation that flows from his role as the husband of the Virgin Mary and the virginal father of Jesus Christ. This role of father extends to include all the brethren of Christ, but in a way that is subordinated to the spiritual maternity of the Blessed Virgin.”
(Dominic De Domenico, O.P., True Devotion to St. Joseph and the Church, p.70)

As we celebrate Corpus Christi in our Catholic Church and Father’s Day in our country, I thought it appropriate to continue our reflection upon Saint Joseph, whom we honor as the foster-father of Jesus. The reason I felt it appropriate dates back to an old Catholic tradition which, although not the original particular intention, managed to neatly high-light both the saving work of Jesus and the role of Saint Joseph as father. Please, allow me to both present to you and reflect with you upon the tradition of: The Seven Sorrows of Saint Joseph.

As Catholics, many will already claim knowledge of similar tradition invoking the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of “Our Lady Seven Dolors” which honors the seven sorrows she experienced in the life of Jesus as told through the Gospels. Dolor is a Latin term meaning sorrow or pain. Yet, few would have been exposed to the seven sorrows of Saint Joseph. Before we reflect upon these sorrows of Saint Joseph, know that they are directly united with his role as father (foster). For when one considers the angelic dream of Saint Joseph which announced Jesus’ becoming incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, we should realize that this dream did not require his consent as future spouse of Mary. Rather, this dream required a more impactful decision. In essence, “Joseph, now that you are aware of this miraculous pregnancy, are you willing to take upon yourself the responsibilities and duties required as both husband and father?” The Seven Sorrows of Saint Joseph are a direct result of his saying “Yes” to this request.

What are the Seven Sorrows of Saint Joseph? They are: (1) Saint Joseph’s Doubt, (2) At the Time of the Birth of Jesus, (3) The Circumcision, (4) The Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple, (5) The Flight into Egypt, (6) The Return from Egypt, and (7) The Loss of the child Jesus in the Temple for Three Days. Even though we shall briefly reflect upon each of these, there is so much beauty reflected in each; I apologize now for I am afraid I shall go long.

(1) The Doubt of Saint Joseph is understood as the mental confusion and emotional hurt Saint Joseph experienced after finding out his future wife has conceived a child. As he lay there in bed that night, one can imagine the anguish he felt knowing what the Law dictated he must do. Will he hand her over to watch her stoned? Will he send her away quietly only to be left answering prying questions from busy bodies in the community? Have we not all experienced similar nights lying in bed wishing God would just speak to us and give us the best answer for our problem? Yet, we know it is never to work in that fashion. Let us offer up those nights for the conversion of unrepentant sinners who might be experiencing a similar dark night. (2) The Sorrow which occurred at the Time of Jesus’ Birth consists in a father desperately trying to find a place for his pregnant wife and himself to stay the night.

A father understands this pressure for he is supposed to provide for the needs of his wife and child (children). However, Saint Joseph is faced with a situation in which he is powerless. There is only a stable for animals. In spite of these events, he is still able to celebrate the birth of Jesus with those who would come to adore. Can we still celebrate the Presence of Jesus in our lives even in those moments we are powerless to “fix?” (3) The Sorrow of the Circumcision is witnessed as the child Jesus sheds His Blood for the first time. Saint Joseph understands, as a father would, this will not be the first time his child will shed His Blood. To see the Blood and hear the crying of the Babe; a darker future moment is now set in motion. As a father feels helpless knowing that he may not always be there to comfort his child when they are alone and hurting, so must Saint Joseph have felt at that time. Could he, can we, hope that the example we will provide be enough for our child as they grow? (4) The Sorrow of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple centers upon hearing the words that your child is destined to be a contradiction and a sword of sorrow will pierce the heart of his mother, your wife. Are these the words a father desires to hear at the baptism of their child? What would they mean? Will he be there to comfort and support both in their need? All fathers must pose these and similar questions to themselves in the quiet of their own hearts. (5) The Sorrow of the Flight into Egypt involves a second dream gifted to Saint Joseph. He is told to take his wife and child in the dead of night, go into a foreign land, and make a living for all as a means to protect his family. Furthermore, God turns the life of His Son over to Saint Joseph at this moment. The future salvation of all rests upon Saint Joseph making calm purposeful decisions at this most grave moment for the protection and wellbeing of those he loves. Do not all fathers realize the decisions they make, large and small, have an impact upon those they love; even down to future generations. (6) The Sorrow associated with The Return from Egypt is best understood as having crossed one desert only to see another on the horizon. Although Herod, the father, is now dead, his son rules. Will he try again and succeed where his father failed? Again, Saint Joseph must faithfully trust the guidance of an angelic dream as to where to go. A father knows he may protect his family for the danger seen, but it will always be the one unseen that weighs down his thoughts. (7) the final Sorrow understood with the Finding of the Child in the Temple revolves around one question. After frantically searching for three days and finding the child, Saint Joseph must listen to a question from a child which could appear cruel at first glance. “Did you not know . . . I had to be about My Father’s business?” Sometimes questions and statements, unintended, can cut deeper than any knife. For all of the long sleepless nights, the hard days’ work in the heat, the cold, the rain, for all of the sacrifices fathers make to provide and protect their families; this is the moment of deepest sorrow. Yet, even in this, Saint Joseph excuses the child for that is what is He is – a child, although a Divine Child, still a child who will still need guidance as he grows. Do not fathers come to the same conclusions as they witness the often slow painfully awkward maturing of their children.

Again, I apologize for the length, but I hope these things help us all to understand the Sorrows of Saint Joseph and the sorrows our own earthly fathers endured, are enduring, or will endure for love of our families. Let us honor and pray for our Fathers on this blessed Corpus Christi.