

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Dominica Sexta Post Pentecosten (Latin Mass)
July 17, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“The seven sorrows are complete, but there is another event of great importance to be considered. Tradition tells us that Joseph experienced a happy death in the arms of Jesus and Mary. I hope, with his help, something similar will happen to us.”
(Dominic De Domenico, O.P., True Devotion to St. Joseph and the Church, p.79)

Last month we reflected upon the devotion entitled “The Seven Sorrows of Saint Joseph.” Yet, there remains one last great sorrow concerning Saint Joseph. It is his final sacrifice; his death which we must now contemplate.

As Catholics, we have been taught that Saint Joseph had died prior to Jesus beginning His public ministry; the work of our redemption. Many scholars and theologians have offered theories concerning the death of Saint Joseph. Although fascinating to read, these are not the purpose of our reflection. Let us solely reflect upon the fact that Saint Joseph must be dead prior to Jesus beginning His public ministry. We may confidently arrive at this conclusion by either of two explanations. First, if Joseph were still alive, then our Lady would also have remained at home to take care of the needs of her husband. Sacred Scripture would not record her accompanying her Son during this time. Nor would it include her praying with the apostles and disciples in the upper room for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Secondly, if Joseph were alive, he may have accompanied his Son during his public ministry. Given the respect due to a father in the Jewish society of the time, Joseph's presence would have overshadowed Mary. Mary's role as the “New Eve” and “Queen Mother” would be somewhat obscured.

To understand the significance of Saint Joseph's sacrifice, his death, we must reflect upon the death of a just person prior to the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The gates of heaven have been barred by the disobedience of Adam. A good person, like Joseph, would have resided spiritually (without a body) in what has come to be called “The Limbo of the Just.” Denied the eternal perfection of happiness of Heaven, Joseph and other saintly individuals would have patiently waited and continuously prayed for the coming of the promised Messiah. No physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual pain would be felt by these just souls.

Please, take a moment and consider this idea. When our own loved ones die, we assume (rightly or wrongly) that they enter into heaven rather quickly. This may be an underlying reason why we rarely hear mention of the need to pray for the souls of our departed loved ones during their funerals. Now, here is our great Saint Joseph who is

second in heaven to the Blessed Mother in his role as Foster-Father of the Savior. Yet, he does not go to Heaven immediately. He waits with countless other holy men and women. He is not afforded special treatment over and above any other holy, just, devout soul.

Now, consider how we pray, during the month of November, for all holy and just souls who are allowed to continue their purgation after their death until they sinlessly enter into the gates of Heaven. Yes, some saints may enter heaven rather quickly after they die due to their completing their purgatory during their lifetimes. Yet there are others, maybe those we have known and love, who wait along with many others. Like Saint Joseph so long ago, they wait patiently and pray continuously for us that we may overcome ourselves, becoming saints in the process. Instead of waiting till November to pray for these good souls, let us ask, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, that they may enter heaven joyfully this day.