

THE CHILD JESUS.

Part 2: Reflections on Loss and Obscurity.

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From *The family for families: reflections on the life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.*

THE LOSS.

“BUT when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the Child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.’ So he arose and took the Child and his mother and went into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there; and being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee. And he went and settled in a town called Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong. He was full of wisdom and the grace of God was upon him” (Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 2:40).

It is quite noteworthy that Joseph carefully studied the political conditions of Judea before he settled there with his two charges. Finding the reign of Archelaus potentially as dangerous as that of his father Herod, Joseph decided not to reside in Bethlehem but to travel eighty miles farther north to Nazareth in Galilee, which was under different rule. His actions confirm our previous estimate of his great character — a character prudent, brave, trusting in God’s word, yet not presuming that miracles would occur when human foresight and initiative would be sufficient to protect the life of the Christ Child.

We can hardly make the same claim for ourselves in our own lives. When problems arise that call for immediate adjustment, we pray to God for help, almost expecting miracles to solve our difficulties. Of course, the spirit of faith and trust in God that such prayer indicates is highly laudable; and if our prayer is sincere, God will infallibly help us in one way or another. The point to remember, however, is that God in His wisdom has chosen a certain order of providence. The events, which we call “ordinary” in this present order, would be most stupendous miracles if God had chosen to run this world according to a different plan. Because they happen every day, we often fail to see how unswervingly they point to the wisdom and love of the Creator.

The sun, for instance, rises and sets daily with precision more perfect than that of any clock; and this precision affects not only our one sun with its system of planets and its moon, but the entire vast universe with its thousands and millions of such suns already known to us and its possible

billions of which we know nothing. And all these bodies whirl in space so far extended that its huge dimensions lose meaning for our minds.

You yourself speak with a fluent tongue resulting partially from a wonderful system of nervous telegraphy in your body. You present a pleasing appearance because of the health maintained in you by an automatic chemical equilibrium that is far more delicate and self-adjusting than anything possible in our best-equipped laboratories. You work with a stamina governed by the minute secretions of glands whose intricate internal structure and operations are still largely a scientific mystery.

In other words, God has chosen a certain order and kind of events within which He is exercising His omnipotence. He wishes us to utilize the facilities, which we find at hand in this order. Only as a means of convincing incredulous human nature (and for reasons He alone fully comprehends) will He interfere with the order He has established.

The lesson is simple, yet so hard to learn for all of us. It is the lesson Jesus, Mary, and Joseph have exemplified throughout: Pray as if all depended on your prayers, and cooperate with your prayer by working as if all depended on your work. Nor should you be surprised when your prayer will be answered — most likely in an ordinary way!

Such are our thoughts as we travel north with the Holy Family toward Nazareth. The years of exile are over, and now the Three are returning to the spot, which for thirty years will witness the hidden life of the God of all creation. It will be a quiet life of obscurity, so overwhelmingly ordinary as to convince even the most skeptical that Christ actually did come on earth to redeem and to teach the ordinary man and woman, the “man on the street.”

Of the period of the hidden life we are told only one incident — touching, human, yet veiled with mystery — the loss of Jesus in the Temple, and His painful separation from Joseph and Mary.

“His parents were wont to go every year to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the Feast”
(Luke 2:41-43).

It was a custom for Joseph and Mary to make the yearly trip to the Temple at Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. Whether or not they took Jesus with them on each occasion, we do not know. However, since their Son’s obligations as a Jew would formally begin with His twelfth, or as others claim with His thirteenth year, they brought Him with them on this occasion which Saint Luke describes, to perform His duties as a faithful Jew, or else at least to familiarize Him with these obligations.

It may appear puzzling why Jesus, God Himself, would have to be familiarized with the duties of a faithful Jew. Did He not know all things?

As God, indeed, Jesus had infinite knowledge, and as man, He received abundantly all infused knowledge He would need for His mission here. However, in addition to this, He willed to be

educated and to learn by experience just like every other ordinary person. His purpose was always the same: to be as much like us as possible.

“And after they had fulfilled the days, when they were returning, the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and his parents did not know it. But thinking he was in the caravan, they had come a day’s journey before it occurred to them to look for him among their relatives and acquaintances” (Luke 2:43-44).

Mary and Joseph committed no fault of carelessness in losing Jesus. For one thing, as He was to say Himself, He willed to remain in Jerusalem as the Eternal Father willed Him to do. Moreover, at the Passover it was customary for the Jewish boys to be grouped in a sort of catechism class. When their caravan would be due to leave the Holy City, they might travel together just as their fathers and mothers traveled in separate groups. After the slow first day’s ride, the family groups would reunite at evening at the first khan or caravansary several miles outside of Jerusalem. It was here that Mary met Joseph. Jesus was not to be found.

We can hardly realize how much Joseph and Mary suffered at this moment. In our own lives, we question God if He sends us suffering; but can we ever wonder and complain at our lot after we see here the two holiest of God’s creatures being given a cup of sorrow directly from the hand of their loving Son, God Incarnate? From the depths of His own love for Mary and Joseph, Jesus willed to remain in the Temple, knowing the agony, which He would cause His parents. There was a higher obedience here, which Jesus respected.

Joseph and Mary remembered what the inspired prophets had written. The Messiah, the Savior of the world, was to be a man of sorrows, and He was to redeem mankind by means of suffering. But Joseph and Mary were not God; and from every indication given us by the Gospels, they themselves were not apprised of the exact future, the moment when their Son would lay down His life for His adopted brothers.

The two loved Him as their Son with the love of parents. They loved Him as their God as only the two peerless saints of all ages could love Him. Nonetheless, they were always still His creatures, and they recognized their position perfectly. For all that Mary and Joseph were aware, the time for the Redemption might have arrived. Perhaps at this very moment Jesus was being subjected to the indignities and vicious attacks that were to make Him “despised and the most abject of men.” His parents could not deny that they had lost Him through no fault of their own, but they always felt themselves as the two to whom He had been entrusted.

No exile was hard, no poverty was grinding, no suffering counted for anything, as long as they possessed Jesus. He was the light of their lives around whom their love centered in a manner which ordinary parents’ love for their children only faintly shadows. Now Jesus was gone, and terrible loneliness set in for these two hearts. It was a darkness the extent of which we cannot measure unless we compare it with the greatest of all lonelinesses, which Jesus was to let Himself experience in the agony in Gethsemani and during the three hours on the cross.

And yet how all this suffering bound Joseph to Mary and Mary to Joseph! Before, they had been united closely, as closely as possible. Now, that “possible” was increased by this suffering together. They were one as they otherwise never could have been. At this moment of desolation, with Jesus gone — they knew not where or why or how — they had only each other.

In our own day we often pray to our Blessed Mother and offer her our sympathy in this dolor.

What is our sympathy compared to that of Mary’s husband? Do we realize what Joseph meant to Mary in that moment of anguish? His was the heart most closely attuned to hers, emptied of self-love in its love for her. How true it is that God, even while He permits or sends the bitterest suffering, sweetens it with some consolation to make it easier to bear! In this case, when the presence of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was withdrawn from Mary, the heart that comforted her was, after her own, the heart closest to Him whom she had lost.

Suffering is like a powerful drug. Bringing out all the nobility of the human soul, it can bind husband and wife (just as it bound Mary and Joseph) more closely than all the love of prosperous times. On the other hand, if accepted with bitterness and resentment, it acts as a force to separate even the closest of hearts and to expose the selfishness and cowardice that all of us know lie hidden in our hearts.

In your own experience, you have undoubtedly witnessed the tenderness of a generous husband toward a sickly wife. Perhaps you have heard a widow courageously tell of her satisfaction that she was the one who was left behind to fight life’s battles, because her “George” or “Bill” or “Tom” could never have fought alone if she had been the one who was taken first by death.

These are the people who in this twentieth century (and in the twenty-first), mirror in their lives the mutual support and affection that Joseph and Mary shared on that evening two thousand years ago, when clammy fear gripped Our Lady’s heart and troubled the deep calm that had characterized Joseph’s conduct in every previous trial.

“And it came to pass after three days that they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who were listening to him were amazed at his understanding, and his answers. And when they saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have You done so to us? Behold, Your father and I have been seeking You sorrowing.’ And he said to them, ‘How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?’ And they did not understand the word that he spoke to them” (Luke 2:46-50)

‘If Joseph and Mary did not understand at that time the meaning of this desolation, their loss of their dearly beloved Son, how can we expect to do so now?’ We reverently wait in patience, knowing that one day in heaven we shall understand (as they already have understood) how and why God sent this cross to bless those whom He loved most. Together with Joseph and Mary, we can say that this is our mystery also.

We do, however, learn this with certainty: Jesus evidently willed to separate Himself from His parents to show us that God's will must come first, above all human ties, even if the preference will cause pain. If the loss in the Temple had never occurred, we in our day might have said, "God willed something in my life which was a source of much pain to me. Was it a punishment of sin? Or am I one of the unlucky ones who are not favorites of the Almighty as were Joseph and Mary?"

Now we cannot have even a pretence of justification for our complaint. The so-called favorites of the Almighty are not wrapped in heavenly bliss during their lives on earth. They have been subjected to obedience to the will of God not only as much as, but tremendously more than we have ever been or shall be. Jesus wished to indicate that His mission on earth was more important than His tenderest and closest ties. Years later, in the Garden of Gethsemani, He would show that His mission was — in a certain sense — even more important than any other consideration in His life: "Father, not My will but Yours be done!"

The conduct of Joseph and Mary is a good example for all parents to follow when they discern the seeds of a priestly or religious vocation in their children. Mary and Joseph perceived that Jesus had reasons of His own for bringing about the temporary separation, painful though it might be; but those reasons were God's reasons, and it was not in the province of His creatures, even the two closest to the Creator, to dispute them.

Mother and father will discern that their children have reasons of their own for wishing to leave home, and if those reasons are based on the desire to devote their lives entirely to the service of God, mother and father, like Mary and Joseph, will wholeheartedly acquiesce.

Ordinarily, good Catholic parents will make no objection when their children find suitable partners and leave home life to found a family of their own. It is painfully surprising that sometimes these same parents are the most reluctant to permit their sons and daughters to take up lives consecrated to God in the seminary or convent. One of the most common and most shallow of arguments used to dissuade such vocations is the fallacy that the close ties of family life will thus be sundered irrevocably. Actually, a strange paradox occurs. In the religious and priestly life, spiritual bonds unite parents and children much more strongly than did the former links of home life. In the case of those children who choose marriage, the objection is not made; yet it is of the very nature of married life that husband and wife relinquish their dependent connections with father and mother in order to devote themselves entirely to each other and to the home of which they are now the new founders.

In the ideal Catholic home, parents pray that God will call at least one of their progeny to His service. The honor of serving God specially by His own invitation is an honor bestowed on the whole family. In such a family, the entire atmosphere is favorable to the development of a vocation, but at the same time, there is no "forcing" of a son to look toward the priesthood or of a daughter to desire convent life.

All imprudent and reprehensible urgings of an over-fond parent are definitely out of place in a case where the children themselves evince no desire to follow Christ's call. They probably have not been called. Moreover, a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life as a lay brother or a nun is an invitation, not a command. To repeat: the proper attitude is neither to exert undue influence where the vocation does not exist, nor to attempt to discourage it where it does exist.

If, however, hindrances are placed in the children's way, they can well reply in the words of the boy Christ that they "must be about their Father's business." A higher call has come to them, and no one has the right to interfere. In cases where interference does occur from an importunate parent, selfishly wishing to monopolize the child's affection for a lifetime, it can often be traced to the lack of realization that the years of helpless infancy and childhood are over. The once dependent boys and girls are now entering on their own lives, and they begin to possess their own rights.

As parents, there should be no regret on your part that the children have at last arrived at the age of choosing their state in life. This is the time when the grandeur of your vocation as parents is ripening into full maturity. In earlier years, you were sowing the seeds of your children's character by the good example and the training you gave them. Now you have the opportunity of seeing your efforts rewarded. If your son seeks the priesthood, if your daughter wishes to enter the convent, you have the joy of knowing that you have been instrumental in helping to bring forth another life consecrated to the service of God. On the other hand, if your children enter married life, your happiness will be full, provided that you have given your own example of holy married life to stand out in their minds as the ideal they wish to imitate directly.

All these considerations look only to the present life. The ultimate norm is eternity. The manner in which you raised your children can be judged correctly in the light of what you did to assist them to save their souls. You have a special interest in those souls. By your own action, you cooperated with God's own creative power. At the moment of conception, God cooperated with your parental act to create and infuse those immortal souls whose destiny you were to influence. There was the essential dignity of your parenthood. Its corresponding responsibility was to mold and guide these children entrusted to you. Why, then, should you feel regret and sorrow if you see the members of your family embarking on careers that are likely to bring them safely into their eternal destiny? The only possible regret and worry would be in the event that by your own negligence your children's salvation would be seriously imperiled.

In another fashion, the stewardship of parents may be terminated by the angel of death, taking one of their charges prematurely. It is pitiful to behold the broken hearts of fathers and mothers who have lost children in infancy or at any time before adult life has been reached. By all means, it is a most difficult cross, but their sorrow should be softened and sweetened by thoughts such as those on which we have been reflecting. God, the loving Master, has seen fit to take an account of His stewards earlier than ordinary. The child was entrusted to his Catholic father and mother to be prepared for eternity, as every child is entrusted. God has taken him to heaven perhaps before

the inevitable frailties of human nature could tarnish the freshness of the gift of sanctifying grace he received in Baptism.

As for the parents, their work is done with regard to their youngster. They can look forward now to a family in two worlds, represented by a saint in heaven praying for his brothers and sisters and father and mother still on earth.

These are not merely comforting thoughts enunciated here for the solace they impart. They participate in the absolute truth of our faith, and they are not true because they are comforting, but they are comforting because they are true. Bereaved parents can look to the bereavement of Joseph and Mary as they seek Jesus in the courts of the Temple. From Joseph and Mary they will receive the peace of Christ, and solace and hope in the day when once again their family like the Holy Family shall know the satisfying joy of reunion — reunion in God.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

“AND he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and his mother kept all these things carefully in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men” (Luke 2:51-52).

Jesus returns with His parents to Nazareth, and Holy Scripture draws a veil over the hidden life of the next nearly twenty years. The Son of God faces the vast task of redeeming the world. At the same time with the purpose of being our perfect model, He chooses to live a life of obscurity, prayer, and obedience amid the drab monotony of commonplace everyday life.

If we would ask a proof that Christ came on earth to teach us by His example, the hidden life at Nazareth should more than satisfy us. Very few people are in the limelight. Most of us find our lives extremely ordinary. Even the relatively few who mount to fame find that the glamour and the glory soon pass, and that their private lives are fundamentally just as obscure as those of the rest of their fellows.

Throughout His life on this earth, Jesus was constantly making use of common things to teach us the ways of holiness. In the sacraments, He elevated such everyday materials as water and oil and bread and wine into signs that impart the grace of God Himself. So, too, He did in the case of this most common of all commodities — obscurity. By taking on Himself an obscure life He wished to show all men that holiness was possible and was easily attainable in a life known only to God, hidden from the world, perhaps even despised by arrogant worldlings for its lowly seclusion.

Christ’s obscurity, however, was not only that of an individual; it was also that of a family. Jesus recognized that a very small proportion of families would have to undergo persecution similar to that which beset the Holy Family in those early years, as when after the divinely foreseen circumstances of the Nativity and the visit of the Magi there followed the hostility of a jealous king, the need of flight to a strange land and exile there. Christ was aware of all this; and although the lessons of His first years were immensely valuable, nevertheless He willed to

approach now closer to the life of the average family. He approximated this average life so closely that it would seem Saint Luke finds nothing special to relate of it — no miracles, no preaching, no teaching of new and sublime doctrine, none of the intense martyrdom of suffering which the Passion and Crucifixion were later to bring.

How successfully Jesus, Mary, and Joseph played their part in the humdrum town life of Nazareth can be judged by the incredulous remarks of their neighbors when later they refused to believe in the divinity of Christ's mission. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" (Matthew 13:55.)

What, then, does Christ's obscurity mean for us? It means that we are not to give up striving for a more perfect service of God merely because our life is ordinary, humble, average.

More important, however, must be our utilization of Christ's obscurity to resist temptations against trust in God as our loving Father. Such temptations cleverly allege, "You aren't anyone in particular — why should God care for you? — You don't have the great sanctity of Mary and Joseph and the saints — you are living in family life out in the world, not in a monastery or convent. Why do you think that Almighty God should have a special place in His heart for your concerns and your prayers?" The temptation is insidious. Worse still, it is very, very common. Only God knows whether or not it succeeds in preventing people who live in the world from loving Him trustingly and with an open heart.

Christ's obscurity brings to the fore one salient fact: the value of our life is measured only by what we are in God's sight — not by any human standard, not even by our "feelings" that we are more or less progressing in our religious duties. God alone sees our will. He alone knows our strength and the graces given to help us. He alone is aware of the full nature of the difficulties that beset us. Hence, He alone is capable of judging us worthy of reward or punishment. Fame in the world means absolutely nothing in itself with regard to our salvation and perfection. How we might use that fame is, of course, important; but whether or not we are known by millions or by a handful, our position in God's sight is shielded from the prying gaze of the world. For God, our true value lies in the inner life of humility, patience, and the other virtues. This is the life hidden with Christ in God, ever to be cultivated and esteemed above all else.

The lesson of obscurity is not difficult to understand when applied in this manner to the difference between worldly and supernatural standards. More involved (because requiring more supernatural faith) is the application of obscurity to purely supernatural matters. For example, a great preacher works many conversions from his sermons; a radio orator succeeds in spreading universal good will toward the Church; deathbed repentances and conversions are multitudinous; huge numbers of people outside the Church die in apparent good faith, and in all likelihood have saved their souls by obeying God as their conscience indicated to them. Who prayed and worked and suffered for all this apostolic harvest? Christ's merits, of course, primarily brought it about; but cooperation with grace is also required, and in God's providence, the grace to cooperate with

another grace often seems to depend on the prayer or the good deed of some generous soul, offered for the purpose.

Do you see now what is meant by “supernatural obscurity”? You may be living your life in what you think is a very ordinary way. In God’s sight, on the contrary, you are waging a courageous battle against temptation; you are fulfilling the duties of your state of life with superior fidelity; and in general, you are consistently carrying out the two great commandments of love of God manifested in love of neighbor. What of the graces you are possibly winning for the spread of Christ’s spiritual kingdom? The fact that you may be ignorant of their existence does not nullify their efficacy, nor does it make your actions less pleasing in God’s sight. In this manner, a life that exteriorly appears to be very ordinary and very average may in reality be highly effective in the supernatural order. This is the exercise of charity not merely for the good of the body but also for the benefit of the soul.

Christ our Lord referred to the reward awaiting charity when He described His position as judge at the great final Judgment: *“Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.*

“Then the just will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You; or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and take You in; or naked, and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick or in prison, and come to You?’ And answering, the King will say to them, ‘Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me’.” (Matthew 25:34-40).

Jesus revealed in these words how much good is accomplished without its recognition in this life. In the case of supernatural obscurity, where good deeds win graces for the spread of Christ’s kingdom, the application is equally as strong as if those good deeds were done for the welfare of the bodies instead of the souls of others.

Another benefit to be derived from the sight of Christ’s obscurity is a new motive against failure: a confidence that no failure can crush. If all our essential value lies only in what we are in God’s sight, then what we are in the sight of the world means nothing in case we fail, even miserably. True, our feelings may perhaps react strongly, and our self-appreciation may decline because of our inability to establish ourselves in social or business prestige; but basically, deep down in our soul, we possess ourselves in peace.

We cannot lose our trust in God when we lose our fame or fortune, because we know invincibly that fame and fortune are worthless in God’s reckoning. Men and women with no religion, with no faith in an all-good God who will never desert them or judge them unfairly — these are the ones who, when temporal disaster crushes them, seek to compensate for their loss by temporarily drowning their sorrow in sin, or even by cutting off their existence in this world.

How different is the case with the person who recognizes his obscurity and perceives that his actual success is to be weighed by what God reads in his soul! A businessman of the author's acquaintance was an almost complete failure throughout his entire career. He died too penniless to be a bankrupt. Nonetheless, his was a holy death, for he had always striven to serve God and his fellow men, to be a faithful father and husband, a generous provider for his family. Financially he accomplished nothing. Again and again throughout the years, his best efforts seemed to amount to a sort of 'anti-Midas touch' that blighted and withered what had previously been successful business ventures. The secret of his constant confidence for the future, the hope that buoyed him up even in his darkest moments, was this knowledge that his conscience gave him: "What you are in God's sight, counts. What the world thinks you are, does not count. Try again. God knows you are trying, and that you are not succeeding, but it is for no selfishness or sin on your part. Try again." It was this supernatural faith and trust that not only bore up his morale but even saved his reason.

Such are the lessons of the obscurity of the hidden life. No matter what the conditions of your life may be, sanctify them by offering them to God Almighty as so many prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and petition. This, your "hidden life" on earth, will be the glorious life in God's sight, which you will see credited as merit when your turn comes to stand before the tribunal of our blessed Lord.

Another great lesson of the Holy Family at Nazareth lay in the prayer they constantly practiced. Jesus, of course, was God, but in His created human nature, He could and did pray to His Father.

We must always remember in speaking of Jesus that His Incarnation is a mystery of mysteries, second only to the fact of the Blessed Trinity in being 'august and unfathomable' by our intellects.

Jesus was divine, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity and God by nature equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He united in Himself the nature of God and the nature of man. How this was accomplished we cannot understand. We simply know that it was done, and that it was by this means that He could pray to God His Father while being God Himself.

Since the Holy Family observed the Jewish law in its perfection, we can deduce quite accurately what prayers they recited. The Psalms, of course, were the favorites. Three times a day Jesus, Mary, and Joseph said the *Tephillah*, "The Prayer," consisting of eighteen long invocations and blessings. Joseph (and later Jesus when He attained to manhood) was obliged to say the *Shema*, a sort of profession of faith in the one true God, twice daily.

A very interesting Jewish custom of prayer that must have been observed in the house at Nazareth was that of the *Mezuzah*, "the doorpost," and the "phylacteries," small square calfskin boxes with Scripture texts written on parchment inside them.

One of these texts was part of the *Shema* that Joseph recited:

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole strength. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart; and you shall tell them to your children, and you shall meditate upon them sitting in your house, and walking on your journey, sleeping, and rising. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be and shall move between your eyes. And you shall write them in the entry, and on the doors of your house” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

This injunction was taken so literally that Jewish men would bind the phylacteries on the left arm and the forehead when saying the prescribed prayers. The Pharisees went much further and strictly enjoined the constant wearing of ornate phylacteries, but the common people (among whom Saint Joseph would be counted) did not follow so strained and exaggerated an interpretation of Holy Scripture. Hence, Joseph probably wore them at prayer time alone.

On the doorpost of the house at Nazareth was fastened a wooden tube containing a rolled parchment inscribed with the passage quoted above from the Book of Deuteronomy and another passage (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) citing the blessings of serving God. On entering and leaving the house the members of the Holy Family would piously touch this *Mezuzah*, saying, “May God keep my going out and coming in from now on and forevermore.” All this was intended to show reverence for the word of God.

Such was the vocal and the more or less formal prayer, which Jesus, Mary, and Joseph offered in their home at Nazareth. In their hearts, however, they prayed always. Just as the Heart of Jesus was constantly united with His divinity, so were the hearts of Mary and Joseph so closely bound to God that their every action was a prayer.

“But,” you say, “how did the Holy Family find time to be ordinary people, as their neighbors certainly understood them to be, if they were praying constantly?” The answer is better given by another question: Why should constant prayer make anyone less neighborly? As a matter of fact, the difficulty here rests on the false assumption that prayer necessarily entails many words, a long face, and an austere disposition.

This is only one of the popular misconceptions of the nature of prayer. As long as such false ideas might persist, it would be well-nigh useless to urge the imitation of the spirit of prayer that prevailed at Nazareth. For this reason and for the sake of encouraging and advancing those who already pray well, we must explain in some detail what is meant by genuine prayer.

Volumes have been written on how to pray, yet essentially everything they have expounded and everything we will describe here is based on the definition of prayer. In other words, if you are raising your heart and mind to God, you are praying. Whether you use words or not, whether you say much or little, you are genuinely praying if your intention is directed to “talk” to God.

There are countless ways of praying. The misunderstanding of the true nature of prayer has resulted from an artificial limitation of its meaning to perhaps one type, namely, vocal prayer. Vocal prayer is that which follows a set formula, usually composed by some one else. It has undoubtedly great value, but it is not the only way of talking to God.

The other type, far more easy to practice at all times and in all places, is mental prayer. Here we speak to God as friend to friend, exactly as our heart dictates. There need not even be any words expressed on our part. For example, you can visit the Blessed Sacrament and let the good Lord in His holy sacrament “shine” on you from the Tabernacle. You need say nothing. Merely sit in His presence, united to Him by the love of your friendship with Him.

Another kind of mental prayer is “contemplation,” where you mentally behold, in the Ignatian application of this word, some event transpiring in Christ’s life. This is a sort of mental moving picture.

Still another type is called “meditation” in the formal meaning of the word. In meditating, you tell God your reaction to what you are considering. Is it hard or easy? Do you think you would wish to act that way or differently? Do you need help to do so? Do you wish you could be better in practicing this virtue or in avoiding that fault?

Then there are those fascinating combinations of vocal and mental prayer that we call “aspirations” or “ejaculations.” Some modern writers have colorfully described them as “quickies.” That is what they are, for you recite the aspiration so quickly that you don’t have time to be distracted! In a second or two you can say, “Lord, I love you,” or “Jesus, Mary, Joseph, help me always,” or “Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in You,” or “Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.” You can use these ejaculations in crowded buses and streetcars, out in the open country or in the busy city, a few times each day, or just as often as you please, all without the mental fatigue that eventually results from protracted prayer.

Another method of combining vocal and mental prayer is to recite slowly to yourself some simple prayer which you like, such as the “Our Father,” the “Hail Mary,” or the “Hail, Holy Queen.” Say it lingeringly and rhythmically, perhaps a word for every breath. If you have leisure and sufficient quiet to attempt more concentrated prayer, stay on each word of these prayers as long as you find relish in it.

The essential thing to remember is that prayer is the candid talk of one friend to another, of yourself to God. While you must, of course, remain respectful, you should not let your respect frighten you from being familiar in your prayer. Prayer is something very private, and you have a right to speak to God in the intimate relation of creature to Creator, friend to Friend.

Moreover, you should not restrict yourself to the prayer of petition, that is, asking God for what you require in order to live a better life spiritually and temporally. Your prayer should have other purposes also. For example, express your gratitude to God for the benefits He has bestowed on

you, on your family, on the Church, on our country and the world. Or make reparation to God for so many sinners who are deliberately offending Him. You can make further reparation, too, for sins and negligences in your own life.

These three types of prayer — petition, thanksgiving, and reparation — are more or less related to the benefits God has given us. The fourth kind, the prayer of adoration, is in itself more selfless. When we adore God and praise His goodness, His mercy, and His justice, we are adoring Him not for what we have received from Him but for what He is in Himself. On some occasion when you would like to pray mentally but do not feel inclined to attempt any particular subject, pay homage to God Himself in the prayer of adoration. The Divine Office of the Church — its official prayer — consists mainly of the Psalms, which themselves are made up largely of sentiments of praise and adoration.

In any discussion concerning prayer the question usually arises, “How can I pray always? I have necessary occupations to attend to; I have legitimate recreations and lawful pleasures. How can I pray while engaged in them?”

Pray by offering these good actions as your prayer. A most effective practice of this sort is the Morning Offering of the Apostleship of Prayer. “O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all our associates (in the Apostleship of Prayer), and in particular for the intention selected this month by our Holy Father, the Pope.”

Throughout the day, renew this intention occasionally. It can be done very simply and briefly by some such aspiration as “All for You, O Jesus,” or “I wish to do everything for love of You, my God.”

What we have said up to this point has pertained chiefly to prayer on the part of the individual. There is also the most perfect prayer of all, the Mass, the renewal of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. In the Mass, we are privileged to unite ourselves with the priest in order to offer God the spotless sacrifice of adoration, praise, reparation, and thanksgiving. You will appreciate and relish the Mass much more deeply if you follow the actions and words of the celebrant with a missal of your own, containing the translation of all the prayers said at the altar.

However, for the purpose of this pamphlet one group prayer must receive special emphasis, the family Rosary. The custom of saying the Rosary privately is most praiseworthy; the practice of the family recitation is the logical extension of this prayer of Our Lady, and can hardly be recommended too strongly.

Again and again in crises of the Church, the popes have called on the Queen of the Rosary for help. In fact, the entire history of the devotion of the Rosary simply repeats how strikingly Mary came to the aid of the Church on each occasion she was petitioned through the group recitation of her Rosary.

Saint Dominic was the first to preach the Rosary as a successful spiritual weapon against the Albigensian heresy in the 13th century. In 1571, the Turks were defeated at Lepanto, and Europe was thus saved from Mohammedanism at a moment when the Catholic world was reciting the Rosary in petition for so all-important a victory. In 1716, the Moslems were turned back in Hungary, again at a time when the confraternities of the Rosary at Rome were conducting solemn public prayers for the success of the Christian cause. In fact, the power of the Rosary so impressed Pope Leo XIII that during his pontificate he issued twelve encyclicals in order to urge Catholics all over the world to pray the Rosary. The fortunes of the Church in those days were in dire and precarious straits. Leo could think of nothing that was possibly more efficacious than the Rosary.

In our present day, we, too, together with the Church are passing through a grave crisis. Family life has been derided, abused, and neglected to such an extent that some observers think that the family has already been destroyed. Such a pessimistic outlook we do not accept; nonetheless, it is a timely warning of social deterioration that must be heeded. The family is the building block of society, the foundation of our whole modern civilization. Not only the practice of religion and the advancement of culture, but our entire modern society together with all the rights of man as a human being would be wiped out if the family were destroyed and state nurseries were put in its place.

The attacks have come from without as well as from within. Those from within the family are the more to be feared. Healthy family life can always combat successfully external adversaries. But family life cannot be healthy if divorce, race suicide, and the shirking of responsibility guide the men and women who are to bring children into the world and who are to educate them to reach their eternal destiny by means of a Christian life in this world.

Divorce, race suicide, the shirking of responsibility — these are the internal enemies so much more devastating than any others can possibly be. Hence, the practice of the family Rosary has come to the fore particularly in our times to fight them. The Holy Spirit in His guidance of the Church has inspired our popes, bishops, priests, and faithful to pray the Rosary as the most efficacious means of gaining assistance against the powers of evil undermining family morality and family existence.

Not only does the family Rosary bring down blessings by way of Mary's intercession. In itself, looked at from a purely natural point of view, it is a bond of union. When the members of a family meet daily for ten to fifteen minutes of common prayer, they are guaranteed at least one sacrosanct period when business and social engagements will not interfere with corporate life at home. This union in prayer links the minds and hearts of all present. Supernaturally, Christ is among them in a special manner. "Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

The Rosary is so powerful a prayer because it depicts the chief mysteries of our Redemption in a

manner most pleasing to Mary and to God. In the short, easy meditations on each Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious mystery, there stands out the part of Mary as the humble handmaid of the Lord in whom He accomplished mighty things. The merits of Our Lady are presented to Jesus again and again, so that He in His goodness bestows particular graces in order to honor His mother. She had been all-faithful in her service of her Creator and Redeemer. With Jesus, she cooperated intimately in the work of His Redemption. So, too, does she cooperate with Him in intervening to distribute the fruits of His Redemption in order that it may be more effective.

The very derivation of the name “rosary” indicates the homage of Our Lady, which it embodies. During the Middle Ages, as formerly among the Romans, persons of royal blood wore crowns of flowers called chaplets. As the custom grew with the passing of centuries, the chaplets became crowns of gold presented to kings and princes as tokens of submission and honor. In Mary’s case the rosary is a triple chaplet — three crowns made up of roses of Hail Mary’s and Our Father’s, during the recitation of which the story of Mary’s part in our Redemption is lovingly and gratefully recalled.

At Nazareth, the Rosary, of course, could not be said. Something greater was done. In the hidden life of obscurity, prayer, and work, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were drawing the pattern for every future family — a pattern which all members of every Catholic family should examine and imitate as from eldest to youngest they recite their family Rosary together.

Obscurity, prayer, work — these were the three great characteristics of the Hidden Life. We have already seen the lesson taught us by the obscurity and prayer of the Holy Family at Nazareth. There remains a final summation — the dignity of labor.

To the ancient pagans manual labor was disgraceful, but to the Christian work is ennobling. The lesson of the Holy Family is too clear to deny. God Himself in human form took up the trade of a carpenter. Mary His mother performed all the household tasks just like every other wife and mother of her time. Joseph supported Jesus and Mary by his earnings as village carpenter. That is the true picture. We cannot improve on the facts, the reality. The Holy Family engaged in labor; therefore, no one can think himself degraded by engaging in labor. On the contrary, if we offer our work as prayer, we raise its value even higher. Pope [Saint] Pius X composed an indulgenced prayer to Saint Joseph, patron of working people, that expresses concisely the Christian attitude toward labor. It summarizes also for us the lessons of the Holy Family’s work at Nazareth.

Glorious Saint Joseph, model of all who devote their lives to labor, obtain for me the grace to work in the spirit of penance in order thereby to atone for my many sins; to work conscientiously, setting devotion to duty in preference to my own whims; to work with thankfulness and joy, deeming it an honor to employ and to develop by my labor the gifts I have received from God; to work with order, peace, moderation, and patience, without ever shrinking from weariness and difficulties; to work above all with a pure intention and with detachment from self, having always before my eyes the hour of death and the accounting

which I must then render of time ill spent, of talents wasted, of good omitted, and of vain complacency in success, which is so fatal to the work of God.

All for Jesus, all through Mary, all in imitation of you, O Patriarch Joseph! This shall be my motto in life and in death, Amen.

[A partial Indulgence.] (500 days' indulgence, Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, 28 March, 1933.)

Reluctantly we close the chapter on the hidden life of obscurity and prayer and work and intimate family union at Nazareth. The years are passing on, and the paths of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph will soon begin to separate. The years of preparation for Jesus are over. God's work of redemption must be accomplished.

SEPARATION.

IT IS quite certain that Saint Joseph died before Christ began His public life. When the infuriated Nazarenes tried to ridicule the sublimity of Christ's doctrine by naming His living relatives and thus showing how common He was, they neglected to mention His foster father (Matthew 13:55). Our strongest argument, however, is drawn from Christ's words on the cross. To Saint John He said, "Son, behold your mother." And to Our Lady, "Woman, behold your son" (John 19:27). It was Joseph's right as well as his obligation to care for Mary. The only reasonable explanation for Christ's action of commending His mother to Saint John must be that Joseph had already passed away, to await the day of his resurrection with Christ.

By reason of the fact that he died in the presence of Jesus and Mary, Joseph has rightly been chosen by the popes as the patron of the dying. Because of his closeness to the Son and the mother, he has the greatest intercessory power with them; and because of the circumstances of his death — in the arms of Jesus and Mary — his patronage is doubly fitting.

Joseph's death before the public life began was providential. Had he lingered on in his position as "father" of Jesus, he might have hindered the effectiveness of Christ's preaching and Christ's manifest claims to be divine. With Joseph's passing, the holy trinity on earth was temporarily separated. For Jesus and Mary it meant the end of the quiet, long years of calm and happiness spent with him. The moment for Christ's great redemptive act was close now, and with it, there also approached the initiation of Mary into her vocation as co-redemptrix, queen of martyrs, and mother of the Church.

What a farewell — an *au revoir* in the strictest sense — that was at Nazareth! The work of Joseph the just man was completed, and with the absolute conformity of his will to the will of his foster Son, he wished that there might be accomplished in him only that which would further the cause of saving souls through Christ's atonement. This was the moment, too, when Joseph received from the lips of the Mother of God and from God Himself the words of gratitude for all he had done for them. There were no regrets, no fruitless bitter sorrow. It was the model deathbed, a lesson for all time.

Joseph must have mused gently over the past. Seemingly, there had been nothing in his life to mark him as outstanding. He had been just another citizen of the Empire, to his fellow townsmen, “only Joseph.” A good neighbor, a quiet fellow, one who would help in time of need — yes, he had been all of these, but thoroughly ordinary, as ordinary as any man of Nazareth. That was how he thought of himself.

After all, of what could he boast? Of money? Hardly that, for with all his diligence he was able at best to keep his family in moderate circumstances. His royal blood? No, he was too candid to bask mentally in the long-vanished glory of the stock of David. He knew that his worth lay in what he actually was, not in what his ancestors had been.

How could he ever forget how it had all begun! In that stalwart early manhood, he had been a suitor for the hand of Mary when he first realized that a special Providence was gently changing the course of his life. There was the espousal, the agonizing perplexity, the angel’s revelation bringing floods of peace, the virginal marriage to the very Mother of God.

And how those next events stood out, vivid and fresh in his memory! The manger in the cave at Bethlehem, the hasty departure by night for Egypt, the careful return to Nazareth, the heartbreaking separation in the Temple incident, and then the years of obscurity and labor that were so happily spent in the company of Mary and Jesus.

Always deep down in his heart he had realized that he possessed a treasure infinite, a treasure whose secret he was chosen to guard. Mother and Son had been entrusted to him from on high. He, Joseph the carpenter of Nazareth, was the shadow of the Eternal Father on earth. On his labor had depended the life and the well-being of the Word Incarnate. And yet — he was always only Joseph, in himself nothing, but by some unfathomable design of God raised to the position most privileged among all men of all time.

His own strong, toil-worn hands had guided the fingers of Him who had fashioned the universe. He had seen the lesson those other hands were teaching for all ages — work is good, work has dignity, work can be made a meritorious prayer. Could he lead others to imitate that example of his Son?

And here, as he lay dying, he saw the end of his task on earth. In obscurity he had always lived, in even greater obscurity he was passing away. In the life of the Church his memory was to remain equally obscure for a thousand years until in God’s own time, when the doctrines of Christ as God and Mary as Virgin Mother were clearly established in the minds of men, he would begin to appear in his true worth. But he would always be “only Joseph”, lovable, the friend of all. . . . “Jesus, Mary! Mary, Jesus!” . . . The end had come.

The house was silent. The two who remained saw their task yet before them. It was the will of the Father in heaven, and that was all that counted.

So, too, in your family life, there must inevitably come a day when you or your loved ones will see the hand of death take a child, a husband and father, a wife and mother. In the first shock of bereavement, the dull sense of emptiness may perhaps lead to a deeper sense of hopelessness.

But Jesus and Mary and Joseph have gone before. Death is the end of the time of testing, the completion of the life that must have sorrows mixed with its joys. The pilgrimage is over for the soul that has passed from the shadows of faith to the clear light of eternal reality.

For those who remain behind, the house is silent. They see their task yet before them. It is the will of the Father in heaven, and that is all that counts.

Saint Joseph's happy death can lead our thoughts in only one direction: our own preparation for a happy and holy death when our time comes. In an earlier pamphlet (chapter), we touched on the peace, which a well-lived life brings at the moment it draws to a close. The courageous and steadfast fulfillment of your family obligations will bring about a tranquil conscience, which will withstand all worries and fears at the hour you realize that your pilgrimage on earth is soon to end.

For you as a Catholic, however, another factor will be most important in helping you to die well as you have lived well — your use of the sacraments, particularly Holy Eucharist, Penance, and Extreme Unction (the Sacrament of the Sick). In fact, Saint Joseph's intercession often shows itself most strongly in the manner in which Joseph's friends are provided with the last sacraments to be with them on their last journey.

In general, our Catholics are well aware of the doctrine relating to the Blessed Sacrament and its marvelous effects. Thanks to the decree of Pope [Saint] Pius X in 1905, frequent Communion has become a custom, and daily Communion commonplace among the faithful. But with regard to Penance and Extreme Unction, especially as sacraments preparing for a holy death, rather widespread misunderstanding exists which hinders the full utilization of their sacramental benefits. Hence, several cardinal points must be clarified concerning these two sacraments.

Above all else, Penance is the sacrament of peace, because outside of it, ordinarily no greater assurance can be obtained on this earth that God has forgiven sin and has completely restored the sinner to His friendship. Christ our Lord instituted the sacrament of Penance primarily in order to remit all serious sins committed after Baptism. He also wished that the sacrament exercise a secondary effect as well. When received by a person who has no mortal sins to confess, Penance bestows an increase of sanctifying grace and grants extra special helps of actual grace to combat temptations and faults.

One misunderstanding regarding Penance is that it cannot be received unless the penitent has committed mortal sin since the last confession. In reality, such is not the case. It is sufficient either to mention a few venial sins of which you are aware, or to make a general accusation of some sin from your past life (and here, too, a venial sin is sufficient). In this manner, you are able to gain the special graces, which only Penance can impart.

Of course, all mortal sins committed since the preceding confession must be mentioned, although if any are forgotten in good faith, they are indirectly forgiven by being included in the act of contrition of the penitent and in the absolution of the priest. If later they come to mind, they should be specified in the next confession not in order to be forgiven (for they have already been remitted), but in order that the law of Christ concerning the confession of mortal sins might be fulfilled. This is why mortal sins are called “necessary matter” for confession in distinction to venial sins, which are called merely “sufficient matter”.

Although at least one venial sin must be confessed in order to provide this “sufficient matter” (if there is nothing serious to mention), there is no obligation to confess all venial sins inasmuch as they can be forgiven outside of the sacrament by means of an act of contrition, the offering of other prayers, or the performance of good works. Nonetheless, all venial sins are forgiven in every good confession provided that the penitent includes them at least in a general, implicit fashion in his declaration and acts of contrition, including his purpose of amendment.

By submitting venial sins to the tribunal of Penance, part at least of the temporal punishment is remitted. Venial sins do not incur any eternal punishment because while they are flaws in our friendship with God, they by no means constitute the wanton ingratitude and treason, which we call mortal sin. In the present state of human nature, our faith tells us that no one can go through life without committing venial sin, unless he or she has been given a very special grace. Our Blessed Lady certainly enjoyed this privilege, and we piously believe, Saint Joseph. In our own case, however, we know how easily we fail. Anger, jealousy, manifestations of selfishness, rash judgments, hesitation in repelling temptation — these are some of the faults that mar our perfection but can be gradually eliminated from our conduct.

There is one particular circumstance, which calls for explicit mention. Let us suppose that by some misfortune, serious sin has been committed and confession at the moment is impossible. Must mortal sin remain on the soul?

God in His goodness has given the weakness of our human nature a first-aid remedy even in this instance. An act of perfect contrition will remit mortal sin provided there is included at least implicitly the desire to receive the sacrament of Penance and thus have the mortal sin forgiven officially. Such serious sins must be mentioned in the next confession. To make such an act of contrition, we must regret having sinned because we have offended God Himself, who in Himself is all-good, all-worthy of our love. In other words, the motive for perfect contrition is love of God. This is more than is required for confession, where only an act of “attrition” is requisite — that is, sorrow for sin arising from a motive of fear of punishment or detestation of the malice of sin in itself. But this sorrow is not to be without wholesome acknowledgment of, and reliance on, God’s mercy and love.

Such are the general principles regarding the use of Penance as a remote preparation for a happy and holy death. The frequent reception of the sacrament throughout your life will deepen ever

more and more the serenity that characterizes the children of God and the adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus. In a sense, Penance is always a “last sacrament” because it provides a fund of supernatural peace to offset any worry or fear that may arise when the unpredictable moment of death approaches. Sins from one’s past life are so positively forgiven when subjected to the sacrament of Peace, that years later there can be absolutely no ground for uneasiness concerning them.

The misunderstandings regarding Extreme Unction (the Sacrament of the Sick) are even more erroneous than those concerning Penance. Very many Catholics dread the moment when the priest must be called to administer Extreme Unction, as if by that very fact they or their loved ones will necessarily die. Often they delay the moment of reception as long as possible, so that a recovery is no longer to be hoped for and sometimes death has already supervened.

Extreme Unction has been called the “Cinderella of the sacraments” for the reason that it is associated in the popular mind with inevitable death. Yet how different and consoling is the true doctrine! As the Church teaches us, Christ wished to provide salutary remedies against all the wiles of the enemy of human nature. Satan utilizes every occasion throughout the whole of life in order to attempt to trap souls; but at no time is he more active than at that instant when he perceives that his last chance of seducing a faithful Christian is at hand.

The main purpose of Extreme Unction is to fortify the soul at this critical moment of serious illness. In addition, the sacrament forgives sin and remits temporal punishment just as does Penance, in case the sick person cannot confess sins for which he or she is sorry. Extreme Unction also cleanses away the “remnants of sin.” Finally, if it be expedient for the soul, Extreme Unction restores even bodily health. Daily experience confirms this teaching of the Church, for apparently desperate cases yield to treatment on many occasions only after Extreme Unction has been administered. The testimony of non-Catholic as well as Catholic doctors on this score is not difficult to obtain.

All these effects are indicated in the words of Saint James, who in his Epistle promulgated what Christ had previously instituted. *“Is any one among you sick?” he writes. “Let him bring in the presbyters (priests) of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him”* (James 5:14-15).

As a practical rule in every household, the priest should be summoned as soon as there is a prudently probable danger of death. The sacrament will by no means make death inevitable. Instead, it may effect a cure of the body, if expedient as it will impart strength to the soul. And if God wills that the soul should now pass on to its judgment and reward, the reception of Extreme Unction will guarantee confidence in God’s mercy as well as sentiments of love, fervor, and ineffable peace. This, the moral certainty of possessing sanctifying grace and merit in God’s sight, is truly what we call a happy death. It will be our means of imitating the death of Joseph in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

EPILOGUE.

AFTER Joseph passed away, the Two quietly went about their daily tasks, realizing how soon they would be parted. During those days before His leave-taking, Christ supported His mother by the products of the carpentry Joseph had taught Him. These were precious days; and Jesus and Mary, intensely and perfectly human as they were, appreciated the last quiet moments mother and Son would spend together before the shadow of the cross became the cross itself.

Finally, there came the morning of departure. Jesus was to leave out-of-the-way Nazareth to meet the hostility of the world in founding a Kingdom of God that would last into eternity. Mary understood all that this meant. From her long years of closest contact with God, her Son, her heart was one with His. She knew that as His mother she would be closest to Him in His suffering. But all this did not matter. She loved Jesus, loved Him as only the most exquisite person created by God could love Him. Her union with Him consoled Him far more than any other creature could do. In her love for Jesus, she did not forget that after the Passion and death, would come the Resurrection, the triumph of the cross, and of Christian truth over Satan and the self-indulgence and rebellion that is sin.

She would visit Jesus occasionally while He was preaching and teaching and healing during His public life, but never again on this earth would she have the unutterable joy of living constantly in His presence, day and night, under the same roof, sharing the same table, teaching Him in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

These years at Nazareth with Joseph and Jesus had been Mary's period of consolation, given her for the purpose of strengthening her for the awful moment when the full weight of the burden of the Queen of Martyrs would descend on her soul. It was the love of the Giver, which she desired at all times, and in His present gifts of peace, she could see only Him.

After Jesus' departure, the little house at Nazareth would be empty, the memory of its two menfolk recalled constantly by the sight of the things they had made and handled. Mary would be left alone with her thoughts, her work, her prayers. Yet would she ever be really alone? No, in those prayers she would constantly unite herself with Jesus, her Son and her God. He would be doing the work for which He had come down to earth. She knew that now; and there was not that sickening uncertainty and dread that had struck Saint Joseph and herself when the Child had been lost in the Temple some twenty years ago.

Would the Three ever be united again? There was no doubt of that. In God's own time, Jesus and Mary and Joseph would transplant the spirit of their home at Nazareth to a new home in eternity, and the Holy Family would live together in heaven, always the model of family life, watching over fathers and mothers and children, encouraging them, loving them. But that was not yet to be. The moment of farewell had come . . . now.

We leave the final leave-taking of Jesus and Mary to themselves. It is a scene too intimate, almost too ethereal in its winsomeness to attempt to portray, even inadequately at best. In the privacy of

our hearts, however, we kneel close to the Two, just where they want us ever to be. There is a last affectionate embrace of mother and Son, no weeping for sorrow on their part. But as we ourselves look on, the poignant beauty of Mary and Jesus overwhelms us, and we can look no more for our tears.

Jesus turns, walks for the last time through that doorway through which long ago He had taken His youthful steps. But now, carrying the load of punishment for the world's sins, He gravely wends His way down the narrow, crooked street. At its bend, as He turns toward the open road and the world beyond, He waves to His mother. She stands in the doorway, waves back. She stands . . . our thoughts look ahead. . . . "At the cross of Christ, her station keeping, stood His mother, close to Jesus to the last."

Our sketch of the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is ended. In your own life by your frequent meditation on the Holy Family, you can extend their lessons further so that you imitate them more closely and love them more dearly. And you can offer them yourselves — your husband or wife, your children, your family — in your life consecrated to the Holy Family of Nazareth.

"O Jesus, our most loving Redeemer, who having come to enlighten the world with Your teaching and example, willed to pass the greater part of Your life humbly and in subjection to Mary and Joseph in the poor home of Nazareth, thus sanctifying the Family that was to be an example for all Christian families, graciously take to Yourself our family as it dedicates and consecrates itself to You this day. Defend us, guard us, and establish among us Your holy fear, true peace, and harmony in Christian love; in order that by conforming ourselves to the divine pattern of Your family all of us without exception may be able to attain to eternal happiness.

"Mary, dear Mother of Jesus and our Mother, by your kindly intercession make this our humble offering acceptable in the sight of Jesus, and obtain for us His graces and blessings.

"O Saint Joseph, most holy Guardian of Jesus and Mary, help us by your prayers in all our spiritual and temporal necessities; that so we may be enabled to praise our divine Savior Jesus, together with Mary and you for all eternity."

(Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father, thrice. [A partial Indulgence.]
(500 days' indulgence, Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, 20 October, 1935.)
