

who ever lived! Let us pray that more places request permission to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Spouses, and that someday it may be placed on the universal liturgical calendar.

Everything that refers to that marriage [of Mary and Joseph] happened by an intimate disposition of the Holy Spirit.⁴

— St. Bonaventure

Virginal Father of Jesus

It is perfectly in accordance with the faith and spirit of the Church, to honor as a virgin not only the Mother of God, but likewise Joseph.¹

— St. Peter Damian

The mother of Jesus is a virgin, a perpetual virgin. The perpetual virginity of Mary has been a very important teaching of Christianity from the beginning. How important? Well, in the fourth century, a bishop named Bonoso from Illyricum (that is, modern day areas of Albania, Montenegro, and Croatia) was rebuked by his brother bishops and stripped of his episcopacy for teaching that Mary and Joseph had more children after Jesus was born. The pope at the time, St. Pope Siricius, wrote a letter to the faithful bishops in Illyricum thanking them for disciplining the errant bishop. He wrote:

We surely cannot deny that you were right in correcting the doctrine about children of Mary, and you are right in rejecting the idea that any other offspring should come from the same virginal womb from which Christ was born according to the flesh.²

The doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity is such an important teaching of Christianity that St. Pope Martin I made it a dogma of the faith at the Lateran Council in 649.

With this in mind, did you know that there is a tradition in the Church that holds that St. Joseph was a perpetual virgin as well? It is a tradition that has been adhered to and promoted by saints, holy mystics, and popes for centuries. Before delving into this tradition, it is necessary to address common objections that are often raised against the virginity of Mary. In addressing these objections, a clearer picture of the virginity of St. Joseph will emerge.

First, some have stated that the passages in the New Testament that refer to the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus (see Mk 3:31; 6:3; Mt 13:55-56) are a clear indication that Mary did not remain a virgin. At first glance, these statements seem to contradict the perpetual virginity of Mary, as well as any possibility of St. Joseph being a virgin. However, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a concise answer to the question. It states:

The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact, James and Joseph, “brothers of Jesus,” are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls “the other Mary.” They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression.³

The wisdom expressed in the *Catechism* is the fruit of centuries of study of the Scriptures. Learned biblical scholars familiar with Old Testament expressions have always held that when “brothers and sisters” is used in the New Testament to describe the relatives of Jesus, it is not referring to his biological brothers and sisters. Rather, the Old Testament expression “brothers and sisters” found its way into the New Testament as a way to describe the cousins of Jesus. Every biblical scholar knows that, in the ancient Greek versions of the Old and New Testaments, the word used for brothers and sisters is the same word used for cousins.

Saint Jerome, arguably the greatest biblical scholar in Church history, tackled this issue in the fourth century. He offers the following reflections:

Certain people who follow the ravings of the apocrypha fancy that the brethren of the Lord are sons of Joseph from another wife, and invent a certain woman, Melcha or Escha. As it is contained in the book which we wrote against Helvidius, we understand as brethren of the Lord not the sons of Joseph but the cousins of the Savior, children of Mary [wife of Clopas, she who was] the Lord’s maternal aunt, who is said to be the mother of James the Less and Joseph and Jude. They, as we read, were called brethren of the Lord in another passage of the gospel. Indeed, all scripture indicates that cousins are called brethren.⁴

Saint Jerome addresses several points in this statement. He notes that the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus were not Jesus’ biological siblings, but his cousins, and also points out that the idea that St. Joseph

had children from a previous marriage finds its origin in apocryphal (non-canonical and non-approved) documents.

Saint Bede the Venerable, one of the greatest historians of the eighth century, echoes the thought of St. Jerome:

There were indeed heretics who thought Joseph, the husband of the ever Virgin Mary, had generated from another wife those whom Scripture calls the "brethren of the Lord." Others, with still more cunning, thought that he [St. Joseph] would have given birth to others from Mary herself after the birth of the Lord. But, my dearest brethren, without any fear on this question, we must know and confess that not only the Blessed Mother of God, but also the most holy witness and guardian of her chastity, remained free from absolutely all marital acts; in scriptural usage, the "brothers and sisters of the Lord" are called, not their children [of Mary and Joseph], but their relatives.⁵

Saint Jerome and St. Bede know what they are talking about. These great saints are not only defending a fundamental truth of Christianity — Mary's perpetual virginity — but are also affirming the tradition that St. Joseph remained a virgin his entire life.

Second, some have raised the objection that Mary could not have remained a virgin — and by association, neither could St. Joseph have remained a virgin — because several passages in the New Testament refer to Jesus as the "firstborn" of Mary (see Lk 2:7; Col 1:15). Once again, St. Jerome offers a biblical answer to the objection. He writes:

Certain people have perversely conjectured that Mary [and Joseph] had other sons, for they assert that he alone who is to be called "firstborn" has brothers. However, it is customary in holy scripture to call "firstborn" not him whom brothers follow, but him who is first begotten.⁶

In other words, when Scripture refers to Jesus as the firstborn child of Mary, this is not meant to imply that there are second, third, or fourth-born children. Referring to Jesus as the firstborn Son of Mary is simply a biblical way of stating that Mary begat her first child. It doesn't mean that more children followed.

Third, some protest against the notion of Mary and St. Joseph having a virginal marriage because of the passage in the Gospel of Matthew that states that Joseph did not know his wife "until" Jesus was born. The passage reads:

And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. And he knew her not until she brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

— Mt 1:24-25

At first glance, the passage from Matthew does give the impression that Joseph engaged in marital relations with his wife after she gave birth to Jesus: “[H]e knew her not *until* she brought forth her firstborn son.” However, as numerous Scripture scholars, saints, popes, and theologians have stated over the centuries, the use of the word “until” in Scripture does not necessarily mean that a subsequent action will occur in the future.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian in the history of Christianity, tackled this specific issue in his *Summa Theologiae*. He wrote:

“Until” does not necessarily have a determined temporal sense. When the psalmist says: “Our eyes are turned to the Lord until he have mercy on us” (Ps 122:2), this does not mean that, once we have obtained mercy from God, we shall take our eyes off him.⁷

There are several other passages in Scripture that attest that the use of the word “until” does not imply that an action will necessarily follow.

- 2 Sam 6:23: “And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child *until* the day of her death.” (Does this mean that Michal had children after she died? Of course not!)
- 1 Tim 4:13: “*Until* I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, and to teaching.” (Does this mean Timothy should stop preaching on Jesus after Paul arrives? Of course not!)
- 1 Cor 15:25: “For he [Christ] must reign *until* he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (Does this mean that Christ’s reign will end? Of course not!)
- Mt 1:25: “And he [St. Joseph] knew her not *until* she brought forth her firstborn son.” (Does this mean St. Joseph had relations with Mary after she gave birth to Jesus? No, it doesn’t.)

The consistent teaching and tradition of the Church is that Mary and Joseph lived a virginal marriage. Their perpetually virginal marriage resulted in a perpetually virginal Son, Jesus Christ.

The teaching of the Church that Mary and St. Joseph lived a virginal marriage is the basis for the tradition that St. Joseph was a

perpetual virgin. In fact, the tradition that holds that St. Joseph was a perpetual virgin also affirms that St. Joseph, in a similar fashion to Mary, had made a vow of virginity to God in his youth.

Both Mary and Joseph had made a vow to remain virgins all the days of their lives; and God wished them to be united in the bonds of marriage, not because they repented of the vow already made, but to be confirmed in it and to encourage each other to continue in this holy relation.⁸

— St. Francis de Sales

Mary belonged to Joseph, and Joseph to Mary, so much so that their marriage was very real, since they gave themselves to each other. But how could they do this? Behold the triumph of purity. They reciprocally gave their virginity, and over this virginity they gave each other a mutual right. What right? To safeguard the other's virtue.⁹

— St. Peter Julian Eymard

Mary and St. Joseph safeguarded each other's virtue for the sake of the mission of their virginal Son.

The idea that St. Joseph was a widower who brought children from his first marriage into his marriage with Mary has never been the official teaching of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has never advanced this idea because it is not in accord with the dominant tradition that St. Joseph was a perpetual virgin. It is very important to stress that the idea of St. Joseph as a man who had been previously married and fathered other children from a previous wife — as well as the claim that he was an old man when he espoused Mary — originates in apocryphal (non-approved) sources.

On occasion, apocryphal sources have been used by the Church to establish liturgical feasts — for example, the feast of Mary's parents, Sts. Joachim and Ann — but such instances are rare and only affirmed by the Church when they are in accord with tradition. It can't be denied that some Fathers of the Church — especially in the East — wrote favorably about St. Joseph having a previous marriage and children. However, this does not in any way mean that the Church embraced their ideas or promoted them as official teaching. On the contrary, the dominant tradition on this matter holds that St. Joseph was not a widower, but a virgin.

The Church's constant tradition holds that St. Joseph lived a life of consecrated chastity. Some of the apocryphal gospels picture

him as an old man, even a widower. This is not the Church's teaching. We are rather to believe that he was a virgin, who entered into a virginal marriage with Mary.¹⁰

— Servant of God John A. Hardon

The tradition that St. Joseph was a perpetual virgin provides us with tremendous insights into St. Joseph's greatness and virtue — and it also affords us an insight into how old he probably was when he espoused Mary. A presentation of St. Joseph as a virgin presumes that he was young when he espoused Mary; young enough to make a sacrifice of his virile powers. A virginal St. Joseph conveys an image of a youthful man who had to exhibit heroic, supernatural virtue in order to remain a virgin — he espoused the most beautiful woman ever to live! An elderly man espousing a young virgin requires no sacrifice; the elderly man's virility and passion are waning. A strong, loving, youthful, and virginal man, on the other hand, would be required to make a tremendous sacrifice of his mind, body, senses, and heart in order to espouse a woman so pure and lovely.

Saints, mystics, Scripture scholars, and theologians are not the only ones to affirm the virginal fatherhood of St. Joseph. Several popes in the 20th century have done so as well.

On November 26, 1906, St. Pope Pius X approved a prayer invoking St. Joseph as the virgin father of Jesus. He even granted an indulgence to all who recite the prayer. It reads:

O Joseph, virgin father of Jesus, most pure spouse of the Virgin Mary, pray for us daily to the same Jesus, the Son of God that, armed with the weapons of his grace, we may fight as we ought during life, and be crowned by him at the moment of our death. Amen.¹¹

On May 4, 1970, St. Pope Paul VI, speaking to a group in France, affirmed that Mary and St. Joseph lived a virginal marriage. He went so far as to offer an image of St. Joseph and Mary as the new parents of humanity, a type of new Adam and new Eve. He stated:

Whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit from which holiness spreads over the earth. The Savior began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union.¹²

Think about it: If the virgin Eve was entrusted by God to the care of a virginal husband (Adam), why would it be any different between

Mary and St. Joseph? Mary and St. Joseph are much greater than Adam and Eve. Unlike our first parents (Adam and Eve), the virginal union of our new parents (Mary and St. Joseph) did not result in the downfall of the human race but in mankind's elevation. The virginal, loving union of St. Joseph and Mary leads to our redemption. Their virginal union produced a virginal Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Catholic tradition has always taught that Mary's virginal love for God was so great that she consecrated her body to God at an early age through a vow of perpetual virginity. Mary entrusted her entire person to God and had absolute confidence in his plan for her life. She desired nothing in life other than God's will. Her confidence in God was so great that she trusted him to lead her into marriage with a man. She was certain that God would give her a man who would truly love both God and her, and so respect her vow; a man who would be completely dedicated to God's plan and protect her virginity. She never doubted God at all.

The Virgin [Mary] has been wed to the virginal bridegroom [Joseph]. Yet she — who married Joseph out of obedience to her elders — has no fear for her virginity under Joseph's protection. Having placed her trust in God, she delegated to a man the safeguarding of the greatest treasure. She — who had dedicated the flower of virginity to God earlier in a solemn ceremony — had no doubt that she would have a virginal spouse.¹³

— St. Stanislaus Papczyński

In St. Joseph, God prepared a spouse, a guardian, and a knight for Mary. According to God's design, it had to be this way. God did not come into the world in any other manner than through the marriage of a man and a woman, a virginal man and woman.

In St. Joseph, Mary experienced a perfect reflection and mirror of God's love for her. When Mary met St. Joseph, she knew that God had chosen him to be her loving (and beloved) husband. Trusting in God's plan, she fell in love with St. Joseph and gave him her Heart. Mary's body was reserved for God, but she had the freedom to give her Heart to St. Joseph, the only man worthy of her, the only man perfectly reflecting the pure love of God.

In the virtuous manhood of St. Joseph, Mary experienced purity, chastity, modesty, and sacrificial love. Mary's Heart and body were secure in the spousal love of St. Joseph. He is a mirror of the purity

of God the Father. Like the Father eternally begets a Son without physical union with another person, St. Joseph fathers a Son without physical union with Mary. The virginal marriage of St. Joseph and Mary brings about spiritual motherhood, spiritual fatherhood, and virginal fecundity.

The greatest theological minds in all of Christianity have praised the virginal fatherhood of St. Joseph:

A Son was born of the Virgin Mary to the piety and love of Joseph, and that son was the Son of God. Thus, should not the husband accept virginally what the wife brought forth virginally? For just as she was a virginal wife, so was he a virginal husband; just as she was a virginal mother, so was he a virginal father. Therefore, whoever says, "He should not have been called father because he did not generate the son" looks to concupiscence in the procreation of children, not to the inner sentiments of love. Let his greater purity confirm his fatherhood; let not holy Mary reprehend us, for she was unwilling to place her name before that of her husband but said, "Thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing." Therefore, let no perverse murmurers do what the virginal wife did not do. As he was a virginal husband, so he was a virginal father. Just as was the man, just so was the woman. The Holy Spirit, resting in the justice of both, gave a son to both.¹⁴

— St. Augustine

Joseph also was virginal through Mary in order that from a virginal marriage a virginal son might be born.¹⁵

— St. Jerome

I believe that this man, St. Joseph, was adorned with the most pure virginity, the most profound humility, the most ardent love and charity towards God.¹⁶

— St. Bernardine of Siena

In order to augment and support Mary's virginity the Eternal Father gave her a virginal companion, the great St. Joseph.¹⁷

— St. Francis de Sales

He [St. Joseph] was a virgin, and his virginity was the faithful mirror of the virginity of Mary.¹⁸

— St. John Henry Newman

Saint Thomas Aquinas also believed that St. Joseph was a virgin. The Angelic Doctor offers an additional insight on the virginal

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fatherhood of St. Joseph, advancing the notion that it is only proper that Jesus entrusted his virgin mother to a virgin husband since the virgin mother was later entrusted to a virgin apostle (St. John the Apostle) at the foot of the Cross. Saint Thomas writes:

We believe that just as the mother of Jesus was a virgin, so was Joseph, because he [God] placed the Virgin in the care of a virgin [St. John the Apostle], and just as he did this at the close [at the Cross], so did he do it at the beginning [at the marriage of Mary and Joseph].¹⁹

Saint Thomas Aquinas' reasoning makes sense. If you were God, wouldn't you entrust your mother to a virgin? Wouldn't you want your mother to be guarded and honored by a man absolutely pure, chaste, and a perfect reflection of God's love? Of course you would! Saint Albert the Great thought so, too. He wrote:

As a virginal husband, he [St. Joseph] guarded his virginal wife.²⁰

In the 17th century, the famed mystic Venerable Mary of Ágreda wrote *The Mystical City of God*. The book is a devotional masterpiece, portraying for us the life and wonders of the Virgin Mary. Venerable Mary of Ágreda reports that she was privy to conversations that took place between Mary and St. Joseph. In one such conversation, St. Joseph spoke to his beloved wife about the delight he took in her virginity, and revealed to her that he, too, had taken a vow of virginity in his youth. It reads:

My Mistress, in making known to me thy chaste and welcome sentiments, thou hast penetrated and dilated my heart. I have not opened my thoughts to thee before knowing thy own. I also acknowledge myself under greater obligation to the Lord of creation than other men; for very early he has called me by his true enlightenment to love him with an upright heart; and I desire thee to know, Lady, that at the age of twelve years I also made a promise to serve the Most High in perpetual chastity. On this account I now gladly ratify this vow in order not to impede thy own; in the presence of his Majesty I promise to aid thee, as far as in me lies, in serving him and loving him according to thy full desires. I will be, with the divine grace, thy most faithful servant and companion, and I pray thee, accept my chaste love and hold me as thy brother, without ever entertaining any other kind of love, outside the one which thou owest to God and after God to me.²¹

Saint Joseph is the virginal spouse of Mary and the virginal father of Jesus. He is a perpetual virgin. Saint Joseph is your virginal father!

Santo Anello

Divine union between Our Lady and the glorious St. Joseph!
By means of this union that **good of eternal goods**, Our Lord himself, belonged to St. Joseph as well as to Our Lady.¹

— St. Francis de Sales

“Santo Anello?” Who is that?
Actually, Santo Anello is not a person. Santo Anello is a thing: the “holy ring” that St. Joseph gave Mary on their wedding day!

Yes, you read that right. The wedding ring that St. Joseph gave to Mary is still in existence today. It is reserved in a special gold and silver reliquary in the Cathedral of San Lorenzo in Perugia, Italy. Many people who go on pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy, are unaware that only a short distance away from Assisi (14 miles) is the holy ring.

The holy ring has been in Perugia since the 19th century. Prior to its term in Perugia, the ring was housed in various other locations throughout Italy. Until recently, the existence of the ring was not known to many people outside of Perugia. Even many saints did not know about the holy ring.

Thanks to the mystical visions of Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, people around the world now know about the Santo Anello and its exact location. Interestingly, Blessed Anne Catherine herself never saw the ring in person. She only saw the holy ring in her mystical visions, but never knew where the ring was located. Information about its precise location only came to light after her death.

Here’s how.

It was reported that on July 29 and August 3, 1821, Blessed Anne Catherine received visions concerning the holy ring. Prior to the visions, she had had no idea that the ring St. Joseph had given Mary was still in existence. She said:

[July 29, 1821] I saw the Blessed Virgin’s wedding ring; it is neither of silver nor of gold, nor of any other metal; it is dark in color and iridescent; it is not a thin narrow ring, but rather thick and at least a finger broad. I saw it smooth and yet as if covered with little regular triangles in which were letters. On the inside