

WONDER 5

JUST AND REVERENT MAN

Saint Joseph was “a just man,” a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care.

— St. John Paul II

Son of David

How great is the dignity of that son of David, Joseph, the husband of Mary!¹

— Blessed Gabriele Allegra

How great indeed is the dignity of St. Joseph! In the Litany of St. Joseph, he is given the title “Noble Offspring of David.” In some translations, the title is rendered as “Renowned Offspring of David.” Either way, the meaning is the same: Saint Joseph is a descendant of King David.

He [St. Joseph] was the progeny of a patriarchal, regal, and princely stock according to the direct line. From this it is evident that the dignity of the patriarchs, kings, and princes terminated in Joseph.²

— St. Bernardine of Siena

Saint Joseph has the blood of kings. What a noble father Jesus has in St. Joseph; what a noble father we have in St. Joseph. Our spiritual father is a descendant of royalty! Saint Joseph is the “Son of David.”

The title “Son of David” is a Messianic title. Jesus is called the “Son of David” 17 times in the New Testament. Unlike Jesus, St. Joseph is not the Messiah, but he is the only other person in the New Testament referred to as the Son of David.

Saint Joseph is called the “Son of David” by the angel of God when he is instructed by the angel not to be afraid to take Mary into his home (see Mt 1:20). Why does the angel call St. Joseph the “Son of David,” especially in light of the fact that it is a title associated with the Messiah? The reason the angel does it is because St. Joseph

needs to be reminded of his royal ancestry at a very crucial moment in salvation history. Saint Joseph had recently discovered that his wife was pregnant and, in his humility, not fully understanding the origin of the child in her womb, he is about to take action by separating himself from her and the Child. The angel had to come to remind St. Joseph of who he was and let him know what role he had been given by God in the coming of the Messiah, lest he walk away from divine mysteries and the vocational call he had been created to fulfill. In other words, God planned for his Eternal Son to be known by those around him as the son of a man of the house of David. That man was St. Joseph.

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.” Otherwise, while troubled in mind, you may fail to understand this mystery. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.” What you see in her is virtue, not sin. This is not a human fall, but a divine descent. Here is a reward, not guilt. This is an enlargement from heaven, not a detriment to the body. This is not the betrayal of a person, it is the secret of the Judge. Here is the victory of him who knows the case, not the penalty of torture. Here is not some man’s stealthy deed, but the treasure of God. Here there is a cause not of death, but of life. Therefore, do not be afraid.³

— St. Peter Chrysologus

Saint Peter Chrysologus’ words are beautiful and thought-provoking. His reflection presumes that St. Joseph was suspicious of Mary’s faithfulness, but as we will see in the section “Just and Reverent Man,” many other saints provide a much more noble and virtuous explanation for Joseph’s behavior. These saints hold that St. Joseph was in reverential awe at what was happening in Mary’s womb, and he considered himself unworthy to be her husband and the putative father of the Child. He never suspected Mary of any wrongdoing whatsoever. On the contrary, St. Joseph knew he was in the presence of a great mystery. Humble and just, he planned to separate himself from Mary quietly in order not to get in the way of divine mysteries. Before he could take action, however, God sent his angel to remind Joseph of his royal lineage, a lineage needed for the Savior to be considered a descendant of David.

King David, St. Joseph’s royal ancestor, had himself once taken a similar course of action. Considering himself unworthy to have the Ark of the Covenant in his city, King David sent the Ark away (see 2 Sam 6) for three months. To prevent something similar from

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 sured St. Joseph that God had chosen him to take the child and his
 mother into his home. Saint Joseph was not to send the ark away.
 Saint Joseph was not to do what King David had done. "Joseph, son
 of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home"
 (Mt 1:20).

Just and Reverent Man

To be just is to be perfectly united to the Divine Will, and to be
 always conformed to it in all sorts of events, whether prosperous
 or adverse. That St. Joseph was this, no one can doubt.¹

— St. Francis de Sales

To exercise the virtue of justice, as St. Francis de Sales rightly notes,
 a person needs to live in perfect accord with the Divine Will and,
 in the face of all sorts of events, whether advantageous or adverse,
 give God and others their due. The Church has always understood
 St. Joseph to be a just and holy man, loving God and neighbor as he
 ought, but it hasn't always understood the deeper theological signif-
 icance of what those words actually mean, especially when applied
 to the actions of St. Joseph in the New Testament. It has taken the
 Church centuries to advance a theology of St. Joseph that shows his
 greatness and his holiness.

Today, the Church teaches that St. Joseph is the holiest human
 person after Mary and the "Most Just" of all the saints. He is our
 spiritual father, the Pillar of Families, the Glory of Domestic Life,
 the Patron of the Universal Church, and the Terror of Demons. For
 this reason, certain passages in the New Testament that present the
 actions of St. Joseph need to be reexamined in light of what is now
 unequivocally taught by the Church to be true about St. Joseph —
 namely, that St. Joseph, as he confronted all sorts of events, whether
 advantageous or adverse, always acted in accord with the Divine Will
 and gave God and others their due. He truly lived the love of God
 and neighbor that his Son would later teach.

What did he [St. Joseph] actually do? He loved. This is all he
 did, and it was sufficient for his glory. He loved God without
 limit and without lessening. This was his significance; this was
 his life here below. For this, he has been loved immeasurably.