Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary—Solemnity
March 19

First Century - Patron Saint of the Universal Church, fathers, carpenters, and a happy death

*"When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.
He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus." ~Matthew 1:24–25*

Reflection: The Father in Heaven sent His Son into the world to be born of the Virgin Mary. The Father chose her who was the Immaculate Conception to bear His Son in her womb, bring Him into the world, and raise Him from infancy to adulthood. But the Father also needed to choose a foster father for His divine Son. Of all the men in Israel that He could have chosen, He chose Joseph of Nazareth, a carpenter. Today's solemnity not only honors him, but it also points us to his marital union with the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the effect that that marriage had not only upon him, Mary and Jesus, but also upon us as members of the Body of Christ.

Joseph was likely born in the small town of Bethlehem, where Jesus was also born, but he moved to Nazareth with Mary and Jesus after returning from Egypt in order to keep Jesus safe from Archelaus, the ruler of Judea. Though there are a number of apocryphal writings about him from the first several centuries, nothing is known about him for certain except what is contained in the Gospels. But the Gospels tell us all we need to know about this holy, obedient, and just man, who was given authority over the Son of God and continues to exercise a holy authority over the entire Church.

Saint Joseph was truly the father of Jesus. Of this truth, Saint Augustine writes, "By reason of their faithful marriage, both of them deserve to be called Christ's parents, not only his mother but also his father, who was a parent in the same way that he was the mother's spouse: in mind, not in the flesh." Joseph's fatherhood is also clearly established by the fact that the angel gave him the responsibility of naming Jesus. "She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus…" (Matthew 1:21).

Saint Joseph was obedient to the Father in Heaven, and that obedience deepened his union with Mary his spouse, making their marriage the ideal family for the Son of God. Pope Saint John Paul II speaks of this fact in his apostolic exhortation *Guardian of the Redeemer*, when he says, "One can say that what Joseph did united him in an altogether special way to the faith of Mary. He accepted as truth, coming from God, the very thing that she had already accepted at the Annunciation" (#4). Saint Joseph's obedience is clearly seen in his response to four dreams by which an angel instructs Joseph how best to guard and protect the Son of God. Joseph acts immediately, in obedience, to the angel's instructions. The Vatican II document, *Dei Verbum* states, "'The obedience of faith' must be given to God as he reveals himself. By this obedience of faith man freely commits himself entirely to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals,' and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him" (#5). Thus, since Saint Joseph's obedience was absolute, then that obedience fully united him to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in her obedience, and to the Father in Heaven. His obedience to the Father also enables him to become a powerful instrument of the Father's authority on earth, exercised through him.

Saint Joseph exercised the authority of the Father by protecting the Son of God and expecting obedience from the Son as His earthly father. That Jesus was obedient to Joseph is made clear in the Gospels: "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them…" (Luke 2:52). The Son of God could only be obedient to the will of His Father. Therefore, in order for Joseph to exercise authority over Jesus, he had to enact nothing other than the will of the Father to which he, himself, was obedient.

On December 8, 1847, Pope Pius IX declared Saint Joseph to be the Universal Patron and Protector of the Catholic Church. This unique title reflects the same truth that Mary is the Mother of God and the Mother of the entire Church. Since she was the mother of the Son of God, and we, the Church, are members of the Body of Christ, then she is our Mother. And since Joseph was the father of the Son of God, His guardian and protector, over whom he was given authority, and from Whom he received obedience, then we, too, can trust in Joseph's guardianship over us. We must have confidence in submitting to his spiritual authority in our lives, for we are members of the Body of Christ.

As we honor Saint Joseph as the husband of Mary today, ponder the effect of that unique marriage bond. Saint Joseph was not perfect, but his absolute obedience to the Father's will and his unity in marriage to the Mother of God makes him our father, just as he was the father of Jesus. As a loving father, he will direct us with the authority of God the Father, will protect us in times of trouble as he did for Jesus and Mary, and must always be seen as one uniquely chosen to be the father of the family to which we belong.

Prayer: *Saint Joseph, you were obedient to the will of the Father in Heaven as it was revealed to you by an angel. You took Mary as your wife and Jesus as your Son. You raised Him, protected Him, and exercised a fatherly authority over Him. Please exercise that same fatherly authority, given to you by the Father in Heaven, over my life. I entrust myself to your intercession and authority and pray that you protect me always, guiding me to your Son in Heaven. Saint Joseph, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.*