

Spring 2015

A publication of the
Oblates of St. Joseph,
Holy Spouses Province,
United States of America

CUSTOS



*"St. Joseph, who taught
the Christ child,
guide our youth to love
and embrace the
teachings of
Jesus our Lord."*



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We are dedicated to sharing the charism of the Oblates of St. Joseph with you through meditations on our Josephite-Marellian spirituality, sound theological reflections, and news and events from our Congregation.

CUSTOS

A quarterly publication of the Oblates of St. Joseph, Holy Spouses Province, U.S.A.

The title of our magazine 'Custos' is the Latin word for 'Guardian' and refers to St. Joseph in his vocation as the guardian and protector of Jesus and Mary.

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Front Cover: Fr. Sergio Perez, O.S.J. with members of the Theology of the Body (TOB) youth group leadership team from Madera, CA. Fr. Sergio and the team collaborated to put on a TOB retreat in Loomis, CA in January 2015.

Above: The Oblates of St. Joseph of the Holy Spouses Province (U.S.A.).

DEAR FRIENDS AND Benefactors,

Once again we are preparing for the holy celebration of Easter as we enter into the Spring season. As a native of the east coast, I know all too well how nasty winter can be and these past months have proven for many to be another merciless experience of severe cold, snow and ice. Spring is truly a welcome event



for you who felt the winter's wrath, and for those of us living here on the west coast we are more than grateful to God for the daily blessing of sunshine and warm temperatures. However, no matter what part of the country we may be currently

living, Easter joy floods our hearts and we are made anew after the long and arduous journey of Lent that began in ashes.

The Church invites us to take all of our problems, worries and struggles and view them with Easter hope as our lives are filled with experiences of resurrection, when the despair and desperation of our Good Fridays are transformed by the compassion and mercy of those who have embraced the Good News of Easter morning's empty tomb. We sometimes find ourselves stuck in a "Good Friday world": our problems batter us, overwhelm us, strain our ability to cope and make it all work. Our Alleluias are tempered by reality and so we approach the Easter Feast with "Yes, Christ is risen, BUT..." Easter does not take away our daily problems and worries, but changes the way we face and solve them. The Risen Lord gives us the power and strength to transform our own crosses of life as a means of sanctification just as His Cross became the instrument of saving the world from sin and death.

In the last several months, we Oblate brothers and priests of the USA province faced a series of

losses of family members brought on by serious sickness. I witnessed my brother Oblates deal with these losses with tremendous courage and a deep spirit of faith. We, as a religious family, felt the bond of prayer and fraternal support among us through these sad experiences, and much like the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, trusting in God knowing that He walks with us "through the valley of darkness." You, my dear readers, also have your own personal Good Friday stories and I am confident that your Easter faith has transformed you and called you to see beyond your own fears, sorrows and anger in order to recognize the blessings you have received and the blessings you have to offer.

You are a blessing to us because of how you inspire us with your strong faith, your commitment in our parishes, seminaries and other places of ministry and the loving support you offer to our priests, brothers and seminarians. Daily we pray for each of you and your families when we gather in our small religious communities before the Risen Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament. May Easter joy remain forever in our hearts no matter the suffering we may be currently experiencing. Let us recall the inspiring words of our Holy Founder, St. Joseph Marello: "After the Resurrection, Jesus brought peace to His disciples and wants to bring it also to us. Let us open our hearts to this peace of Jesus, but does not exclude trials, sacrifice and the cross." The Cross of Good Friday and the Empty Tomb of Easter Sunday are personally before each of us: may we in our daily lives come to truly experience Jesus in both.

Easter blessings to you and all your loved ones!

Yours in Christ, our Crucified and Risen Lord,

Rev. Paul A. McDonnell, O.S.J.
Very Rev. Paul A. McDonnell, O.S.J.

Provincial Superior, Holy Spouses Province



Building Our Mother's Church

PHASE I CONSTRUCTION COMPLETE

By Virginia Santos-Ruiz

ONE WORK ENTRUSTED to the Oblates of St. Joseph since 1992 is the large bilingual parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Bakersfield, CA. This parish was built in 1925; at that time it was large enough to meet the needs of our parishioners. As the parish grew, the church became too small to accommodate the ever increasing number of people attending Mass. As a result, the Oblates here in Bakersfield have been entrusted with the responsibility of building a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Co-patroness of the Unborn. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the tilma of St. Juan Diego shows her wearing a maternity band beneath her hands, representing the pregnant mother about to give birth. God chose Joseph as husband of Mary to protect Jesus in the womb and after birth. Together the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, are Co-patrons of the Unborn.

In 2001 Fr. James Catalano, O.S.J. buried a Holy Family medal on an enormous empty lot on Brundage Lane in western Bakersfield. Shortly thereafter, Divine Providence blessed us; the Berchtold family donated this beautiful property to our parish. On May 2, 2010 Mass was celebrated on the Brundage property to consecrate this colossal building project to St. Joseph. On October 23, 2011, Phase 1 construction officially commenced. Shortly thereafter, the parish was established as a Diocesan Shrine, which is a place of pilgrimage for all who wish to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe and to remember the many unborn babies of the world. On

October 12, 2012 Mass was celebrated at the newly constructed Pavilion by Bishop Ochoa, to bless the completion of Phase 1 construction.

Phase 2 of our Capital Campaign has now begun, and this is certainly the much more challenging phase. We presently still need \$9 million dollars in order to begin construction of our beautiful Shrine Church. We are inspired by the story of St. Juan Diego who was visited by our Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531 with a message to build her church. We believe that just as St. Juan Diego was called, we too are called by our Mother to build Her Shrine. In a time when life can seem inconsolable, we see the great need for this shrine: a sacred place where people can come together and venerate Our Lady of Guadalupe, adore her Son, seek reconciliation through the Sacraments, and seek her intercession in life's difficulties. It is with great desire that we invite you to become a part of our mission. Say a prayer and consider if God might be calling you to be a supporting "Friend of the Shrine."

For more information on how to become a Friend of the Shrine, or to have your name added to our Shrine mailing list, please contact us!

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How to be an Evangelizer

by Fr. Gregory Finn, O.S.J.

POPE FRANCIS IN his Encyclical Letter *Evangelii gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel") maps out for us the vision and the program he feels God is calling him to in the time of his service as the Vicar of Christ. His emphasis has always been to try to convey ever more clearly the joy of experiencing the love of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Savior, which transforms our lives here and for eternity. It is this joy also that should emerge from the believer who seeks to live this incredible relationship with God. Our Holy Father has reflected on some of the earthy problems and attitudes that can get in the way of both experiencing this joy and expressing it (materialism and division) but then he turns to reflect on how the joy we have should be motivating us to spread the "Good News," so people truly perceive it as good news, news that inspires and uplifts, that attracts and excites, that nourishes those who share it, and makes them want to spread it all the more.

The work of living and sharing the Good News relies on us to be effective in living and proposing it. And this is the Good News: that God has come to earth, that his death on the cross saves us, that his love and forgiveness are therefore without limit and available to all who welcome it, that there is a possibility of life

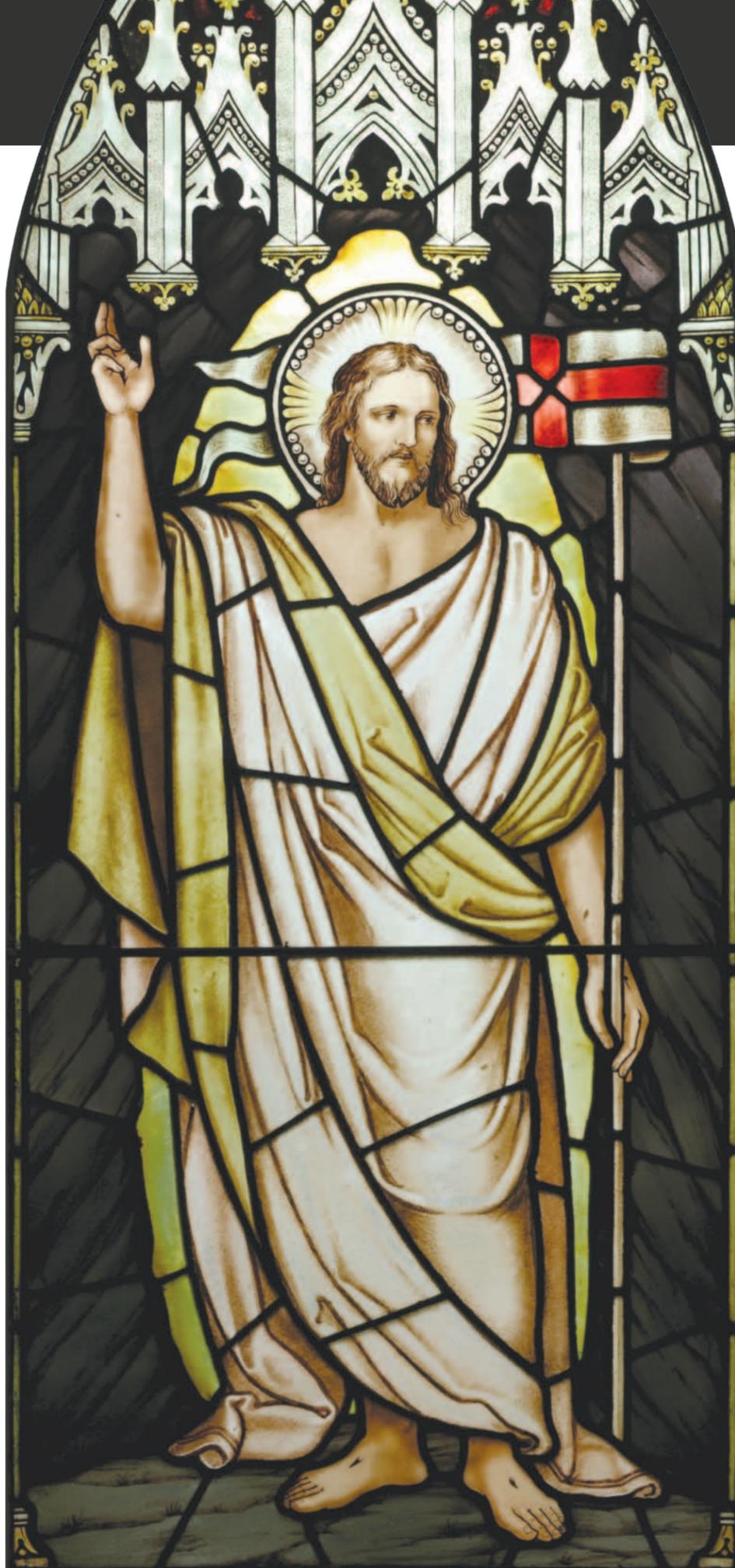
greater than we can imagine, and there is grace to get us there. Our participation in this Good News is the Lord's way of including us in the whole work of salvation. But it puts a lot on our shoulders! Nevertheless, if we have the love of God in our hearts, if we have let His joy penetrate us, it can be done.

We need to have a "missionary spirituality," a relationship to God that is at once both personal and intimate, for that is how God knows and loves each of His children. If we know and love God for who he is and what he has done for us, then we absolutely have to be open to the impulse to share it with others. It is a direct flow if our relationship to God is solid and authentic. We are not going to want to keep it to ourselves, we are going to want to tell others, we are going to want to look for the moments, be aware of who might need to hear it, be unafraid when the opportunity comes to offer it as a gift (never an imposition!) to those in need,

to seek for ways to express it in concrete forms: praying for others, helping those in need, reaching out to the poor, showing charity to all, curbing our egos, forgiving our brothers, etc.

There is no room for self-centered thinking here, allowing ourselves to be entirely bound by our per-

We live in a time when selfishness is practically considered a virtue, but it really has no place in any genuine relationship, let alone one with God. We must instead be generous. The more grace we give away, the more room we make for further grace to be received.



sonal needs, our personal journey, our personal fulfillment. If we are loved, love must move us to go beyond ourselves. We live in a time when selfishness is practically considered a virtue, but it really has no place in any genuine relationship, let alone one with God. We must instead be generous. The more grace we give away, the more room we make for further grace to be received. Nor should we be hesitant or reluctant or afraid. If God has loved us so, and done so much for us, we need not fear the efforts, nor make excuses for holding back, or assume that others will carry out what we are slow to do. If God's grace gives us joy, joyfully and energetically let us share it.

Neither is there room for pessimism or negativity or fear. Yes, the world around us is not much favorable, sometimes even hostile. Yet it did not deter the Son of God, and we are His beloved brothers and sisters! The efforts of living and sharing the life of God may not be easy, to be sure! But just because there will be difficulties, we should not give into to gloomy thinking, fearful musings, or the temptation that all is futile. These have been challenges that Christians have faced from the beginning—the apostles faced them explicitly as we can see from the Gospels themselves—but they have been happily overcome by those whose trust in

God, whose focus on Him, whose reliance is on grace, whose hope is determined. That needs to be us!

There can be a certain temptation to compromise our enthusiasm with worldly tactics and that our simple and generous trust in the Lord be blunted by allowing room for earthly goals and objectives. The Holy Father speaks of “spiritual worldliness” regarding those who would like to have it both ways: be indulgers of this world and its goods, but also have a foot in the spiritual path of Christ: “Just in case!” we might say, “Just to make sure our bases are covered!” This is a sure way to dull our God inspired joy, and further, to delude those who see us. For it projects clearly that we do not have faith enough in what we profess to put behind us this worldly preferences and pleasures - and if that is so, why should anyone follow Christ if His own followers don't find their ultimate joy in Him? Do our lives show that Christ matters more than anything else? Would anyone looking at us see someone striving to follow the ways of the Lord (despite our fumbles and failings)? Would people shake their heads and laugh, because we are so much like all the rest of the world, with but a thin coating of piety?

Do we love one another? If we are happy believers and followers of the Christ who loves us, do we dem-

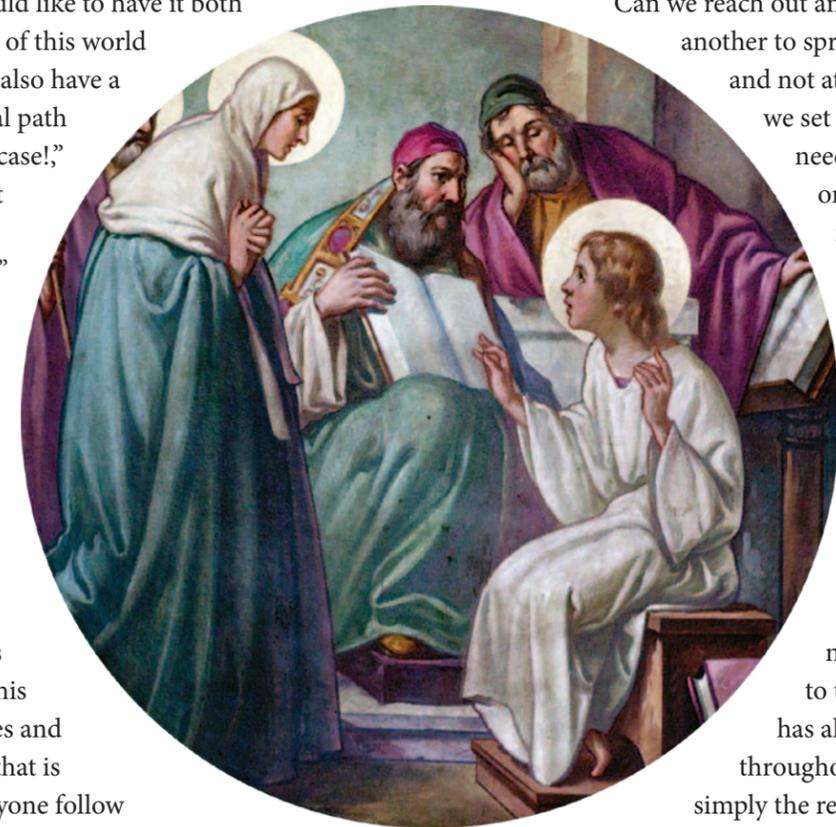
onstrate it by not allowing anything to come between us, by being brothers and sisters to each other no matter what, by overcoming human divisions for the grace of Christ unites us above and beyond the human level? All the redeemed are a family! We are each imperfect and have our rough edges, but can we show that we strive to overcome them and be united as a family?

Can we reach out and work with one another to spread the Good News, and not at cross purposes? Can we set aside our egos and need for self-expression or recognition, and instead just be happy that each of us is doing something for the Lord in his or her own way?

Our Church faces many challenges, and even at times its earthly structures and organizations need to be called back to these ideas. That has always been the case throughout our history. It is simply the reality of Original Sin that constantly needs to be addressed.

Let us not worry, for the Lord cannot be defeated, and we are His children. Let us continue to be joy-filled followers of Christ, doing all that we can, each according to his vocation, each with the opportunities given, to share the grace and share the joy!

Fr. Gregory Finn, O.S.J., is the pastor of Holy Annunciation parish in Hazleton, PA.



Facing page: Stained glass window of the resurrected Jesus. Above: Finding of Jesus in the Temple, St. Joseph Mareello Church, Pittston, PA.

Resting like St. Joseph

by Pope Francis

On January 16, 2015 while in the Philippines, Pope Francis met with families in a packed arena in Manila. In his address he reflected on the person of St. Joseph and what St. Joseph can teach us about growing closer to the Lord and creating stronger families. We are happy to share his thoughts here, edited for length.

DEAR FAMILIES,
Dear Friends in Christ,...

The Scriptures seldom speak of Saint Joseph, but when they do, we often find him resting, as an angel reveals God's will to him in his dreams. In the Gospel passage we have just heard, we find Joseph resting not once, but twice. This evening I would like to rest in the Lord with all of you, and to reflect with you on the gift of the family.

It is important to dream in the family. All mothers and fathers dream of their sons and daughters in the womb for nine months. They dream of how they will be. It isn't possible to have a family without such dreams. When you lose this capacity to dream you lose the capacity to love, the capacity to love is lost. I recommend that at night when you examine your consciences, ask yourself if you dreamed of the future of your sons and daughters. Did you dream of

your husband or wife? Did you dream today of your parents, your grandparents who carried forward the family to me? It is so important to dream and especially to dream in the family. Please don't lose the ability to dream in this way. How many solutions are found to family problems if we take time to reflect, if we think of a husband or wife, and we dream about the good qualities they have. Don't ever lose the memory of when you were boyfriend or girlfriend. That is very important.

Joseph's rest revealed God's will to him. In this moment of rest in the Lord, as we pause from our many daily obligations and activities, God is also speaking to us. He speaks to us in the reading we have just heard, in our prayer and witness, and in the quiet of our hearts. Let us reflect on what the Lord is saying to us, especially in this evening's Gospel. There are three

aspects of this passage which I would ask you to consider: resting in the Lord, rising with Jesus and Mary, and being a prophetic voice...

I would like to tell you something very personal. I like St Joseph very much. He is a strong man of silence. On my desk I have a statue of St Joseph sleeping. While sleeping he looks after the Church. Yes, he can do it! We know that. When I have a problem or a difficulty, I write on a piece of paper and I put it under his statue so he can dream about it. This means please pray to St Joseph for this problem.

Those precious moments of repose, of resting with the Lord in prayer, are moments we might wish to prolong. But like Saint Joseph, once we have heard God's voice, we must rise from our slumber; we must get up and act (cf. Rom 13:11). Faith does not remove us from the world, but draws us more deeply into it. Each of us, in fact,



has a special role in preparing for the coming of God's kingdom in our world.

Just as the gift of the Holy Family was entrusted to Saint Joseph, so the gift of the family and its place in God's plan is entrusted to us so we can carry it forward. To each one of you and us because I too am the son of a family.

The angel of the Lord revealed to Joseph the dangers which threatened Jesus and Mary, forcing them to flee to Egypt and then to settle in Nazareth. So too, in our time, God calls upon us to recognize the dangers threatening our own families and to protect them from harm...

The pressures on family life today are many. Here in the Philippines, countless families are still suffering from the effects of natural disasters. The economic situation has caused families to be separated by migration and the search for employment, and financial problems strain many households. While all too many people live in dire poverty, others are caught up in materialism and lifestyles which are destructive of family life and the most basic demands of Christian morality. The family is also threatened by growing efforts on the part of some to redefine the

very institution of marriage, by relativism, by the culture of the ephemeral, by a lack of openness to life.

I think of Blessed Paul VI in the moment of that challenge of

Pray often and take the fruits of your prayer into the world, that all may know Jesus Christ and his merciful love.

population growth, he had the strength to defend openness to life. He knew the difficulties families experience and that's why in his encyclical (*Humanae Vitae*) he expressed compassion for specific cases and he taught professors to be particularly compassionate for particular cases. And he went further, he looked at the people on the earth and he saw that lack (of children) and the problem it could cause families in the future. Paul VI was courageous, a good pastor and he warned his sheep about the wolves that were approaching. And from the heavens he blesses us today.

Our world needs good and strong families to overcome these threats! The Philippines needs holy and loving families to protect the beauty and truth of the family in

God's plan and to be a support and example for other families. Every threat to the family is a threat to society itself. The future of humanity, as Saint John Paul II often said, passes through the family (cf.

Familiaris Consortio, 85). So protect your families! See in them your country's greatest treasure and nourish them always by prayer and the grace of the sacraments. Families will always have their trials, but may you never add to them! Instead, be

living examples of love, forgiveness and care. Be sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death. What a gift this would be to society, if every Christian family lived fully its noble vocation! So rise with Jesus and Mary, and set out on the path the Lord traces for each of you...

Dear friends in Christ, know that I pray for you always! I pray that the Lord may continue to deepen your love for him, and that this love may manifest itself in your love for one another and for the Church. Pray often and take the fruits of your prayer into the world, that all may know Jesus Christ and his merciful love. Please pray also for me, for I truly need your prayers and will depend on them always!

The Christian Education of Youth

In this issue we continue to reflect on the counsel given by St. Joseph Marelllo to parents on how they can work to educate and form their children in the Catholic faith. We share here the second part of his Pastoral Letter written February 4, 1892 as the Bishop of Acqui, Italy.

MAY YOU KEEP far from you, O fathers and mothers, O teachers of the young, that false tenderness that prevents you from addressing a word of reproof to your children; from making them shed a tear, and which renders you so tolerant of their defects as to make light of them or laugh them off. Whereby children taking advantage of such thoughtless condescension and looking upon it almost as a tacit approval of their action, not only do they not correct themselves, but they fall every day into worse faults. God does not want that, having become incorrigible, they cause you affliction and tears, as well as becoming a cause for remorse due to your having neglected to admonish them seriously and correct them on time.

With this we do not mean to say that we must always be severe with children and nothing excuse because of the tenderness of their age. They are certainly blameworthy those fathers who treat their children with excessive rigor, or who reprove them for their faults only with bitter words full of threats and anger; even (and would that it were not) with imprecations accompanied by brutal punishments. Such fathers, instead of correcting, ruin their offspring and impel them to further wrong doing.

However, if excess is bad, so is the exclusion from education of every firmness and severity in correction and punishment, and abandoning oneself to that blind indulgence that never finds anything deserving punishment and reprehension and even admires faults. This is one way that children are mistreated under the appear-

ance of loving them, and for fear of displeasing them, letting them grow in vice and corruption. Severity must be used in its time and place, but always within the limits of prudence and discretion, in reproving as

We have to discern between one fault and another, between one failing and another, and not use the same rigor for every one; besides being unjust, it would lose its entire efficacy because of its excessive frequency.

well as in punishing, so that the soul that is at fault may not be discouraged or disheartened, and not become obstinate in doing evil.

In order that correction may be just, timely and useful, parents must apply themselves to knowing well the character of their children and in discovering their inclinations in order to be able to reprove them as they should, and even, if possible, to stifle the evil ones and give ample development and firmness to the good ones. Characters, or as they used to say, natures, are different and we soon discover their tendencies; that is why it is not good to use the same method and the same

measure with everyone. There are fiery natures that must be moderated and timid natures that need to be encouraged. There is no lack of indolent natures that need to be stimulated, and stubborn natures that have to be bent by the salutary yoke of discipline. Moreover, we have to discern between one fault and another, between one failing and another, and not use the same rigor for every one; besides being unjust, it would lose its entire efficacy because of its excessive frequency. Thus, in the case of a defect, it would not be good to apply the same punishment applicable to a deliberate and malicious violation of a serious duty, or some fault against Religion or good morals. In short, correction must be made in such a way that the child, with a calm

mind—at least as much as possible—may understand that the punishment is inflicted solely for his good, and that it was reasonable and not excessive but appropriate for the fault; neither arbitrary nor stemming from passion, but solely the effect of justice and love.

What is said here about blame and punishment can be said also of praise and reward; if they are not given with prudence and proportionate to merit, instead of being encouragements to virtue, they often become a subtle poison which insinuates itself into the heart and corrupts the best sentiments. Reward must be given in such a way that it does not give rise, in the heart of the one who receives it, to vain complacency and a dangerous exaltation of self-love; but rather to a sweet satis-

faction, a holy joy at having been able to accomplish one's duty faithfully and having corresponded to the will of their parents in which they must recognize the will of God himself.

Some may say: my children never deserve praise and reward; I must always reprove them, almost at every step; I have attempted all the ways, tried all the methods, I have tried gentle admonition and severe punishments, but all in vain; they become worse every day. I answer: unfortunately, it is true that we sometimes meet such intractable characters that neither reason nor force, neither the kindness of indulgence nor the severity of punishment manage to subject them to discipline. O parents who have such children, we commiserate with you; but know that the evil is not without remedy. After having tried every means in your power, revive your faith in the One who holds in his hands the hearts of every man, and continue

to love these ungrateful and rebellious children, and do not cease to pray for them, that God in his power and mercy may do what you cannot do yourselves. He will hear you, and to you too, as to other parents who weep over the perversion of their offspring, he will give you the consolation of seeing them finally repentant.

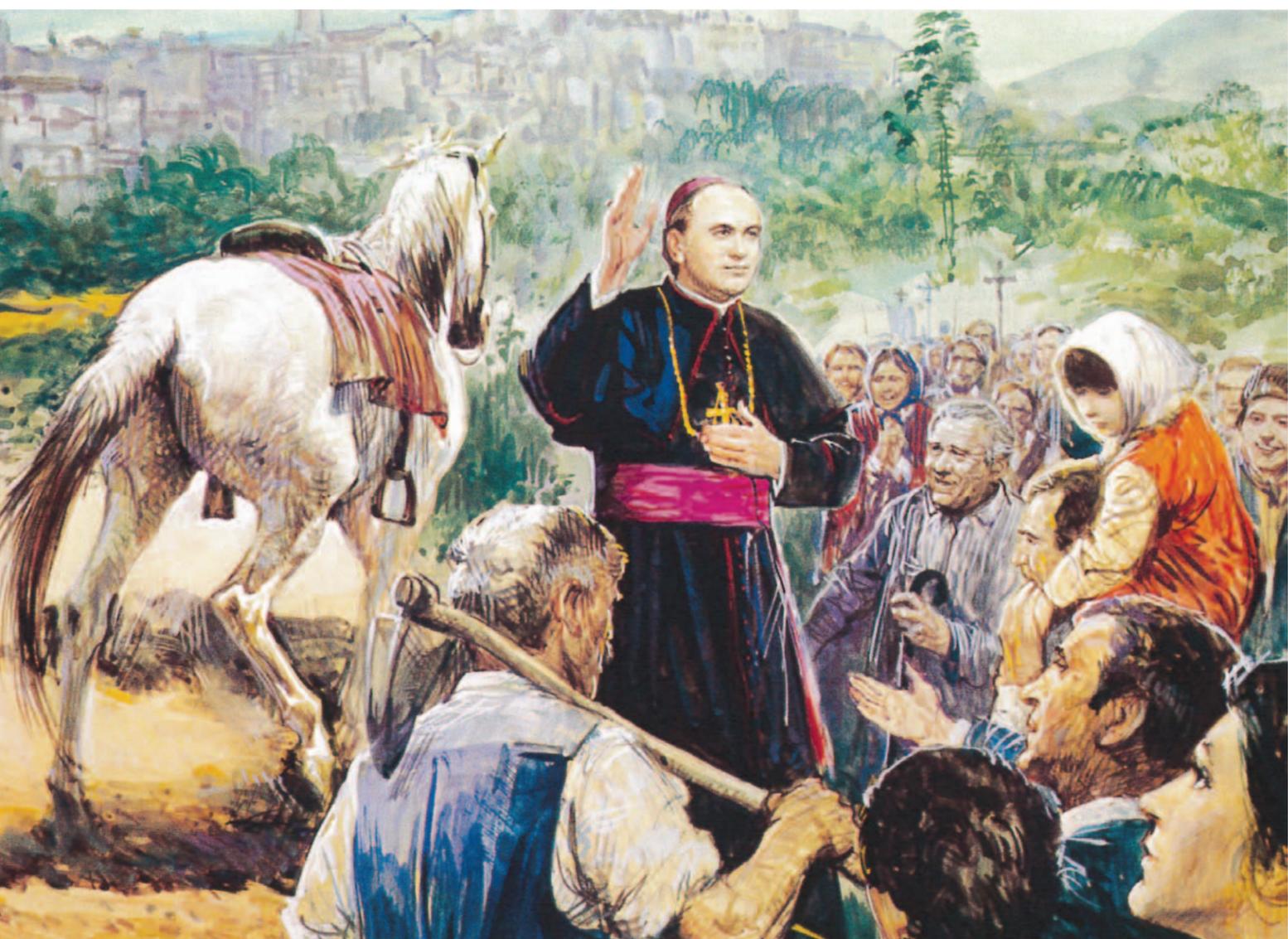
Prayer is a method to be practiced not only in anxious moments and when you have tried every other way, but always and in every case, even when the burden of educating your children seems light. That is because our works and efforts of themselves have no worth if God does not accompany and strengthen them

with his grace. Therefore, be active around your children, pray for them with fervor and faith, make them pray and become used to praying, and do not count as ill spent the time taken in assisting and helping them in the recitation of their daily prayers. Pray assiduously for yourselves, that God may help you in the accomplishment of the serious duty of educating your children well; for you are raising adorers of God, and putting their soul on the way of salvation and maintaining them there. It is a matter of your honor, even of your good, the good of the Holy Church and of society

itself: without prayer, who could be assured of a joyful and happy result in such an undertaking? What we say to you, O Christian parents, we say to everyone: whoever wishes to fulfill zealously and fully, and especially perseveringly, all their obligations, must trust in God and pray; a humble and trusting prayer is never rejected by the divine goodness. Therefore, pray in these sad and calamitous times; pray for your temporal

needs and for your eternal ones. Pray for the Sovereign Pontiff, the beloved Father of the great Christian family; ask the Lord to keep him for many more years for our good and in our filial affection, and to fulfill his holy desires by rendering fruitful his efforts for the flourishing and spreading of the Catholic faith, as well as for the triumph of truth and justice throughout the world. Pray for our August Sovereign, for the Royal Family and for the State authorities; and may your charity, Venerable Brothers and Dearly Beloved, make you pray also for us who wholeheartedly impart our pastoral blessing.

After having tried every means in your power, revive your faith in the One who holds in his hands the hearts of every man... do not cease to pray for your children, that God in his power and mercy may do what you cannot do yourselves.



Facing page: Bishop Marelló's pastoral visit, by Musio.

Step by Step: A Reflection on Youth Ministry, Part III

by Fr. John Shearer, O.S.J.

Fr. John offers us the third and final reflection on the principle document of the Oblates of St. Joseph on youth ministry entitled *Step by Step*.

IN THIS FINAL section of *Step by Step*, the focus turns from a study of youth ministry in general to a review of a specifically Oblate youth ministry. This type of ministry with youth is “in accord with the charismatic elements that we find in our Rule of Life in the Congregation, the teachings left to us by our founder, St. Joseph Marelllo, and those operative suggestions that come from a properly Oblate spirituality” (*Step by Step* #19).

In 2013, the Oblates of St. Joseph accompanied a large group of young people from the United States to Brazil for World Youth Day. The whole event lasted about two weeks. For the first week, we travelled to São Paulo to spend time with the Oblates and Oblate Laity at Santa Edwiges Parish. The driving theme for the week was “Missionary Outreach.” Living in the United States, we are used to

a certain level of material comfort that we take for granted on a daily basis. Decent roads (barring the occasional pothole) and sidewalks,

Reaching the hearts of young people in the style of St. Joseph Marelllo means to love them and bring them to the Truth, who is Jesus Christ.

solid building construction, properly closed civic sewage systems, dedicated police, fire and emergency medical personnel, and a social safety net designed to help those in need, are not commonplace in all corners of the world. Often times,

these daily assurances here at home are considered to be a luxury in other countries. This was the case in the neighborhoods surrounding Santa Edwiges.

According to *Step by Step*, Oblate youth ministry should always have a missionary dimension and be in tune with the signs of the times. While in São Paulo, our young people, guided by seminarians and religious sisters and brothers from Brazil, went out into the local neighborhoods and brought the Good News to the homes of those who were not only struggling to “make ends meet,” but who also were struggling to hear the voice of Jesus speaking to them in their daily lives. I went with a group of youth to visit some of the large apartment buildings, and as we went door to door, many of the people who were at home were so touched that a group of youth,

a nun, a seminarian and a priest would go visit their homes to visit, pray, sing and proclaim the Word of God. However, something the people whom we visited did not realize, perhaps, is that they too were evangelizing us! By receiving us into their homes, and allowing us to share time together in Christ, the bonds of unity that exist among the members of the Body of Christ became ever more visible. Clearly, Jesus not only knocked on the doors of the families we visited that day, but He also knocked on the doors of the hearts of His missionary youth. Even amidst the difficult circumstances in that neighborhood, the light of Christ was shining brightly in the Christian community present at Santa Edwiges, and we were blessed to share in that joy.

The current state of the family in today’s society is also mentioned in part III of *Step by Step*: “We learn to read the reality of our day and what is being asked of us. Probably one of the signs of the times is the crisis of family life, because this has repercussions for

young people who live disoriented and alone” (#22). There are two particular Marellian antidotes to the “crisis of family life” and the negative effects it inflicts upon young people: 1) youth ministry with a genuine family spirit, and 2) providing a place where youth are welcomed and not judged. The Oblates of St. Joseph are called to foster a family spirit, modeled after the Holy Family of Nazareth, in each of their religious communities. “This spirit of harmony, respect, acceptance, and faith has to be passed on in contact with the people we meet in carrying out our apostolic ministry” (*Step by Step* #26). Of course, Oblate youth ministry can never take the place of a healthy and holy family life, but our presence with young people should always inspire them to see that it is possible to live such a way of life. This inspiration can really take root when a young person feels welcomed and received. It is important to notice, also, that being welcoming and not judging toward youth, is not the same as making excuses for immoral and

destructive behavior. “The educative style of Marelllo was centered on the proposal of authentic and demanding ways, beginning with the welcoming openness of a Father” (*Step by Step* #25). In other words, reaching the hearts of young people in the style of St. Joseph Marelllo means to love them and bring them to the Truth, who is Jesus Christ.

Fr. Sergio and I hope that these brief reflections on *Step by Step* have deepened your understanding of how Oblates of St. Joseph minister to youth. By sharing these thoughts with you, we also hope that you are inspired to reach out to the young people in your life and bring them to Christ and His Church. The lives of St. Joseph and St. Joseph Marelllo offer us solid examples of how to do so in today’s world.

Fr. John Shearer, O.S.J., serves as Vocation Director on the East Coast and as parochial vicar of St. Joseph Marelllo parish in Pittston, PA.



Facing page: Painting from St. Joseph Marelllo Church, Pittston, PA.

Vocations and the Holy Family

by Fr. Sergio Perez, O.S.J.

The Holy Family reminds us of essential elements of responding faithfully to our vocation, as much for religious and priests as for spouses.

RECENTLY POPE FRANCIS made an apostolic visit to the Philippines and addressed a special gathering of Catholic families in regards to the role of families in the Church and in society. As he delivered his message to them, he used the example of St. Joseph as the patron and model for all families to imitate. In his message he highlighted three areas where families are able to follow the model of St. Joseph: resting in the Lord, arising with Jesus and Mary, and becoming a prophetic

voice in the world. Although the Holy Father used these three helpful tips for families, we can apply it to those who are discerning their vocation, those involved in vocation ministry, and in cultivating a “culture of vocations” within our families, parishes, and society.

We know that St. Joseph did not utter a single word in the scriptures yet he was instrumental in the protection and guidance of the Holy Family and of all salvation history. St. Joseph is mostly known for his silence,



and the way that the Lord communicated to St. Joseph was in his dreams while he was sleeping. It is when St. Joseph rested in the Lord that God was able to penetrate the conscious of St. Joseph and reveal to him his plan for the family of Nazareth. Pope Francis stressed in his message that St. Joseph was able to dream and embrace the will of God in his life and that of his small family. For those who are in discerning their vocation, they must never forget to dream about what God is calling them to be in their life. When one dreams, it allows them to put aside the obstacles of life and have a vision of God’s plan for them. It is by dreaming that the person discerning is able to completely rest in the Lord and be open to God’s voice and he speaks to them about who they are and where they are going. Just as St. Joseph was able to enter into the mystery of God by dreaming and resting in his presence, the discernor is able to enter into that same mystery. It is not always about doing something but about being still in the presence of the Lord. This method of discerning a vocation is the first step in the right direction.

When Joseph awoke he was not alone but had the Virgin Mary at his side while they focused on Jesus. When we are contemplating the mysteries of God, we are not alone in this effort. We need to arise in our discernment with Jesus and Mary and not lose our focus on what we are doing. When St. Joseph awoke from his rest, he understood that Jesus and Mary were going to be his strength to help him protect and guide them to their mission in life. St. Joseph helps the one who is discerning to always look to Jesus with Mary as the goal to achieve. It is the mission of all those who are discerning their vocation to always have their eyes set on Jesus with the assistance of our Blessed Mother. The humility of St. Joseph is demonstrated in him knowing that he couldn’t fulfill God’s mission alone. He needs the Blessed Mother by his side while he serves the interests of Jesus. So it must be with us too.



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Finally, when we are ready to encounter the world with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at our side, we are able to become prophetic voices in the world. Although St. Joseph did not say much in scripture, he was a man of action and embodied what a prophet is called to do by living out God’s will. St. Joseph had to make tough decisions for the Holy Family. Those who are discerning now are facing many obstacles and temptations of the world, yet, they are given the grace to persevere with the assistance of the Holy Family. Living out the Gospel message and being open to the religious life or priesthood becomes a sign to the world that God is still alive and that his voice has not been forgotten. It is by becoming living and breathing messengers of the religious vocation in our modern society that those who are discerning are being prophets to their peers and to the world. It is a great responsibility but one that can only be supported by the grace of God and the assistance of St. Joseph and Mary. It is important that those who are discerning not forget that they are never alone: they will always have others to assist them on their journey.

St. Joseph, who is the model and patron for all religious vocations, is also encouraging all the faithful to assist those discerning their vocation by their prayers, their witness, and their presence. All our called to support the “culture of vocations” and make this dream of God become a reality.

Fr. Sergio Perez, O.S.J., serves on the West Coast of the United States as Vocation Director and Youth Director of the Holy Spouses Province.



Family

The Oblates of St. Joseph imitate the Holy Family in their common life. They live together in their religious communities and foster a true family spirit in their houses:

- In faithfulness to their daily rhythm of liturgy and prayer
- Through sharing common meals and schedules
- By participating together in ministry and recreation
- While supporting each other in the challenges and trials of life

Is God calling you to be an Oblate of St. Joseph?

If you are interested in knowing more about our community and our spirituality, please visit our website at www.osjusa.org or get in touch with a local Oblate community. See our directory on page 19.



News & Events

World Meeting of Families

Like Catholics around the country, the Oblates of the Holy Spouses Province in the United States are excited about the upcoming World Meeting of Families and Pope Francis visit to the country. We have been working to secure options for accommodations and to coordinate our lay friends and cooperators that are interested in participating. If you and your family are planning to attend or are looking for options, please contact your local Oblates to discuss the event. Most importantly, please continue to pray for the success of the gathering!

SANTA CRUZ, CA

- On Friday, February 6, the religious community moved back into the newly transformed villa residence following a six-month renovation project. The residence serves as the provincial house and central office for the USA province.
- A pasta dinner was held in the shrine hall on Sunday, February 15, as a Mardi Gras celebration for the general public. Members of the SLJM organization assisted with the preparations, guaranteeing its social and financial success.
- “Couples for Christ” conducted conferences every Sunday during the month of March at the shrine hall to spiritually assist individuals and married couples in growing in their love for the Lord through Scriptural reflections, prayers, music and invited speakers.
- On March 6-8, a vocation weekend retreat was conducted under the direction of Father Sergio Perez, O.S.J., vocation director for the west coast sector of the Oblate USA province. Joining him were our five seminarians and eleven young men discerning a possible vocation to the religious life and priesthood.

- The annual Novena to St. Joseph was held from March 10-18 during the daily 11:00 am Mass. Reflections were offered each day by one of the Oblate priests, followed by devotions to St. Joseph.
- Feast of St. Joseph was celebrated on March 19th at the shrine with Very Rev. Paul A. McDonnell, OSJ, provincial superior, serving as principal celebrant and homilist. Numerous members of the local faithful joined in the celebration honoring the Patron of the Universal Church. The feast day celebrations continued into the following day (March 20) when all Oblate brothers and priests of the CA sector gathered together to honor their patron for a community Mass at the shrine, followed by a luncheon and the blessing of the new chapel in the recently renovated provincial house.
- Eighth grade students from Queen of Apostles School, San Jose, held a day of retreat at the shrine on March 24. The young men and women listened to spiritual talks, had an opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, participated in the regularly scheduled shrine Mass, enjoyed lunch and concluded the afternoon listening to a presentation on vocations and God’s call for them in their own lives.

- Holy Week liturgies were celebrated at the shrine attended by the local faithful and numerous visitors to the Santa Cruz area during the Easter holiday.

BAKERSFIELD, CA

- The parish and school observed National Catholic Schools Week during the last week of January. Please continue to pray for the schools connected to Oblate parishes throughout the country and around the world.

- OLG School held their Annual Reverse Raffle and Dinner Dance in February. The event was greatly attended and wonderfully executed.

- The Oblates in Bakersfield have started hosting a monthly vocation discernment group. If you or young men you know are interested in reflecting more deeply on the vocation to be an Oblate of St. Joseph, please contact the parish office for details.

MADERA, CA

- On March 8, St. Joachim welcomed Bishop Armando Ochoa to the parish to celebrate the confirmations of the parish youth.
- On March 14-15, St. Joachim parish hosted the Oblates' semiannual workshop on marriage and family entitled Life Giving Love. The parish was pleased to welcome twenty-four couples who participated.

- The church finished the large project of renovating the light fixtures throughout the church. The lighting in many parts of the church is vastly improved, as well as much more energy efficient.

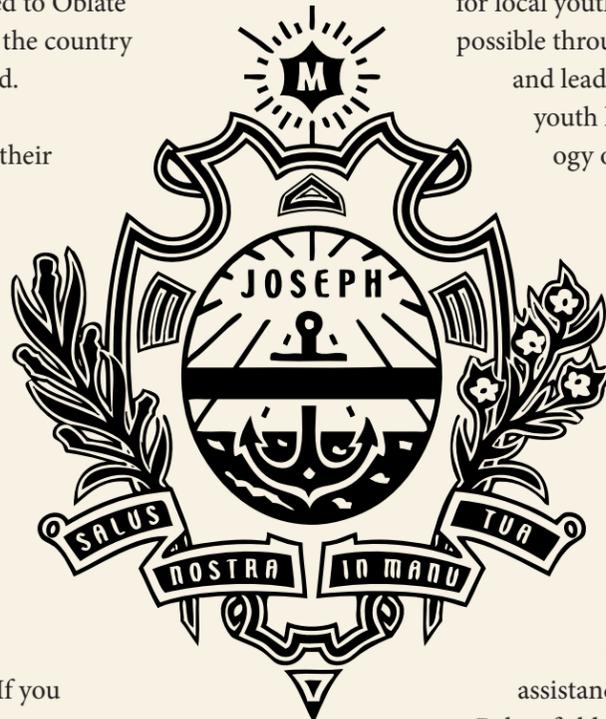
LOOMIS, CA & GRANITE BAY, CA

- On January 16-18, the Mareello Youth Center held a Theology of the Body retreat for local youth. The event was made possible through the participation and leadership of the Madera youth leaders of the Theology of the Body group at St. Joachim Church.

- In February, the Oblates in Loomis hosted the first ever Life Giving Love workshop at Mareello Youth Retreat Center. Locals couples came to attend the event put on with the assistance from couples from Bakersfield and Madera.

- On March 19, the Oblate community in Loomis hosted a celebration in honor of St. Joseph. The festivities included an evening Mass, followed by a Eucharistic procession and a traditional St. Joseph's Day bread and meal.

- On March 29, St. Joseph Mareello parish hosted a Ministry Fair that highlighted all of the different work being accomplished in the parish. At the same event, the parish celebrated the ground breaking for their new parish center construction project.



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A New Rhythm of Life

by Fr. Matthew Spencer, O.S.J.

Here we are at yet another Easter season. What is going to make this particular Easter a time of blessing and renewal in your life?

SOME YEARS AGO an elderly couple I had never seen before approached me after Mass. "Victoria and Martin" told me they were visiting family from out of town, and that on that particular day they were commemorating their 62nd wedding anniversary. After



congratulating them on the joyous occasion and accomplishment (and joking with them that I hope to live

at least as long as they have been together!), Martin tells me that he would do it all over in a heartbeat: "Our lives are filled with routine and repetition, no doubt, Father. But my secret to making it this far is to make every day new and special for my wife!"

As Catholic Christians we definitely sometimes feel like our lives of faith are full of routine and repetition, day to day, week to week, and year to year. Every

day we hopefully are trying to offer ourselves to the Lord. Every Sunday we go to Mass, every year we progress from Advent to Christmas, from Lent to Easter, in what can sometimes seem to be a cycle that seems the same, over and over. This rhythm of life is in part a blessing because it keeps us moving through the mysteries of salvation and remembering what Christ has done for us. But there can be a danger to it as well: sometimes the routine becomes monotonous, and a rhythm that is meant to be helpful becomes a hindrance. The secret to not falling prey to monotony and tedium is exactly what Martin said to me on his anniversary: we need to be making every day new and special!

How many prayers to bless your food have you recited over the years? How many Sunday Masses have you attended? How many Easters have you celebrated? How often we think of the repetition of our lives, and yet we forget about the abundance of graces that the

Lord wishes to pour out upon us at every new Easter, at *every new moment!*

My challenge to you this Easter season is to discover what the resurrection of Jesus means for you in this moment, at this very time in your life. It's true that his resurrection 2000 years ago changed everything. But it's not just an event in the past. His resurrection continues to transform lives and hearts right down to our own, here in the twenty-first century.

So make this Easter count. Rediscover what Jesus has done for you and what he continues to do for you. Trust in his great love and concern for you, and leave behind the sin that separates you from our resurrected Lord!

Fr. Matthew serves as Director of Communications for the Holy Spouses Province and as rector at Mount St. Joseph Seminary and Novitiate in Loomis, CA. You can reach him at m Spencer@osjusa.org.

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