

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SOLEMNITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY
TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2019
SAINT AUGUSTINE HOME OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

My Dear Friends in Christ,

I am very happy to be with you on this great solemnity of Saint Joseph, husband of Mary. The Little Sisters honor him as a patron; he protects and provides, teaching all of us to rely on Divine Providence. We also pause from our Lenten observances to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Little Sisters of the Poor in America. I thank Mother Francis Gabriel for her kind invitation to be with you.

As a priest of the Archdiocese of Rennes and growing up in San Malo, hailing from that place where Saint Jeanne Jugan began her marvelous work, I have a fondness for the Little Sisters who faithfully cared for my own mother. How happy I am that the good work that Saint Jeanne Jugan spread to the United States one hundred fifty years ago! As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to this country, I greet you in his name and express his paternal affection for all gathered here and assure you of his spiritual closeness and prayers.

I am told (and maybe the story has been embellished a little) that here in Indianapolis, during the height of the Great Depression, the Little Sisters did not have enough coal to heat their home and to assure the best care for their elderly residents. Apparently, they came to an agreement with the Archbishop of Indianapolis to transfer the remaining elderly residents to the Daughters of Charity's Saint Vincent Hospital until a solution could be found. The Mother Superior called the Sisters together to pray before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and to implore the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph for a miracle. I am told that one sister even placed a single lump of coal in front of the statue of Saint Joseph.

The sisters remained in Adoration, but during the night, they heard a terrible noise outside. The next morning at sunrise, a claim agent from the New York City Railroad Company appeared. There had been a wreck in the sisters' backyard, and coal had been dumped on the property. The claim agent offered the sisters a large sum of money but explained that it would take at least a week to return to clean up the mess. The sisters asked whether they could use the coal, and the agent said not only could they use the coal, but the company would pay the claim as well. Of course, the coal was the highest grade of coal, and the sisters had what they needed to keep the house open. Many sisters attributed the miracle to the intercession of Saint Joseph, their Protector and Provider, the husband of Mary.

Saint Jeanne Jugan trusted in Divine Providence. She often said, "Give us the house. If God fills it, God will not abandon it." Her trust in God manifested itself in both material and spiritual poverty, which allowed her to say, "It is so good to be poor – to have nothing, to await all from God." Her devotion to Saint Joseph flowed from her confidence in Divine Providence. Just as God is the Father who watches over his children, providing for their every need, so too she saw Saint Joseph as the one who would obtain bread for the poor and protect the Congregation.

Today, we honor Saint Joseph, the husband of Mary. Joseph was of the house of David from which the long-expected Messiah was to be born. He was a poor man, a carpenter who worked with his hands. The scriptures say that he was a righteous or just man; he was in right relationship with God and his neighbor. He must have thought that he had won the lottery when Mary agreed to be his betrothed. He probably had many ideas and plans of how his life would be with Mary, of what their future would be like. All of that changed when Mary conceived her Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Although he intended to divorce her quietly, Joseph, the just man, was immersed in the things of God. When the angel appeared in a dream and explained everything to him, he trusted that God's word was true. We might speculate that it was his experience of poverty that had taught him to rely on God. He had confidence that God would provide for him and for all peoples through this Child, who would be named *Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*.

Saint Joseph reminds us, not only of the need to live the vow of poverty daily and so increase our reliance on God, but also to live in a spirit of sacrifice with respect to our vocation. That is, we cannot have our vocation on our own terms; rather, each vocation is a gift from God to be lived on his terms for his Kingdom and for the good of the Church. Joseph's plans had to die, so that God's plans could live. Saint Joseph forgot himself and lived for his wife Mary and for her Son, Jesus. This degree of abandonment to Divine Providence is not so easy for us, and yet, we see the fruitfulness of this "forgetfulness" of Saint Joseph. He forgot himself and remained faithful to God, living his vocation as a husband and foster-father.

Additionally, the scriptures recount that *when Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home*. In Saint Joseph, we have an example of how to live the vow of obedience. He promptly does what the Lord commands him, without grumbling or complaining. He listened to God; interpreted his words; and acted. Saint Joseph teaches us how to discern God's will and how to be obedient to it.

He took his wife into his home. Beyond the literal meaning of this verse, the spiritual meaning is that he took his wife into his heart. Joseph truly loved Mary, but as her "most chaste spouse", *sponsus castissimus*, he lived this love for his wife, not in a carnal way but in a way that was not self-directed or possessive – with an openness reflective of his capacity for self-giving and with a tenderness that protected the gift of Mary's virginity. He teaches us how to live consecrated chastity in a fulfilling way – by forgetting self and living for others.

Saint Jeanne Jugan often encouraged her sisters to forget themselves and their plans for the service of others. Recall the words of your foundress: "To be a good Little Sister of the Poor, one must love God and the poor a great deal and forget oneself."

Charles Dickens met Saint Jeanne Jugan once, and afterward he wrote: "There is in this woman something so calm, and so holy, that in seeing her I know myself to be in the presence of a superior being. Her words went straight to my heart, so that my eyes, I know not how, filled with tears."

What was that "something" that she had that touched his soul? This "something" that Saint Jeanne Jugan had is that which Saint Joseph had in his life – Mary and Jesus. This was the precious treasure Saint Joseph guarded – as husband and foster-father. It is that same "something" that the Little Sisters of the Poor possess to this day, which allows every elderly man or woman to enter a house such as this and to know that God cares for them and loves them.

God does not forget them. Here everyone is someone important – someone for whom Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary, entered the world.

Saint Joseph was the Guardian of the Redeemer. In these days, the Little Sisters continue to follow his example in protecting the “little ones” of the earth, especially the elderly poor, from the throwaway culture that threatens human dignity and the gift of life. Your accompaniment of these “little ones” at the end of life’s journey reaffirms the value of each person and points them to eternal life with God. This is your mission.

Saint Joseph was privileged to carry out a special mission - to be the husband of Mary and the foster-father of Jesus. We too are privileged not only to have witnessed all that Divine Providence has wrought through the Little Sisters of the Poor over these past one hundred and fifty years, but also to be called to serve God in the Lord’s Vineyard as our specific mission demands. Let us abandon ourselves to Divine Providence and to the powerful intercession of Saint Joseph, so that the work of the Saint Augustine Home and the Little Sisters may continue for one hundred and fifty more years!