



IN HONOR OF SAINT JOSEPH

*Composed in the Year of Saint Joseph, February 21, 2021
by Father Robert A. Gonzalez, Class of 1978*

All hail to you, Saint Joseph, our protector great! Chosen you were by God the Father from all eternity to be spouse of Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word. “Just Man,” you are called in Sacred Writ; sanctified in your mother’s womb, so great saints of Mother Church spoke of you as your virtues they extolled. Confirmed in grace you also were. Only Mary, whose husband you were chosen to be, exceeded you in grace; she the Immaculata, chosen to be the Mother of God, preserved from original sin at the instant of her conception. Who could have been worthy to be her spouse? You alone were chosen for this role from all eternity. O humble Saint Joseph, you sensed yourself not worthy for such an exalted vocation when the angel spoke to you in a dream. He told you not to fear to take Mary as your wife, for she had conceived by the Holy Spirit. You did not doubt and obeyed the voice of God. Model of fidelity, chastity, and manhood for us all. Teacher of discerning silence. Model of manly humility.

You contemplated the mystery of the New Life within the womb of the woman you loved, O Saint Joseph. You protected her who was with child on the way to Bethlehem; you must have known what the prophets had said about where the Messiah was to be born. You knew the scriptures well, as every Christian should – the Holy Book of Truth. You and she adored the Christ Child when he was born in the poverty of the manger. It became the site of the first adoration of the child you named Jesus, because he was to save people from their sins. The shepherds who did their work tending their flocks and the Magi from the East also saw the child and adored. You and Mary presented the infant Jesus in the temple for the rites of purification. You took the Child Jesus and his Mother to Egypt when you were warned in a dream that the wicked King Herod sought to destroy him who is the Light of the World; docile you were to the message in the dream. Chosen to be Guardian of Our Lord in his sacred humanity and Protector of Mary – a sublime and incomprehensible vocation. Pillar of family life, you accepted your responsibilities with silent joy and strength of character. Most certainly you and Mary taught the boy Jesus how to pray in his sacred humanity.

Jesus heard the ennobling way you and Mary spoke to each other; he beheld your happy marriage to her – a beautiful marriage, so great a model for husbands and wives raising their children. Jesus in his humanity learned from you how to love his holy mother. You saw him play and run as any boy would play and run. You saw him grow. You and Mary experienced his being lost and then finding him in the temple, hearing him say to his mother, “Why do you seek me? Do you know that I must be about my Father’s business?” What must you have thought and discerned, O Joseph, model of Spiritual Fatherhood? Yet he returned with you and Mary to Nazareth and was obedient unto both of you in his sacred humanity. How edifying it must have been for both you and her; already knowing the mystery of who Jesus was. The home at Nazareth, such a model of family life and of the domestic church! So proud he was to be called

the “Carpenter’s Son” as his public ministry began, as he had learned the meaning and dignity of work in your company, Joseph. Ever present to your noble soul was the young man Jesus in his physical absence, for Mary was at your side. So too in the life of a true Christian – where our Mother is there also is Our Lord. And as your mission in life was completed, confirmed in grace indeed, you closed your eyes to this world with Mary and Jesus at your side.

Holy Saint Joseph, model of Spiritual Fatherhood, this training ground for priests-to-be turns to you in this year 2021 dedicated to you by Francis, the Successor of Saint Peter. Walk the way with us here in this august place of learning and holiness which students past called “the Joss.” Alumni working in the vineyard of the Lord likewise turn to you and ask for your blessing and guidance; so too those who also studied here who were called to another path in life. One hundred and thirty-one years have passed; many the blessings received through your intercession since Joseph Jessing founded this seminary. Like you, he dreamed and heard the Holy Spirit’s call. It was the year 1888 that the first class of teenage boys came to “the house of Joseph.” They sensed a calling to serve in the vineyard of the Lord as priests to become fishers of men. How deep was his trust in God and how he strove to emulate you, O great Joseph, in your love of Jesus and Mary entrusted to your protection! A spiritual father the great Jessing was to orphans and seminarians alike.

“*Ite ad Joseph; geht alle zu Joseph; go to Joseph,*” Jessing would often say. Strong he was like the oaks of Westphalia withstanding storms; so real a *Mensch*, intelligent and humble, generous and self-giving, with indomitable energy and zeal for the salvation of souls! So was he described by the early pioneers of the Josephinum upon whose shoulders we stand. Joseph Jessing proclaimed your virtues, O great Saint Joseph; instilling in these boys and young men the love you had for Jesus and Mary. A true mentor and formator of future priests and orphan boys whom he taught to be men of faith.

You, great Saint Joseph, heard his prayers and those of faculty and students that the Josephinum would long endure. Love for the Church and the Successor of Peter rewarded – pontifical status was granted on December 12, 1892, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Prophetic sign it was of continued and future blessings a God so provident and all-knowing, the Lord of History. You, O Joseph took these early prayers of sweet beginnings to God the Father. And the grace of the holy death in November 1899 you gave Joseph Jessing, who was consoled that his life’s work would endure and bear fruit. A new century was now nigh.

Those early years quickly went by in the stream of time. High school boys were sent by their very own pastors to discern their calling. Many of these pastors were the earliest of the pioneers for whom the Joss was sweet. Some of these boys persevered and became priests to serve in God’s vineyard, assigned to dioceses by the Apostolic Delegate. Ties to the Holy See in Rome were strong. The Propaganda cassock with the red sash and buttons was proudly worn by seminarians in their steps to holy priesthood. An *esprit du corps* grew ever stronger. All this you saw, O Joseph great. The First World War passed; America changed and so too the Josephinum in downtown Columbus on that city block between 17th and Main Street. The depression came and the magnificent new Josephinum was built, like a fortress she stood in the midst of the surrounding farms. From East and West and from North and South boys and young men came to be formed in this new Josephinum. How great the trust of the benefactors of the Josephinum and their belief in the soldier-priest’s vision, O Joseph, *Schutzpatron!*

The new seminary complex flourished. Chapels filled for Mass and prayers, classrooms new to expand the mind, large refectory and grace before meals, spiritual reading. Seminarian crews left their mark through noble work and calluses on their hands! Lake George dug by youth in their prime. Baseball fields, too, and ball games played. What a sight it was, great Joseph – as you look below from the Father's house. Continued *esprit du corps*, pride in our ties to Rome, and love of Mother Church. Special visits from the Apostolic Delegate. Pride on ordination day in Saint Turibius Chapel – so fondly remembered by alumni, many now gone to their reward. Second World War, so brutal. America victorious! American seminarians from East, West, North, and South, prayed in gratitude. New seminarians continued to come, sensing a call from God. They beheld the high tower and were met at the front door of this formation seat of future ministry, eyes so wide, before the leaves donned the golden colors of the Ohio fall. The Josephinum – the Joss – it continued to thrive, this our Alma Mater!

Vatican II opened and closed by saintly popes John XXIII and Paul VI; windows opened; new challenges and some confusion in the ensuing years. Propaganda cassock laid aside; High School closed and dormitories vacant, yet the Josephinum perdured.

The 1970s were now here. The Josephinum *Geist* so much still alive. An exciting and challenging time with new professors and the beginnings of Hispanic Ministry. In time God willed that other priests and lay faculty come to assume the baton of educating, laboring in this formation seat of priestly ministry. Too many to mention now, yet alumni remember them well – priests and lay faculty, supporting staff and secretaries, exemplifying the dignity and value of work well done.

Celebration of the Josephinum centennial now past; 1988 was the year and then anniversary of pontifical status in 1998. Speeches given on the day, each reminding us of our close ties to the Chair of Peter. Still more seminars and opportunities to expand mind and soul in the ensuing years. Rectors and faculty, students and staff came and went. Modernization and further changes still, much urban growth. A fire too – how can we not forget? We were aroused from sleep in the night! You protected us, great Saint Joseph on that night when the flames in the theology residence lit the night sky on that cold December night in 1999! The great damage repaired; how magnificent the theology residence now appears. How proud we are as we gaze at the seminary complex in all its stateliness! Still more renovations were to come in all that pertains to the Josephinum's mission. *Mens sana in corpore sano*.

What must the soldier-priest now think, reward in hand, pray tell? Gazing down from an open window in the Father's House he praises his Creator for a prophetic received so long ago that announced his work would endure long into the future. Yes, he would thank God Almighty and give credit to your prayers, Saint Joseph. The future is now the present. Old and New are combined; this is the Josephinum today! Young men come to discern their call to become fishers of men in this training ground, the Josephinum to us endeared.

So now, Saint Joseph – faculty, students, staff and alumni once again turn to you and thank you for your protection and prayers. We look to the future. Protect the one true Church we love and our country too in these difficult times. Bless this formation seat of ministry, most especially the rector, the father of this house, a priest through and through, a *Mensch*. Guide and illuminate him in his leadership and service. May we all be like you, Saint Joseph and have Jesus and Mary in the center of our lives. This ode we present to you, O *Schutzpatron*. The best is yet to be. Amen.