

## St. Joseph, Patron of a Happy Death

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020



Since we are in the month of November, for us as Roman Catholics the month dedicated to the Holy Souls, I thought it was important to reflect upon those uncomfortable subjects –

Death and Dying. Benjamin

Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, famously said:

***‘Certainty? In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes!’***

A person would be hard pushed to argue against these facts. Yet, though generally most people have accepted the obligation of paying tax many still refuse to acknowledge the reality of death. When I was a curate there was a parishioner who claimed that they were the most northern of all northerners and the most Lancastrian of all Lancastrians. They were proud to say things as they saw them and to call *‘a shovel a shovel!’* However, when it came to death they became quite sheepish and would skirt around the subject and call it anything other than what it was. *‘They’ve passed on, moved over, no longer with us...’*. That proud, self-confident individual withered away into a timid and uncertain person when it came to death and dying.

Death is not a nice subject because fundamentally it's about loss. How many of us have experienced the death of a loved one? How many of us can still picture where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news? How many of us wept, became angry or simply refused to accept what had happened? How many of us remember that pain, that emptiness that sudden realisation that so and so was gone? How many of us still feel bereft no matter how long ago that person died? How many of us have those wounds of grief, those scars of loss that over time may have become a little numb yet still are very much present and real? No matter how politically correct the phrases about dying are or how much the world tries to keep death at bay by masking it or ignoring it, the reality is it's still very much present.

***'The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of death. In the ancient litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: "From sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord," to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us "at the hour of our death" in the Hail Mary; and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death.'***

**(Catechism of the Catholic Church #1014)**



Our faith as Roman Catholics, our prayers and devotions, our culture and spirituality, as the above quote from the catechism reminds us, never shies away from death. It is a truth and a reality that we face. It does not take away the anxiety, the sadness or the grief of death and dying but our faith in Jesus Christ gives us the hope to confront it.

***'Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection.  
If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live,  
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.  
Do you believe this?'*** (Jn 11:25-26)

Each time we stand at the graveside or are seated at the crematorium death is their staring us directly in the face. Death is staring at us in our pain and loss, but as disciples we can stare right back. Why? Because the Lord has reminded us that death is not the end, the final curtain, the full stop. Jesus Christ Our Lord died that we might live, he descended into hell and rose again on the third day, he has destroyed the permanence of death for ever!

I know the Lord rose from the dead, I believe truly in his resurrection and the life he promised in the world to come yet there are still times when I feel tense about it. Why? Because I don't always live well and if I don't live well then how can I die well. To attempt to explain this a little more clearly look at the picture below.



It's a painted stone carving from a church depicting the death of St. Joseph. The artist shows a man during the moments of his last few breaths. He is frail, weak and vulnerable. The strong working carpenter, the faithful devoted husband and energetic loving foster father is now reduced to a mass of flesh and bone. Yet this dreaded moment is filled with light and hope in the persons of Christ and our Blessed Mother Mary.

St. Joseph lived well. He listened attentively to God and readily obeyed:

***'When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord told him to do...'***  
**(Mt 1:24).**

St. Joseph wholeheartedly embraced Mary and Jesus and took them into his home, into his heart:

***'...he took his wife to his home.'*** (Mt 1:24a);  
***'He [Jesus] went down with them (Mary & Joseph) and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority.'*** (Lk 2:51).

St. Joseph showed love and devotion to the family that God had given him through his constant vigilance and protection.

***'So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him,  
left that night for Egypt' (Mt 2:14).***

St. Joseph never neglected his duty of worshipping and giving thanks to God:

***'...[Joseph] took him [Jesus] up to Jerusalem...observing what stands written in the Law  
of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer  
sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves...'***

***(Lk 2:22-23).***

***'Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.'***

***(Lk 2:41).***

All the above Gospel verses allow us to see that St. Joseph was a holy man who lived a holy life. In other words he lived well because he lived for God. Therefore at the end of his earthly life he died as he had lived – in the presence of God. St. Joseph's death was marked by the holiness of the life he lived which was always for Jesus and Mary. When he took his last breath there was Christ the Son holding his hand and Our Lady, his spouse, praying next to him. What peace, reassurance and consolation he must have received during those last anxious and painful moments.

I know I will die. I know that in the future there will be a headstone that will read:

***'Of your charity please pray for the repose of the soul of***

***Fr. Seán O'Brien, Priest***

***who went to God on ??/??/??***

***Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord...'***

My prayer is not to stop the inevitable arrival of death at my door but to die well. To die like St. Joseph, blessed in the same peace he received, with Our Lord and Mary close by me. For that to happen I have to keep trying to live better, to love better, to forgive better, to pray better and most importantly to try to be holy better.

Let us turn to St. Joseph this November, this month of the Holy Souls, and ask his intercession that we never lose faith in Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, who is our sure and certain hope.

God Bless and keep praying

Fr. O'Brien

## Prayer to St. Joseph for a Happy Death

**O Blessed Joseph, you gave your last breath in the loving embrace of Jesus and Mary. When the seal of death shall close my life, come with Jesus and Mary to aid me. Obtain for me this solace for that hour - to die with their holy arms around me. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I commend my soul, living and dying, into your sacred arms. Amen.**

