

Encounter, Entrustment, and Witness through Work:

Karol Wojtyła and the Imitation of St. Joseph

Grzegorz Ignatik¹

Abstract

The goal of this article is to deepen appreciation for St. Joseph's significance in human and Christian life and to encourage greater imitation of St. Joseph in light of that significance. This article does not intend to highlight all the personal virtues of this great saint or to explore in detail his relations to Christ Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Instead, after identifying the concept of imitation, the article examines the fundamental principle involved in imitating St. Joseph and considers several personal virtues that organically proceed from that principle. Although every man is called to imitate St. Joseph, this article considers such imitation particularly within the context of the ministerial (hierarchical) priesthood and priestly formation. In answering the question of what the imitation of St. Joseph truly entails, the article demonstrates that this imitation remains not only a suitable but also a feasible choice for the contemporary man, and especially the Christian. To accomplish this goal, the article draws primarily from the teaching of Karol Wojtyła prior to 1978.

Keywords

imitation, family, work, fatherhood, masculinity, Karol Wojtyła, St. Joseph

¹ Grzegorz Ignatik – Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio
email: gignatik@pcj.edu • ORCID: 0009-0003-7788-0501

Introduction

The goal of this article is twofold: first, to deepen our appreciation for St. Joseph’s significance in human and Christian life; second, to encourage greater imitation of St. Joseph in light of that significance.² This article does not intend to highlight all the personal virtues of this great saint or to explore in detail his relations to Christ Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Several other works accomplish that task.³ Instead, after identifying the concept of imitation, the article examines the fundamental principle involved in imitating St. Joseph and considers several personal virtues that organically proceed from that principle. Although every man is called to imitate St. Joseph, this article considers such imitation in the context of the ministerial (hierarchical) priesthood and those men preparing for ordination. Therefore, in addition to an introduction and conclusion, the article consists of four parts: “On Imitation,” “The Fundamental Principle of Imitating St. Joseph,” “Personal Loci of This Imitation,” and “Application of This Imitation to Priesthood.”

In answering the question of what the imitation of St. Joseph truly means, the article demonstrates that such imitation remains not only a suitable but also a feasible choice for the contemporary man, and especially for today’s Christian. It suggests that, by imitating St. Joseph, man fulfills his fundamental task of living on earth as man. Furthermore, the article aims to see this life through a sacramental lens. Indeed, the central theme here is not mere imitation but sacramental integration, which becomes more clearly identified in the imitation of St. Joseph. It is difficult to capture the essence of this imitation in a few words. Nonetheless, I wish to suggest the phrase “encounter, entrustment, and witness through work” as our lodestar to the person of St. Joseph and his imitation. I think this phrase captures not only God’s attitude toward St. Joseph but also—and more importantly the focus of this brief work—the sacramental or integrative aspect of St. Joseph’s life that is worthy of imitation.

In order to accomplish my goal, I will draw primarily from the teaching of Karol Wojtyła on the concept of imitation and the person of St. Joseph. I will focus especially on texts he authored

² I thank Fr. Marek Kasperczyk, STD, my colleague at the Pontifical College Josephinum, for his valuable remarks that helped me improve this article.

³ See, for instance, F.L. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1962); John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos: On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph* (apostolic exhortation, 1989).

in or before 1978, that is, prior to his election to the papacy.⁴ These few, little-known texts by the Polish prelate offer a rich and profound vision of St. Joseph as well as Wojtyła's understanding of imitation.

Part 1: On Imitation

The Means and Goal of Imitation

The world today is quite ambivalent with respect to imitation. On the one hand, we see examples of imitation everywhere. Every commercial, every concert, and every movie offers its audience models to imitate, fashions to copy, and products to own and use. On the other hand, imitating others is frowned upon as lacking originality, given its non-spontaneous origin. To be truly oneself, one is encouraged to reinvent oneself—to be an absolute self-mover. To be indifferent to others and to move independently of them, relying solely on one's own will and dispositions as the only guide, seems to be the epitome of authenticity and freedom.

However, genuine imitation is neither enslavement nor servitude, nor witless copying. Rather, in itself, it is a conscious and voluntary activity of a person. "I want to be like you" or "I wish to follow you" does not take away personal freedom and responsibility. Instead, the need for imitation is dictated by the true good, perceived thanks to the other or *in* the other. Hence, the reality of imitation indicates a difference between the actual and an ideal state desired and feasible for a particular subject to attain. It manifests that we are still on a journey toward the perfection (fulfillment) of life, whether individual or social. The ideal state is realized by following a personal exemplar (a person-model). Ultimately, and according to Wojtyła's

⁴ Wojtyła's teaching on St. Joseph used in this article is taken from his articles and homilies. In particular:

- "Święty Józef," in: K. Wojtyła, *Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1980), 82–87; first published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* 14, No. 12 (1960).
- "Wypełnić życie prawdą Ewangelii," in: K. Wojtyła, *Odnowa Kościoła i świata: Refleksje soborowe* (Rome: Fundacja Jana Pawła II, 2014), 28–32; first given as a speech on Vatican Radio on November 24, 1962, and then published in *Notificaciones e Curia Metropolitana Cracoviensi* 1–2 (1963): 23–26.
- "Uroczystość św. Józefa-Robotnika – 1 Maja," in: K. Wojtyła, *Słowo Boże skierowane do człowieka w roku liturgicznym: Część druga—od Wielkanocy do Adwentu* (Częstochowa, 1981), 13–16; a sermon first given on May 1, 1969 (Podgórze, Church of St. Joseph).
- as well as the sermons given on March 19, 1968 (Kraków, Church of St. Joseph); on January 12, 1969 (Zakopane, Church of the Most Holy Family); on May 1, 1970 (Kraków, Church of St. Joseph); on May 1, 1970 (Podgórze, Church of St. Joseph); on March 19, 1974 (Kraków, Church of St. Joseph); on March 19, 1976 (Kraków, Church of St. Joseph); and on January 15, 1978 (Kraków, Studium for the Theology of Marriage and Family).

These sermons, in their original Polish, are cataloged under AKKW E III and available in the Archive of the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków, Poland.

personalistic vision, the goal of imitation is an improvement or renewal of the one who imitates. In theological terminology, we call the process of such renewal “conversion.” We can also speak here of the “configuration” of the subject to his model. Of course, the “conversion” in this context entails the person’s turning away from sin and facing God in order to renew the divine image in himself and thereby introduce it into the world. To sum up, imitation is transformative of the subject’s interior (*ad intra*) and exterior (*ad extra*).

Wojtyła’s concept of imitation can be considered in light of these two aspects. For him, imitation pertains to the person’s properly human acts and to his morality (his moral value). These elements are indispensable for genuine imitation in its interior and exterior dimensions.

Imitation in the World of Immanuel Kant and Max Scheler

Karol Wojtyła’s views on imitation are formed by Christian revelation as well as philosophical reflections, especially on the thought of Immanuel Kant and Max Scheler.⁵ Scheler opposed his personalistic ethical system to the aprioristic, formalistic system of Kant. According to Kant, the source of man’s ethical life is human reason, which ought to live by an *a priori*, universal form of law. All ethical action is done for the sake of the law while disregarding the motivation originating from any values found in the world, any goods perceived through experience. For this reason, there is little place for imitation in the Kantian ethical system as morality must find its origin in the individual’s own embracement of the norm in the *a priori* form of pure practical reason. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant clearly states that:

Imitation has no place at all in moral matters, and examples serve for encouragement only, i.e. they put beyond doubt the feasibility of what the law commands, they make intuitive what the practical rule expresses more generally, but they can never entitle us to set aside their true original, which lies in reason, and to go by examples.⁶

⁵ See K. Wojtyła, “On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm (According to the Conceptions of St. Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler),” in: K. Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler*, “The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II,” vol. 2, ed. A. Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 351–352; K. Wojtyła, “The Evangelical Principle of Imitation: The Teaching of the Sources of Revelation and Max Scheler’s Philosophical System,” in: Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures*, 561–570, 571–572.

⁶ I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47.

Consequently, even good ideas or behavior observed in others would be treated with suspicion because they did not originate in oneself. For Kant, imitation seemed merely an exterior affair and, ultimately, unworthy of the person.

In contradistinction to Kant, Scheler encourages imitation as a properly personal affair. According to Scheler, nonpersonal, abstract, and universal norms cannot contain moral values and are thus ethically moot. Only man—the human person—as a model for imitation can be morally fruitful. On this particular point, Wojtyła notes that Scheler overcame Kantianism by referring to the sound ethical tradition of Aristotle.⁷ In that tradition, a good man was the model and measure of moral conduct. However, the concept of imitation in Scheler is peculiar, in accordance with the phenomenological presuppositions of his system. For him, imitation takes place through the follower’s lived-experience of the model’s values. The basis of imitation is the love of the disciple for the person-model.⁸ Here is how Wojtyła explains the central significance of love in Scheler’s moral system:

By co-experiencing, through the love for the person of the Master, his world of ethical values, the disciples intentionally experience in their feeling the same ethical values. The whole “imitation” would be reduced to that.⁹

Lastly, the person who imitates his exemplar experiences the moral values secondarily—that is, “on the occasion” of the affinity to the other. Due to the threat of Pharisaism (a self-interest in pursuing the good), neither moral perfection nor moral value is the center of imitation, or even volition, in the Schelerian system.

According to Wojtyła, Scheler reduces the principle of imitation to the intentional sphere. Unfortunately, the emotional lived-experience of values in the Schelerian system (in which one *per se* experiences values in their hierarchy) drowned the person’s lived-experience of the truth about the good. That is, human life no longer involves personal moral judgment on human acts in

⁷ See, for instance, Wojtyła, “On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm,” 352.

⁸ “The love for the person who is the model (and, as that model, constitutes an ideal) opens up the ideal value essence of that person to the disciple-imitator, makes it accessible for the emotional-cognitive acts of the disciple, and thereby enables imitation.” K. Wojtyła, “An Assessment of the Possibility for Building a Christian Ethics Based on the Presuppositions of Max Scheler’s System,” in: Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures*, 411. See also Wojtyła, “The Evangelical Principle of Imitation,” 565.

⁹ K. Wojtyła, “Max Scheler’s Ethical System as a Means of Developing Christian Ethics,” in: Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures*, 511.

light of the norm of morality. For Scheler, what matters most in imitation is the master's ideal value essence experienced by the disciple and, thereby, a formation or reformation of that disciple's ethos, rather than a development of the person's real ethical perfection. In this case, lived-experience in some sense obscures or disregards being. Wojtyła summarizes his realistic position *vis-à-vis* Scheler's intentional position as follows:

According to the Gospel, it is impossible to have the true model for imitation in isolation from his real acts. *It is only on account of the real objective ethical value of his acts that man becomes the model for another. Also, it is only by the real objective ethical value of his acts that man becomes the imitator of this model. Although it is impossible to think of imitation without being concerned for the model's world of values, this concern alone is not yet ethical. It becomes such only by corresponding acts.*¹⁰

That is how Wojtyła corrects the overly subjectivistic concept of imitation in Scheler in favor of a realistic concept, which, by the way, includes the aspect of lived-experience.

Imitation in Christianity

Wojtyła observes that imitation has always been invoked in Christian tradition as an integral task of Christian life. Sacred Scripture contains numerous texts that demonstrate the principle of imitation at work. It suffices to recall Christ's words "Follow me," as they convey an invitation not merely to join the group of disciples (see Mt 8:18–22 or 9:9) but also to morally imitate the person of Jesus (see Mt 16:24 or Mt 19:21). Christ explicitly sanctions imitation by his words: "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15), for "apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). We see similar encouragement expressed by the apostles, not only with respect to Christ Jesus but also to their own persons. For instance, St. Paul encourages other Christians to "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1; also see Eph 5:1; 1 Thes 1:6; 2 Thes 3:9; and Phil 3:7). Similar calls to imitation are found in texts authored by Sts. Peter and John (see 1 Pet 1:15; 2:21; and 1 Jn 2:3).

Let me briefly observe that, in the first place, Christ's encouragement of imitation is grounded in his own imitation of the Father by virtue of Christ's divinity. For example, we read

¹⁰ K. Wojtyła, "The Principle of 'Imitation,'" in: Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures*, 572 (emphasis original).

Christ's admission that "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, the Son does likewise" (Jn 5:19). Taking the call for imitation directed by Christ to the apostles, and by the apostles to the disciples, we discover by analogy that relation expresses a primordial form of being. In other words, "Christian existence is put with Christ into the category of relationship" because becoming and being a Christian means to become and be a son.¹¹ What I wish to emphasize now is the intrinsic link between imitation and sonship. Sonship is the fundamental and personal principle of authentic imitation.

As indicated above, the task of imitation entails a model or ideal to be striven for. Wojtyła points out that the model for imitation is always a person whose moral perfection is manifested in his action, in the acts he performs.¹² The principle of imitation entails the model's real ethical perfection and not just his lived-experience of a world of values (as seen in Scheler). Hence, the existence of moral perfection in general is insufficient unless it accompanies a concretely existing person as the model. It is through his acts that the person realizes and manifests his moral perfection (if these acts are good) or moral turpitude (if these acts are evil). By imitating our model, we endeavor that the good we see in the acts of our model be analogously realized in our own acts and, consequently, in our own person.

We see that the means of imitation here is not merely to follow external acts "automatically," as it were. Furthermore, imitation does not entail focusing on one's lived-experience to the exclusion of external acts and facts. Rather, the point of imitation is to realize one's personhood by interior moral growth and fulfillment precisely in and through human acts (including external bodily acts). Wojtyła summarizes the features of a model-ideal in Christianity by calling it—or, rather, him, for this model is always a person—religious, real, practical, and ethical.¹³ By analogy, first, imitation is *religious* because to follow a good model (Christ or St. Joseph, for instance) is a task received from God that places man in a positive relation to him, since ethical perfection in man is a reflection of God's perfection. Second, this imitation is *real* because it concerns not merely an intentional sphere (consciousness and the lived-experience

¹¹ See J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. by J.R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 186–187.

¹² See Wojtyła, "The Evangelical Principle of Imitation," 562. Wojtyła speaks of a certain "self-creation" through conscious acts, by which man becomes good or evil in virtue of the goodness or evilness of the acts he performs. See, for instance, K. Wojtyła, *"Person and Act" and Related Essays*, "The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II," vol. 1, ed. A. Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 171–173.

¹³ See Wojtyła, "The Evangelical Principle of Imitation," 563–564, 568–571.

connected with it) but also the whole being. Third, imitation in Christian understanding is *practical* because the task of imitation is not merely theoretical but also involves the human will and properly human action. Lastly, imitation has an intrinsic *ethical* aspect because it aims at the subject's moral goodness and is performed in conformity with norms of morality. Such a comprehensive vision presupposes and expresses an integral anthropology confirmed in light of Revelation.

Part 2: The Fundamental Principle of Imitating St. Joseph

Religious Source of the Imitation

Karol Wojtyła's reflections on the suitability of imitating St. Joseph possess both human and religious significance—that is, they show relevance to both our human existence and our supernatural life. Wojtyła finds the fundamental reason for imitating St. Joseph in the fact of his closeness to the life of Christ and his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let me note immediately that this closeness has a definitive structure: it is realized in and through marriage and the family. St. Joseph enjoys a close relationship with Christ and his mother as the spouse and husband of Mary and as the foster father of Jesus.

From within these relationships of spousality and fatherhood, St. Joseph encountered the supernatural mystery of the Incarnation—the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature and became a man. In God's providential plan, Joseph was granted the grace to stand most closely to the nexus of the divine and human elements as they were united on earth (*humanis divina iunguntur*). Besides the Blessed Virgin Mary, he remained in the earthly life of our Lord the longest, even longer than the apostles themselves. Another reason for his special position in the divine plan of salvation is the very fact that God entrusted to him both his Son and the mother who bore him into the world. For this reason, the Church venerates St. Joseph by celebrating his feast days (St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary; St. Joseph the Worker; the Holy Family) and by introducing his name into the Canon of the Holy Mass before the transubstantiation (by Pope St. John XXIII), immediately after mentioning the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary and preceding the names of the apostles and martyrs. Therefore, St. Joseph is the chosen patron of many causes, peoples, and institutions.

The Key Principle

This closeness to the mystery of the Incarnation gives St. Joseph an unprecedented insight into two great matters of human existence: family (which is based on the marriage between one man and one woman) and work. We cannot imagine human existence without these two realities, nor should we. We are (and ought to be) born into families and realize our humanity and personhood through our own work, through our own actions, on the basis of who we became in our families. To put it differently, we are human because our existence starts with family and proceeds on its foundation. Whatever we do in life and with our life, we do on the foundation of the relationships into which we entered by birth—that is, our relationships with our mother, father, siblings, grandparents, and extended family members. It is no wonder that, from ancient times, family life has been considered a school of life. As we know, this life, this work that the human person does by his acts, transforms not only the world around him but primarily the subject himself, especially in his moral, properly personal aspect. Therefore, Wojtyła says that family is indispensable because this is where man becomes man.¹⁴

A moment ago, I said that the closeness to the mystery of the Incarnation grants St. Joseph a unique insight into two fundamental aspects of human existence: family and work. It is precisely this connection between divine mysteries and human affairs that Karol Wojtyła highlights in his reflections on St. Joseph. These divine mysteries are not only hidden in the innermost being of the Most Holy Trinity but also manifest in the world. They enter the life of mankind and permeate the history of man most notably in the form of family (and marriage) and work. Wojtyła discusses this both in the context of creation as the primordial revelation of God, and in the context of divine revelation, which is cloaked, as it were, within this creation. God neither rejects nor forgets the work of his hands; rather, he elevates it by accomplishing his divine plan precisely in and through his creation. Therefore, while matrimony, family, and work reflect the nature of the Creator, they also acquire new value and a sacramental (soterial) mission in the reality of the Holy Family. This is why Wojtyła considers St. Joseph “key” to both the divine mysteries and the most fundamental human concerns.

Yet, there is another reason for this key significance of St. Joseph in relation to these mysteries. It is perhaps better to say that he is the key to divine mysteries precisely because of his participation in the human mysteries—again, the mysteries of marriage, family, and work. To put

¹⁴ See Karol Wojtyła’s homily given in Zakopane, the Church of the Most Holy Family, on January 12, 1969.

it differently, what we need to imitate in St. Joseph is also his degree of *integration*, the integration between his interiority or spirituality and his exterior life as manifested in his work in the world.¹⁵ It is precisely this integrative character of St. Joseph that is the most essential foundation of his imitation. I will discuss this character in greater detail in the following reflections.

Family: The Interior Aspect of St. Joseph's Life

Of course, St. Joseph's insight into the matters of family and human labor entailed his own attitude toward them. We wish to imitate him both because of this attitude and because of the acts by which he proved to be a model worthy of imitation for us. Wojtyła considers two central aspects of St. Joseph's significance for man. We can call them the *ad intra* and *ad extra* aspects—the interior and the exterior dimensions of St. Joseph's person and life. They are exemplified by the above-mentioned realities of family and work, respectively.

The interior aspect (*ad intra*) relates to the Holy Family, of which St. Joseph was the head. He was the chaste spouse¹⁶ of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the foster father (*pater putativus*) of her Son, Jesus Christ. Wojtyła considers the interior aspect of St. Joseph's life to be genuinely contemplative. It was St. Teresa, the great reformer of the Carmelite order, who noticed a particular connection between the person of St. Joseph and contemplative life.¹⁷ Due to his day-to-day presence and interaction with the divine mysteries—his silent presence, we might add (for Sacred Scripture records not one word of his)—

in his paternal, thus full of loving care and diligent gaze at the Incarnated God and his Mother (...) we can quite easily consider St. Joseph's life as an ideal or even a prototype of the contemplative life.¹⁸

¹⁵ Integration is one of the central concepts in Karol Wojtyła's philosophy and theology. For more information, see, for instance, Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 295ff., and G. Ignatik, *Communicating Life: Karol Wojtyła and Humanae Vitae* (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2024), 214ff.

¹⁶ For a more detailed explanation of Wojtyła's concept of chastity (purity) as both a human virtue and a divine gift (i.e., the moral and charismatic aspects) as well as the task of integrating chastity in the human person, see Ignatik, *Communicating Life*, 298–306. St. Joseph integrated both aspects of chastity—moral and charismatic—in his life as the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus.

¹⁷ See Wojtyła, "Św. Józef," 83. See, especially, St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Life, Relations, Maxims and Foundations Written by the Saint*, ed. J.J. Burke (New York: The Columbus Press, 1911), 32 (chapter 6, par. 12 of *The Life of S. Teresa*).

¹⁸ Wojtyła, "Św. Józef," 83.

Therefore, the “silence” of St. Joseph in Sacred Scripture is not a sign of his irrelevance to the life of Jesus and Mary and their mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Quite the contrary, this silence expresses his attitude of loving, wonder-filled gaze directed at the mystery of God as manifested in the members of his family. This contemplative attitude is expressed in the words spoken of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). St. Joseph fixed his gaze at God who became man—who accepted human life, embraced human work, and entered into the reality of human family. We could even repeat with Wojtyła that while he fixed his gaze on God he was, at the same time, gazing at man: at ordinary human affairs, human work, and family life.¹⁹

Wojtyła observes that St. Joseph’s life is a hidden one, a life marked by fulfilling one’s obligations in *obedience*. Wojtyła seems to be using the word “obedience” (in Polish *posłuszeństwo*, from *szuchać* or *słyszeć*— to listen or to hear) to express Joseph’s contemplative attitude. It is this attitude of listening upon which all the St. Joseph’s actions in the world rely. The richness of this type of life can be understood only from within (*ad intra*), on the foundation of the person’s contemplative union with God. This interior union, however, has an exterior dimension, the dimension to which we now turn.

Work: The Exterior Aspect of St. Joseph’s Life

We can call the exterior aspect of St. Joseph’s significance—the *ad extra* dimension—the social dimension, thus distinguishing it from the contemplative aspect. This social aspect is most readily recognized, as here we see St. Joseph as the head of the family at Nazareth. As is well known, the family is the elementary cell of any society, nation, country, and the Church. Being the head of the Holy Family, St. Joseph works to sustain it and protect it from any dangers or enemies who threaten it. This fact is expressed especially in the image of Joseph the Worker, for his profession was that of carpentry or masonry, as Scripture tells us. Also, we have the image of Joseph the Protector or Patron. Wojtyła notes that the Church’s celebration of St. Joseph shows how close she wishes to be to all people and the most fundamental matters of human life.

However, this social aspect—as it is achieved and manifested through work—possesses a fundamentally personal and theological character. On the one hand, the work performed outside the family is not merely an epiphenomenon of the family life. Rather, although dependent on man,

¹⁹ See Karol Wojtyła’s homily in Kraków, the Church of St. Joseph, on March 19, 1968.

work in all its kinds—the intellectual and physical, the creative and mass-produced—has its own worth or value. St. Joseph is a man who realizes this value in his life and, thereby, appreciates human labor in the dimension of temporality. If human work is a vocation of man, this vocation not only pertains to human fate in its secular dimension but also, precisely in its secular character, becomes a vessel for manifesting and fulfilling the divine *benepiacitum*, as I have already observed.

On the other hand, his work bears great significance for the Church’s mission in the world. St. Joseph’s work, done for the sake of keeping his family alive, entered the plan of our salvation. The Second Vatican Council summarized the soteriological significance of human work with its famous statement on the instrumentality of the humanity of Jesus:

For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart.²⁰

By analogy, and taking into account the interior and exterior aspects of St. Joseph’s life and work, we can safely say that the plan of salvation proceeded through the heart and hands of St. Joseph. The foster father of Jesus teaches that our work in this world is not just our fate but can also become a means of salvation—a path toward eternal life, as Wojtyła observes.²¹ The essential thing to note here is the relational aspect of human work, as seen in St. Joseph, who works not in separation from or indifference to others but for the sake of others and, most importantly, from within his relations to others. Therefore, by working in the world, St. Joseph not only performed necessary acts to provide for his family (by drawing from the world) but also effected a transformation of the world in the image of the Triune God (by introducing his family into the world, as it were, through nourishing the world with his skill). This transformation is most beneficial to the world and its development. For these reasons, the life of the humble spouse and father from Nazareth echoes the already-quoted words of Christ: “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise” (Jn 5:19).

²⁰ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

²¹ See Wojtyła, “Uroczystość św. Józefa-Robotnika – 1 Maja,” 15.

Encountering God in the Family and Human Work

St. Joseph's significance for today's life finds its source in his closeness to the mysteries of God that he encountered in the Holy Family. This personal encounter is a sort of contemplation, though it emphasizes the relational and reciprocal character of the "I" facing the other (the "thou," or even the "we"). This "facing the other" is actually an "interaction"—another important feature of encounter. To encounter means an active, dynamic state in which persons engage in some kind of communication or even dialog. In order for this communication to happen, they have to be present to each other, close to each other. This feature of encounter is precisely what Wojtyła wished to convey by noting St. Joseph's closeness to the divine mysteries. Another important feature of encounter is the possibility of imitation. Encounter enables discipleship, in which one can recognize the true goodness of the person-master and follow (or imitate) him. Finally, an encounter involves the whole person, who is taken, as it were, into the sphere of the other and into his relations. We can see how closely the features of encounter align with those of imitation, as seen above. The key point here is that the encounter with God in the family continues in human work.

The imitation of St. Joseph, even in his exterior dimension of work, both confirms and elevates every man's work, manifesting its significance and value. Wojtyła notes the "transitive" and "intransitive" moments of human work by quoting Scripture.²² In its *ad extra* aspect, man transforms the face of the earth by his labor in accord with God's mandate directed to the first man and woman: "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). Wojtyła understands this command as a task given to man to continue the work of creation by completing it. This "completion," he explains, means deriving new values from creation by shaping it through work. Of course, Wojtyła also stresses the *ad intra* dimension of work. By his work, man not only transforms and conquers the world but also transforms and conquers himself. Hence, Scripture teaches, "in your patience you will possess your souls" (Luke 21:19).²³ According to the Polish prelate, this passage also reveals the moment of suffering in human work (in both its exterior and interior aspects)—namely, that work entails effort, and a certain attrition of self.

Perhaps the words of one of Wojtyła's favorite Polish poets, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, can provide a suitable conclusion to our reflections in this part. As I have attempted to show,

²² See *ibid.*

²³ This translation is taken from the Vulgate: "*In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.*" The RSV renders this as, "By your endurance you will gain your lives."

the justification for imitating St. Joseph lies in the union of the interior and exterior dimensions of human existence within the context of an ongoing conversation with God. In his poem *Promethidion*, Norwid describes this union in two lines:

Beauty exists that we might be enticed to work;
Work, that we might be resurrected.²⁴

In other words, the beauty we now contemplate in wonder enables and motivates us to act in this world, and our work here on earth springs forth in us, bearing fruit in eternal life. We see a certain *exitus–reditus* dynamic operative here. Beauty, which finds its source in the mystery of God, spurs us to work toward the eschaton. Note how the poet’s linking between beauty and work affirms the moral (personal and transformative) value of the work that leads to resurrection—that is, to eternal existence in Jesus Christ.

A Digression: In Actione Contemplativus

Let me now offer a small digression concerning the values of the active and the contemplative life. The imitation of St. Joseph, as I have presented it here, means an appreciation of the active life (as signified by his work outside of the family) precisely because of its intrinsic reference to the interior life (as signified by his intimacy with the mystery of the Holy Family). I see the exterior work as a two-directional movement. On the one hand, work is a kind of remembrance of the family in the outside world. On the other hand, this same work is a sort of being “shaped toward” or being conformed (configured) to that family. In other words, the value of the *ad extra* aspect of existence is understood as a contemplation through action. A brief look at St. Thomas and Hans Urs Von Balthasar will elucidate my point.

In his discussion on whether a religious order devoted to the contemplative life is more excellent than one given to the active life, St. Thomas Aquinas assigns the highest position to the orders devoted to preaching and teaching, ranking them above those devoted to contemplation. In his hierarchy, third place belongs to those orders that are occupied with external actions.²⁵

²⁴ From *Dialogue I*: “Bo piękno na to jest by zachwycalo / Do pracy – praca, by się zmartwychwstało.” See Cyprian Kamil Norwid, *Wybór wierszy* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1989).

²⁵ *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 188, a. 6.

Aquinas explains that the action which flows from the fullness of contemplation is to be preferred to simple contemplation, while simple contemplation is greater than an outward occupation of service (such as receiving guests, serving food, and the like). Likely bearing in mind the imitation of our Lord Jesus, he says that as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so too is it better to hand on to others the object of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate it. (Incidentally, this also conforms to the relational character of Christianity we mentioned earlier.) Again, this "fruition" is not merely the product of reflection but is itself the object contemplated.²⁶

In one of his works, Hans Urs von Balthasar critiques this traditional hierarchy of values concerning religious orders by indicating the danger of pitting the active life against the contemplative, and vice versa.²⁷ This danger arises when emphasizing the superiority of the activity of the spirit, which has its end in itself over its enslavement to earthly activity. Namely, this emphasis may create an undue superiority of what is inner and personal compared to what is external and social, of what is directed above man (*actio immanens*) versus that concerned with the earthly and human (*actio transiens*). As a consequence, there may arise a neglect of the neighbor, hence a decrease in love. According to Balthasar, an idea of contemplation shared with the Greeks is too individualistic and intellectualistic.²⁸ Instead, he proposes a solution in which the two dispositions, contemplative and active, mutually condition each other so that action becomes the fulfillment of contemplation. In light of understanding Christ's actions as simply the expression of his contemplation—in other words, as the form of contemplation—Balthasar suggests the Ignatian formula *in actione contemplativus* as more fitting for Christian life and presupposing the Thomistic *actio ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur*.²⁹ We can fittingly apply Balthasar's solution to the life of St. Joseph. Accordingly, his work becomes a particular contemplation of divine mysteries—a constant prayer (see 1 Thess 5:17).

²⁶ Hence, St. Thomas says, *sicut enim maius est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita maius est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari*. See *ibid.*, II–II, q. 188, a. 6.

²⁷ H.U. von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh: Explorations in Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 229.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 230, 234–35, and 238. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 188, a. 6.

Part 3: Personal Loci of this Imitation

The above principle of imitating St. Joseph also demonstrates the reason for this imitation. As I have mentioned above, this reason lies in his person being the “key” between human affairs and divine mysteries. Of course, the imitation of St. Joseph in his interior and exterior dimensions entails his personal perfections. As I explained in the introduction, this article will not discuss Joseph’s personal virtue in detail, even though all his perfections can be easily associated with those that will be discussed in this part. Below, I will consider several areas that particularly pertain to our topic, starting with the problem of masculinity.³⁰

Masculinity and the Church’s Activity

Wojtyła recognizes that the person of St. Joseph provides ample material for reflections on the essence of masculinity. The previous reflections on the *ad extra* and *ad intra* aspects of St. Joseph’s life and activity provide the basis for our considerations here. Wojtyła begins his reflections on masculinity with the external aspect as the more visible one. He associates this aspect with apostolic activity, since the apostles were men (males) who were called and sent to continue Christ’s work by creating and organizing his Church. Their successors—bishops, along with their priests and deacons—continue this work. This social-religious mission entrusted to men (males) is most active and evidently “exterior.” Their unique participation in Christ’s magisterial, priestly, and governing offices entails elements of spiritual struggle and conquest. Their responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel is inevitably linked with an offensive and defensive attitude. However, it is evident that the striving for “domination,” as characterized by masculinity, is, in Wojtyła’s opinion, balanced and, so to speak, purified by the reality of service.³¹ One could rightly conclude that the drive for struggle and conquest was given to the man (male) for the sake of service. Every man

³⁰ Wojtyła speaks of the “problem of masculinity,” taking “problem” to mean a subject matter for inquiry and not hinting at the nonsensical opinion that there is something intrinsically wrong or toxic with being male. What is of interest here is that Wojtyła discusses masculinity in reference to not femininity but to St. Joseph and his relation to God and his mysteries. This “vertical” vision of masculinity to some degree explains and substantiates its reality.

³¹ Clearly, the proper integration of both service and struggle (domination) is indispensable for full and mature masculinity. It seems to me that the loss or rejection of the latter results in effeminate men—concerned with others to the detriment of their own identity—whereas the loss or rejection of the former produces brutish men, concerned only with themselves and their self-serving goals. The imitation of St. Joseph corrects such extremes in men as it also removes the danger of clericalism in the ordained. Another strong biblical model of masculinity that comes to mind here is St. Paul.

(male) is called to be a servant—one who carries out his responsibility for others, especially his spouse and children.

According to the Polish prelate, the image of St. Joseph both transcends and complements this social-apostolic dimension of masculinity. In addition to being a protector, a defender, and a provider, St. Joseph is primarily a caretaker, a guardian, a spouse, and a father. This spousal and paternal dimension, which highlights his interiority, seems to Wojtyła more fundamental than any external social, organizational, or administrative activity. Every man (male) is called to be a spouse, to be betrothed, to be a bridegroom. In other words, the man must be oriented inward—toward his beloved, toward his marriage and family—before, and while, he is turned outward toward the world. As we learn from Sacred Scripture, the person of St. Joseph unites both attitudes within himself in a natural and effective manner, thus shedding light on the proper understanding of masculinity. Wojtyła concludes that

Man should be not only a social activist, an organizer, proclaimer and defender of an idea, but also a father and caretaker. Otherwise, he does not realize the whole moral fullness of his masculine individuality.³²

Therefore, this unitive principle (between the *ad extra* and *ad intra* dimensions of St. Joseph's life as a man) should be applied to the activity of the Church today. Wojtyła sees that all external, social-administrative activity of men (males) in the Church must be permeated with the spirit of fatherhood or care. Otherwise, such activity—even impressive in its external expression—will be inevitably afflicted with interior emptiness. Man is truly apostolic only when he is, first and foremost, paternal or caring. Any man (male)—not just ordained clergy—is fully himself when he unites these two aspects in his person. Consequently, interpersonal and social relations cultivated on the basis of this union will develop harmoniously in a manner worthy of human persons. In other words, this is how Wojtyła imagines love to be realized in a masculine manner.

³² Wojtyła, “Św. Józef,” 85. In light of this Wojtylian view of St. Joseph, I consider associating masculinity with exteriority and femininity with contemplative interiority in its various biological, psychological, and religious contexts to be an oversimplification.

A Word on Femininity

Even though Wojtyła does not speak on femininity when discussing St. Joseph’s significance for mankind, let me make a couple of observations in light of the above dimensions of masculinity. By pointing out the social-activist (*ad extra*) and spousal and fatherly (*ad intra*) aspects of masculinity, Wojtyła does not wish to deny women their role in transforming the world outwardly and in their capacity as caregivers. Like men, women are called to contemplate the divine mysteries and draw on them—or, better, embody them—in their actions. However, their attitude, which we could best describe as “Marian,” after the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is its epitome, is concerned with reception and cultivation rather than struggle and domination.³³ The heart of the feminine attitude is its service of life in the most intimate manner. According to Wojtyła, the woman is the servant of life, while the man is the servant of this servant. Of course, by this service, he himself also serves life—the very life that he initiated and that his beloved spouse received and nurtures. Whatever St. Joseph, as the true spouse of Mary and the foster father to Jesus, does outside his family is done from within it and for its sake. Again, this action is detrimental neither to masculine receptivity nor to the outside world, but it greatly enriches both.

Being Just with Respect to the Lord

As I have indicated above, Wojtyła recognizes the link between divine mysteries and human affairs, for which St. Joseph is a “key.” However, instead of discussing principles of contemplative and active life and providing a solution for integrating them, Wojtyła presents St. Joseph’s life as both a model of integration and a model for imitation. Together with Sacred Scripture (Mt 1:19), the Church calls St. Joseph *just* or *righteous* (δικαιος). Traditionally, to be just in this context means that Joseph was “adorned with virtue.”³⁴ Without denying this interpretation, Wojtyła does not focus on the saint’s habits. Instead, he calls him “just with respect to God,” by which he refers to Joseph’s interior attitude. What he means is that St. Joseph gave himself—and everything that was needed—to God in order to fulfill God’s plan. Wojtyła explains what he means by being just with

³³ In his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II interprets Eph 5:22, in which St. Paul calls wives to be subject to their husbands. According to the Polish pope, this “submission” is the wife’s openness to being loved by the husband. He explains that “*the husband* is above all *the one who loves*, and the wife, by contrast, is *the one who is loved*. One might even venture the idea that the wife’s ‘submission’ to the husband, understood in the context of the whole of Ephesians 5:22–23, means above all ‘the experiencing of love’.” See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. by M. Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 92:6.

³⁴ See, for instance, Filas, *Joseph*, 20.

respect to God the Creator in his book *Love and Responsibility*.³⁵ There, he asks about how man can repay the debt for everything he received from God—most fundamentally, his existence and nature—if “to be just” means to give back what is due to the other. He arrives at the following conclusion:

When man reflects on all this from the point of view of justice with respect to the Creator, the following conclusion arises: if I want to be fully just with respect to God the Creator, I should direct toward him all that is in me, my whole being, for he has the first right to all this.³⁶

The Polish thinker also points out that even this returning of everything is insufficient to obtain a level of equality between man and God. In his opinion, only love can bring a certain equality, as love is a complete surrender and belonging to an other. In other words, Wojtyła recognizes the great love that St. Joseph had for his Creator when he calls him “just with respect to God.” This love, as a fruit of encounter, is worth imitating.

The Humility of Always Being a Child

Let me further develop the context of sonship we discovered above while discussing the essence of imitation. In light of our sacramental understanding of St. Joseph’s work, I want to highlight one more reason for following him: St. Joseph’s *humility*. Although we do not know whether—and to what extent—his *ad extra* actions were illuminative or enlightening to others, whether inside or outside the Holy Family, we must hold that his acts were performed for the sake of his family. Joseph’s silence, in which he performed his tasks, expresses his humility. This obedient silence confirms the contemplative attitude of justice—of which I have just spoken—that every father should acquire in his work. To be silent here means to discover and to wonder at the divine mystery present in one’s own work. This silence is an expression of not only man’s contingency and dependence on God the Creator, but also his total entrustment to him. It reminds man of his existential depth—that is, that he is a creature proceeding from God the Trinity. Wojtyła links

³⁵ K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by G. Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

the reality of fatherhood with that of becoming a child in his 1964 mystical drama *Radiation of Fatherhood*.³⁷

At the beginning of our reflections, I displayed the greatness of St. Joseph in the fact that God entrusted to him his Son, his mother, his family, as well as other divine mysteries. These mysteries include not only the mystery of the Incarnation, but also those of man's redemption and of the Church. Therefore, Wojtyła calls Joseph "a man of divine entrustment." Moreover, God the Father entrusts not only all these, but also his own fatherhood to the man Joseph.³⁸ He chooses St. Joseph to be a true father to his Son! However, all these objective facts alone are insufficient to describe the greatness of Joseph and his life. What is most relevant here is his interior attitude toward all that God entrusted to him. In other words, the correlative aspect of God's entrustment is St. Joseph's interior attitude of *responsibility* as his response to it. The "silent" actions undertaken to care for and protect Christ and his mother are signs of his responsibility. In his *opus magnum*, *Person and Act*, Wojtyła speaks of responsibility as a person's conscious response to values in truth, which entails their affirmation and cultivation.³⁹ In his *Radiation of Fatherhood*, the Polish poet portrays the moment of accepting fatherly responsibility by the protagonist Adam.⁴⁰ Wojtyła describes this responsibility as a sort of perichoresis—a reciprocal possession of the other in one's heart. Adam's fatherly responsibility for Monika is deeply bound with love, that is, with his appreciation of her value as a person and as his daughter. As a father, St. Joseph must have shared such an interior attitude with respect to his adopted son Jesus and his wife Mary.

Together with this responsibility, St. Joseph undertook the mission of the Redeemer and the goal of redemption. In other words, St. Joseph was not only conscious of the mystery he encountered, but he also participated in it. What is of key importance for us now is that this mystery is not just his personal involvement with Christ, although this definitely occurred. The mystery here is the fact of St. Joseph's life in the Holy Family. We could say that because he was an integral

³⁷ See K. Wojtyła, "Radiation of Fatherhood," in: K. Wojtyła, *The Collected Works and Writings on Theatre*, trans. by B. Taborski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 339, 362.

³⁸ See Wojtyła's sermon delivered in Kraków, the Church of St. Joseph, on March 19, 1974.

³⁹ See, for instance, Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 272.

⁴⁰ See Wojtyła, "Radiation of Fatherhood," 333–364. After reflecting on his solitude and the reality of the child, Adam still finds fatherhood burdensome. But once he enters into a dialogue with his adopted child Monika and feels the obligation to protect her from a poisonous viper that surprised them on their walk, he becomes aware of interiorly accepting the responsibility of fatherhood. Both the father and the child become aware that they find themselves in each other's heart and grow in this mutual belonging. They express this perichoresis by the word "mine": "my father," "my child."

member of this family—this body—which God made for the sake of his Son and for the sake of redemption, Joseph, in both his person and his work, was also integral to this mystery being realized in history.

Fatherhood as Making a Home

Just a moment ago, I spoke of God making the Holy Family, which by no means contradicts the truth that St. Joseph, as the head of that family, was the one who helped shape it. By entrusting his family to St. Joseph, God entrusted him not only with the task of serving his family, but also—in some sense—with that of building it. This is the task entrusted to all human fathers (as well as to mothers, though differently), especially with respect to the external dimension of the familial community that we call “home.” Wojtyła affirms that St. Joseph is a model for all husbands and fathers precisely because their vocational task is to create a human home—a familial home. The Polish prelate stresses that “home” is not merely a place but also a community, a community with a particular atmosphere of mutual presence, closeness, and support. This familial home is also familiar: it is the proper place for human beings to live and grow together. Therefore, Wojtyła calls home “the fundamental strength of man.”⁴¹ Our Lord Jesus lived at home with Mary and Joseph for thirty years, thus affirming that this home provided strength for him—the Son of God—as well. Consequently, as Wojtyła remarks, a homeless man is, in a sense, unbalanced or shaken in his own humanity, in his human vocation. Such a man misses the gift of parental love, conjugal love, and filial love—both with respect to himself as well as others (namely, his parents, spouse, and children).

Part 4: Application of this Imitation to Priesthood

Encountering God in the Family

To imitate St. Joseph, then, means two things for priests. First, it means continuing one’s encounter with the Trinity. This encounter consists in approaching the Father in the Holy Spirit through participation in the sacred mysteries in the person of Christ the Son. This participation will be both habitual and actual. Second, this imitation is to be realized in the world by encountering others in communion: to be consistent with the language used here, in any network of relations.

⁴¹ See Karol Wojtyła’s homily given in Kraków, the Church of St. Joseph, on March 19, 1976.

As St. Joseph encountered the divine mystery of the Trinity within his life in the Holy Family, the priest is to live his contemplative encounter with God from within the various relations in which he exists in a particular time and space. These relations are many: his immediate and extended family in which he was raised, his parish or parishes to which he belonged and in which he serves, his community of friends and brother priests, his diocese, and his country as a whole. In other words, the imitation of St. Joseph entails entering the world and making God the Father present from within worldly families—that is, within the various relations and institutions of this world. This imitation is, namely, a true *contemplata aliis tradere*—a true tradition (handing on) of what is contemplated.

Witness Through Work

What I have said about the significance of St. Joseph—his life and work—has a profound application to the life and work of the Catholic priest.⁴² The work of the priest has both external (social and apostolic) and internal (spiritual and contemplative) aspects. Furthermore, it is performed in the world and for the world, though its primary concern is the human person and his union with God.⁴³ And because this union cannot be achieved outside the human heart, the work of priests and bishops is called “pastoral.” That is, they are pastors and guardians of souls in the likeness of Jesus Christ (see 1 Pt 2:25). This is why the imitation of St. Joseph is so important for priestly formation and pastoral ministry. By imitating St. Joseph, the seminarian and the priest draw their work from the mystery of the invisible God and apply it to their actions, thereby transforming this world and their own selves in the likeness of Christ. In other words, the imitation of St. Joseph roots the priest in the sacramental dimension of Christ’s mission on earth. To put it differently, this imitation grounds the priest in the mystery of the Incarnation—the union and reconciliation of God and man in Jesus Christ—without neglecting or overemphasizing its human and divine dimensions, that is, the aspects of the sign and grace. St. Joseph is worthy of imitation because, in his person, Divine Providence expressed what is closest to every man and linked that to the eternal, divine plan of salvation. This means that, by imitating St. Joseph, priests become—like him—closest to what is dearest to every man: family and work. They continue building their

⁴² Although Wojtyła does not explicitly make this reference, he discusses the work of the priest in his homily given for the feast of St. Joseph in Podgórze, the Church of St. Joseph, on May 1, 1969.

⁴³ See the secular aspect of the work of the priest in Vatican II documents, for instance, in *Lumen gentium* 28 and 31, as well as *Presbyterorum ordinis* 3 and 9 (“placed in the midst of the laity”).

parish and diocesan family by their ministry, while at the same time supporting the family and the work of those entrusted to their care.

Priest and Human Vocation

In his 1976 retreat for the papal household, entitled *Sign of Contradiction*, Wojtyła presents priesthood as a reminder of, or expression of, the fundamental vocation of man. The priest is a response to man's perennial questions about the meaning of his existence and that of the whole world. As a part of this retreat, Wojtyła says,

Priesthood is an expression of the meaning given to man and the world by their relationship with God. And the profoundest of truths about man and the world is that they both belong to God, Creator and Redeemer...The priesthood in particular is the form of self-expression of the man for whom the world's ultimate meaning can be found only in the dimension of the transcendental: in turning towards God who, as the fulness of personal Being, in himself transcends the world. Without relationship and without self-giving, the whole of human existence on earth loses its meaning.⁴⁴

On the other hand, this attitude frees the priest from being preoccupied with results. Cardinal Ratzinger expressed this point when, in his reflection on the Cross of Christ, he noted that "Success" is not another name for God.⁴⁵ To imitate the "silent" St. Joseph means to speak the whole truth to God concerning one's own being. In a certain sense, this means having time only for God—to use it for him and not just for oneself. Cardinal Ratzinger notices precisely this fact when he says:

The speechlessness of a human being who is able to say nothing more to God can become a prayer, if this very speechlessness is brought before the God who listens.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ K. Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 130, 132.

⁴⁵ J. Ratzinger, "The Eucharist—Heart of the Church," in: J. Ratzinger, *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, trans. by J. Saward, et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 259.

⁴⁶ J. Ratzinger, "Praying in Our Time," in: J. Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 115. See *ibid.*, 116.

Priest as a Sign of the Times

It is a well-known fact that the authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose are to be discerned (and not merely detected) in the happenings, needs, and desires of the modern age by scrutinizing and interpreting the signs of the times in light of the Gospel.⁴⁷ However, the priest of today should not merely be formed to pass judgment on these signs. He himself should be a sign of the times! In my estimation, he will become one when he imitates good models of fatherhood, such as that of St. Joseph. Of course, in imitating St. Joseph the priest creates God’s home—he builds God’s house—the House of Joseph. It is his task. As we saw Wojtyła pointing out, this house is more than a place, it is a community with a climate of mutual closeness, communication, and support, and with growth in humanity and holiness. In his pastoral ministry, the priest—as a spouse to the Church and a father to God’s people—is to create and build such a home wherever he is. Only then will he become a sign of hope, a sign of the times in the sense of being a sign for the times.

Conclusion

On the one hand, God listened to St. Joseph and chose him so as to make him “lord of his house and ruler of all his possessions” (Ps. 105:21). He also supported and guided him. On the other hand, in St. Joseph we see the proper relation to God (the contemplative encounter and total entrustment) and the proper relation to the world (transforming it in the image of God through work). The imitation of this man entails an integration of these relations in one’s life together with others—a life of communion in a family—which is a true conversation with God.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 4, 11, 44. For more detail on the signs of the times, especially in the thought of Karol Wojtyła, see Ignatik, *Communicating Life*, 148–151.

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