

Dowry



Spring 2022

Issue N°53

*"O Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother of God and our most
gentle Queen and Mother,
look down in mercy upon
England thy Dowry."*

In this issue:

Editorial: Liturgical Identity Confirmed

Ending Habitual Sins

100th Anniversary of Chesterton's Conversion

Easter Dawn Mass

Falling in Eucharistic Love

Unexpected 19th Century Catholic Revival

The *Diary of a Country Priest* Today

What was the trade of St Joseph?

Support our Apostolate

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Editorial: Liturgical Identity Confirmed



Last July the *motu proprio Traditionis Custodes* severely restricted the use of the traditional Roman liturgy. Last December the Congregation for Divine Worship issued even stricter guidelines. After seven months of painful uncertainty, on 11th February Pope Francis issued a decree confirming our Fraternity's liturgical identity. *Deo gratias* for such a response from heaven to many prayers.

We note that the meeting of the FSSP superiors with the Holy Father took place during our Novena of Preparation of Worldwide Solemn Consecration of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Further, the Decree confirming our liturgical identity is dated 11th February, the Feast of the Apparitions of Our Lady in Lourdes, and the day of the Worldwide Solemn Consecration of the FSSP. Therefore, after God almighty our gratitude goes to the Immaculate Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Lastly the news was released on 21st February when First Vespers of the Feast of the Chair of Peter occur, it being a First-Class Feast in our Fraternity. Thus, we also must express our gratitude to our Patron St Peter the Apostle and must pray further for his successor Pope Francis.

Across our 259 Mass centres spread in 147 dioceses on 4 continents, Holy Masses and *Te Deums* were sung in thanksgiving by our 526 priests and seminarians, supported among others by the 8400 members of our sodality, the Confraternity of St Peter. Although we all must pray further for every clergy and laity to benefit from the riches of the Roman traditions of the Church, the communiqué below must strengthen the hopes of all loyal Catholics.

Please pray for our British Deacon Gwilym Evans, FSSP who will be ordained a priest at our Bavarian seminary next 18th June and is expected to be assigned in England from this summer onward. God does not abandon those who put their trust in Him, rather, He leads them to experience that hope is beyond human capacity, being a theological virtue infused in souls by the Father of Lights.

By way of illustration, we recommend watching the film *Notre-Dame on Fire* by award-winning director Jean-Jacques Annaud, just released, (cf. notredameonfire.org). The film retraces how on April 15, 2019, heroic men and women put their lives on the line to accomplish the awe-inspiring rescue of Notre-Dame de Paris. It is a true story of courage, hope, sacrifice and victory against all odds. I was particularly touched to see my confrere Fr Jean-Marc Fournier (formerly FSSP, now army chaplain to the Paris Firemen) retrieving the Blessed Sacrament

from the cathedral ablaze. May we all priests risk everything in the service of Christ the Saviour.

Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP

Superior of the FSSP England Apostolate

17th May 2022

Official communiqué of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter

Fribourg, February 21, 2022

On Friday, February 4, 2022, two members of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, Fr. Benoît Paul-Joseph, Superior of the District of France, and Fr. Vincent Ribeton, Rector of St. Peter's Seminary in Wigratzbad, were received in private audience by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for nearly an hour.

During the very cordial meeting, they recalled the origins of the Fraternity in 1988, the Pope expressed that he was very impressed by the approach taken by its founders, their desire to remain faithful to the Roman Pontiff and their trust in the Church. He said that this gesture should be "preserved, protected and encouraged".

In the course of the audience, the Pope made it clear that institutes such as the Fraternity of St. Peter are not affected by the general provisions of the *Motu Proprio Traditionis Custodes*, since the use

of the ancient liturgical books was at the origin of their existence and is provided for in their constitutions.

The Holy Father subsequently sent a decree signed by him and dated February 11, the day the Fraternity was solemnly consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, confirming for the members of the Fraternity the right to use the liturgical books in force in 1962, namely: the Missal, the Ritual, the Pontifical and the Roman Breviary.

Grateful to the Holy Father, the members of the Fraternity of St. Peter are in thanksgiving for this confirmation of their mission. They invite all the faithful who feel close to them as a spiritual family to attend or join them in prayer at the Mass

tomorrow, on the feast of the Chair of St. Peter, and to pray for the Supreme Pontiff.

Source: www.fssp.org

Decree of Pope Francis confirming the use of the 1962 liturgical books

The Holy Father Francis, grants to each and every member of the Society of Apostolic Life “Fraternity of Saint Peter”, founded on July 18, 1988 and declared of “Pontifical Right” by the Holy See, the faculty to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, and to carry out the sacraments and other sacred rites, as well as to fulfil the Divine Office, according to the typical editions of the liturgical books, namely the Missal, the Ritual,

the Pontifical and the Roman Breviary, in force in the year 1962.

They may use this faculty in their own churches or oratories; otherwise it may only be used with the consent of the Ordinary of the place, except for the celebration of private Masses.

Without prejudice to what has been said above, the Holy Father suggests that, as far as possible, the provisions of the motu proprio *Traditionis Custodes* be taken into account as well.

Given in Rome, near St. Peter’s, on February 11, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, in the year 2022, the ninth year of my Pontificate.

Francis



(Photo: Fr Paul-Joseph (left) and Fr Vincent Ribeton (right) with Pope Francis – © FSSP)

Ending Habitual Sins

By Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP

Christ suffered and died to atone for our sins, setting us free from the tyranny of Satan. We must take part in the battle against sin if we expect to receive the fruits of Our Lord's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, following Him in Heaven after His glorious Ascension.

Let us therefore reflect on habitual sin, particularly sins of impurity. A sin is habitual when one commits it often. It can be any sin: for example, slander; drunkenness; missing Sunday Mass; contraception; etc. Such a sin is called *habitual*, from the word *habit*, if it is often, easily and pleasurably committed. In other words, one falls into that particular sin repeatedly. A habitual sin is quite different then from a *one-off* sin, so to speak. It may happen that somebody falls into a sin, even a grave sin, being caught off-guard, or out of sudden weakness or other attenuating circumstance. In that case, the grave sin is not a habit. It is an accident. Of course, it must be confessed and avoided in the future. But the strategy against it is not the same as with a habitual sin.

The habitual sinner can fall into two traps: resignation, and denial.

Resignation

He thinks to himself, or she thinks to herself, "I have tried so many times to overcome this sin of wearing immodest clothes, of pornography, or of *sexting*, or of self-abuse, or of

fornication, and every time I have fallen again despite praying and trying hard to resist the temptation. Maybe I am just too weak to overcome it. Maybe I should just accept the fact that I will never get out of it. That is just who I am."

Denial

Resignation may lead to denial. The habitual sinner may adopt the lies of the world, of the flesh and the devil. He will come to think that immodesty in dress and pictures, impure actions, etc. are not *that* bad. He will claim that it depends on the intention. She will argue, "It is only with my boyfriend, so I am faithful." Or, "Everybody does it, so it can't be wrong." He will add, "It is a natural need, and mentalities have changed a lot since Antiquity and the Middle-Ages." Or, "New technologies of communication demand an update of moral standards. Things are more difficult nowadays with internet, smartphones, etc." They may even suggest, "Surely not *each* of these actions is a mortal sin. Possibly most of them are not even sinful if no harm is intended, but merely fun, or even happiness."

You see, first comes resignation; then comes denial.

Admittedly, not overnight does one break free from a habitual grave sin. God may grant such a miracle, but ordinarily it takes months, sometimes years. However, the point is that

- all such actions are grave sins, no question about it.
- being healed from them all IS possible with the grace of God.

Three tips

Here are three tips to monitor the gradual improvement:

1. one falls less often
2. one falls with more reluctance
3. one comes back to God quicker

Please read carefully. These three tips are not about instantaneous healing. Precisely. With habitual sins, the point is that one falls again, and again into them. To keep trying and to increase hope, we need to be humbly pragmatic. We must look at whatever aspect of our situation *is* an improvement from the past fall.

1. One falls less often:

It is bad if a man sins gravely *thrice* a day; but it is still better than when, a month earlier, he used to commit that same grave sin *five* times a day.

2. One falls with more reluctance:





Last winter that woman used to justify the specific grave sin she committed every week. Last spring, she acknowledged to herself that it was wrong. Now she begs God to make her strong against it. She still falls, and often, but not complacently as before. This is an improvement.

3. one comes back to God quicker

Previously, these two young adults would remain in grave sin for several weeks before seeking absolution from a priest. They felt that since they were fallen, there was no urge for making peace with God. The devil persuaded them that it made no difference to anyone if they carried on sinning a little longer, now that they had lost divine grace anyway. But now, the same young people hurry out of mortal sin through a prompt act of perfect contrition. They sincerely ask for God's

forgiveness even at night when no confessional is open. They know that sincere regret and genuine will to avoid the proximate occasions of sin restore their souls to divine friendship even before receiving sacramental absolution, provided the latter is intended as soon as possible. They still fall, and gravely, but they spend no longer than a day outside of God's grace, whereas before it was months or weeks.

Clearly each and every sin must be avoided at all costs. But ultimate success is more likely when monitoring improvement in the three areas described above. With the grace of God sought and received in the sacrament of penance; in devout Holy Communion; in earnest prayer and prudent mortification; in reading Holy Scripture and the lives of the saints; lastly through Catholic

friendship and the support of our fellow-believers, one *does* get out such habitual grave sins.

Eventually, a time comes when one simply does not remember when one last committed this or that specific grave sin. Then with joy, one thanks God who has achieved such a transformation, with our collaboration, through the power of His Holy Church. Let us invoke St Joseph, protector of our purity and terror of demons; and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate one who crushed the head of the demon. Let us ask for their intercession, especially for habitual sinners falling often in the same grave sins of impurity. □

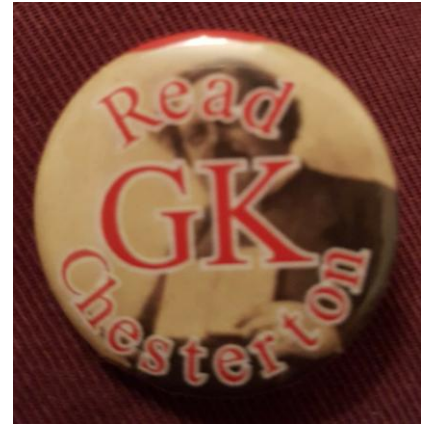
(Pictures credit:
Unsplash/Hugues de Buyer-Mineure
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100th Anniversary of Chesterton's Conversion

By Stuart McCullough

Saturday 30th July 2022 will be the 100th Anniversary of the Conversion of GK Chesterton. The location was, "the Railway Hotel in Beaconsfield, the dance-room of which had been converted into a makeshift chapel in the absence of any Catholic church in the town. In truth it was little more than a shed with a corrugated-iron roof and wooden walls, fitted with chapel fixtures by Sir Philip Rose and made available by the hotel's Irish landlady, Mrs Borlase. However, if Father Rice had failed to persuade Chesterton to be received in more luxurious surroundings [Douai Abbey School where Father was headmaster], he was compensated amply when Gilbert requested that he be present

with Father O'Connor at his reception on Sunday, 30th July. The two Priests breakfasted together at the inn at which Father O'Connor was staying before walking together to Top Meadow [GKC's house]. According to Father Rice, they found Gilbert in an armchair reading the catechism, 'pulling faces and making noises as he used to do when reading'. Greeting his two friends, he got up and stuffed the catechism in his pocket. At lunch he drank water and poured wine for everyone else, and at about three o'clock they set out for the church. While Gilbert was making his Confession to Father O'Connor, Frances [GK's Wife], who was weeping continually, was



comforted by Father Rice." [From *Wisdom and Innocence, A Life of GK Chesterton* by Joseph Pearce.]

Since its very humble beginnings in 2011 The Annual GK Chesterton Pilgrimage has grown. What started with four pilgrims going to Chesterton's grave by car, can now boast that hundreds of pilgrims have walked hundreds of miles to his grave in Beaconsfield. Hearty pilgrims start walking from Saint Georges C of E church in Notting Hill, where GK Chesterton was baptized as a child, to his grave 27 miles away. We stop after 20 miles in Iver Heath, at the Bridgettine Convent on the way for an Old Rite Mass at 2.30pm. This year, Father Neil Brett will be the Celebrant. Pilgrims who don't want to walk 20 miles to Mass and then 7 more miles onto GKC's grave join





us at various points along the way. Many pilgrims, especially those with younger children tend to come for the Mass and then walk the last seven miles into Beaconsfield, which, as we are not on a tight schedule for arrival at Chesterton's grave is at a more relaxed pace than we go at in the morning. In the morning we are always trying to ensure that we arrive in time for Mass. We have had pilgrims as young as three or four walking part of the pilgrimage, as well as those well into their 80s. We have seen a number of people come on the pilgrimage hoping that members of their family will convert to the

Catholic faith. I'm pleased to say that we have had a number of positive results in this area. In fact, GK Chesterton is famous for converting people to the Catholic faith, see the book, 'My Name is Lazarus' for examples.

In a letter to the Catholic GK Chesterton Society, Bishop David Oakley, the new Bishop of Northampton said, "Please be assured of my support for the important work that you are engaged in. It is good that the Society is promoting the work of this important contributor to Catholic thinking in the twentieth century.

And of course, that you are engaged in the promotion of Chesterton's Cause. Please know of my prayers for the Society and all you are doing at this time.

The date of Saturday, 30th July 2022 is now firmly in the diary here, and I would be delighted to preach at the Mass."

For details of the Pilgrimage and for copies of the GK Chesterton Prayer see
www.catholicgkchestertonsociety.co.uk □

(All three pictures Copyright S. McCullough)

Easter Dawn Mass

Fr Gerard Quirke remembers the hardships of Covid lockdown when difficult decisions had to be made

Easter Sunday, 4th April 2021: more than three months into a strict Covid lockdown in Ireland, which had begun on St Stephen's Day 2020. Among other things, the celebration of public Mass was illegal. As a means of encouraging my parishioners on Achill Island, I had decided to offer a dawn Mass at an old Mass rock near Keem Bay, facing out into the wild Atlantic. A common feature in the rural Irish landscape, 'Mass rocks' were created during the penal times when priests continued to celebrate Mass for the people in secret outdoor locations, using large rocks as altars.

However, the planning was not without its obstacles. When word got out, there was concern that people might try to travel to the Mass – illegally, as our ancestors had done in penal times. Although there was support from many quarters, especially my parishioners, others were not as encouraging. A number of my brothers in the diocesan clergy felt I was asking for trouble. I also received several visits from the

Gardaí (the Irish police). Asking what law I would be breaking, all I was told was that "there was none, it just would not look good". Hardly a convincing reason not to offer the Easter dawn Mass! To apply pressure, I was told that there would be a squad car which would prevent any access to the Mass rock. I myself even had doubts that the Mass could go ahead anyway, given the gales and driving rain that were forecast for that morning.

Nonetheless, I decided to go ahead with the planning. As I was getting

ready for the Easter Vigil, news reached my ears that the local police station had been struck by lightning the night of Good Friday, causing €3,000 worth of damage. Was this a sign? I do not know. However, the next day I woke up to one of the calmest mornings I had experienced on the island. Where was the threatened police presence? Nowhere to be seen! Accompanied only by the gentle lapping of waves and the bleating of Achill sheep, I offered the Easter Mass unhindered.

□

(Picture Fr G. Quirke)



Falling in Eucharistic Love

Sophia Institute Press presents its brand-new edition of Fr Armand de Malleray's book Ego Eimi—It is I

Belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist has declined drastically over the past fifty years. For the love of the Lord and the good of souls, how can we help reverse this trend?

Whether you are a believer or struggling, this book will help you develop a personal relationship with Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. In these pages, Fr. Armand de Malleray looks afresh at traditional Church teaching on the Holy Eucharist. He demonstrates that it is implemented with precision, strength, and beauty in the

time-tested Traditional Latin Mass missal.

In his engaging and accessible style, Fr. de Malleray explains the significance of each precious detail of the traditional Eucharistic liturgy, from the opening words of the Preparatory Prayers, “Judge me, O God,” to the importance of punctuating the words of Consecration, to the meaning of the celebrant’s genuflections before and after the elevation.

Fr. de Malleray explains essential doctrines such as transubstantiation, the concomitant presence of Christ’s Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, and the nature of the Eucharistic fragments. He also describes in moving detail Our Lady’s role in drawing us closer to her Eucharistic Son.

Replete with real-life stories, modern-day references, and cultural and historical reflections, *Ego Eimi* will inspire you to worship the Real Presence as an ardent believer, orient you to the

invisible realities occurring, and foster a greater love for our Eucharistic Lord in your heart. You will learn to treasure the Holy Eucharist more deeply through Scripture, Church teachings, and philosophical reasoning. Experience the Eucharistic Fire: embrace the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and adore God’s gratuitous love.

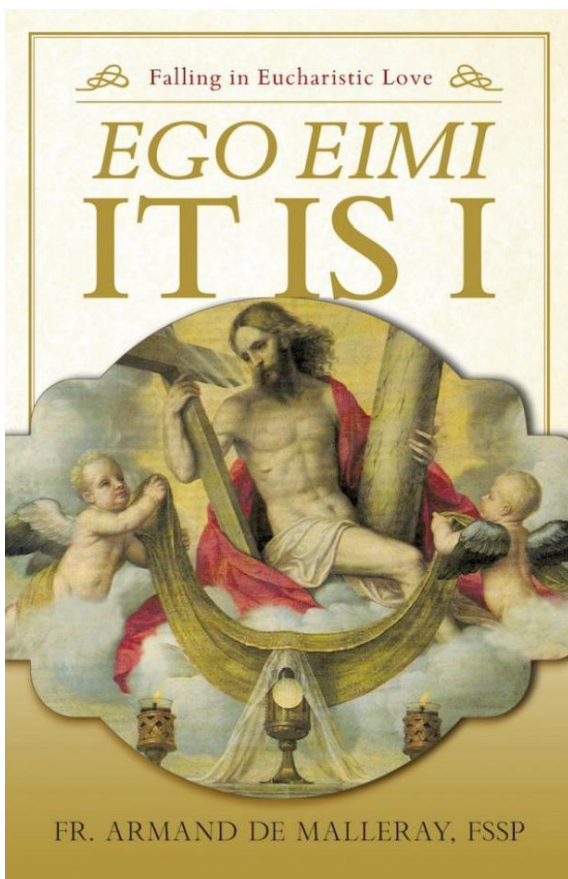
Guided by the Church in which our Eucharistic Saviour dwells, you will also learn how belief in the Real Presence:

- Surpasses other forms of God’s presence
- Is the central mystery and core tenet of our Faith
- Manifests God’s divine mercy as reflected in the prayers of the traditional Mass
- Trains us in contrition and prepares us for a favourable eternal judgment
- Deepens our love so that each time we worship will feel like our first, last, and only Mass

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Unexpected 19th Century Catholic Revival

By Laura Calhan, an undergraduate student in History from the University of Edinburgh

A Catholic revival would hardly be the first thing to come to anyone's mind in a discussion concerning the European landscape between 1850 and 1900. More obvious issues are the maturing of an industrial society, the birth of new state systems and Bismarckian political strategy, or perhaps even the irrevocably impactful works of Marx or Darwin. A revitalisation of Catholic culture might in fact seem completely at odds with the aggressively modern theme that binds these images together. It certainly appeared so to some bemused contemporaries – and yet it is this strange pattern of contrast that renders such a revival so striking upon discovery.

The situation at the beginning of our period was without a doubt far from favourable. For example, assessing the spiritual state of their parishioners in 1848, the *curés* of Marseille came to similar, damning conclusions. One priest complained that the members of his congregation seemed “to fulfil their religious duties more through habit than from conviction”, whilst another noted their ignorance of religious principles, lamenting their contentment with even a flaccid following of liturgical rites. Tepidity, they saw, was a critical weakness, and one that could easily be turned into hostility within the contentious political environment of the time. After all, they were writing sixty years after the beginning of the French Revolution: what was known

as the process of dechristianisation had been going on for decades.

The Catholic Church of the 1800s stood against the current of liberalism, secularism, and increasingly, nationalism. Its stance, however, was not to conform to these movements, but rather to further entrench itself in its traditions and doctrines. In the *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864, Pius IX affirmed that it was impossible for any pope to “reconcile himself with progress, liberalism, and with modern civilisation”.

The combination of these issues is one that we might feel somewhat familiar with in the present day. Although history never repeats itself exactly, it does appear to unfold in recurring patterns: analysing how such problems were dealt with by our predecessors can therefore be an illuminating exercise.

The approach taken by the Church from the mid-nineteenth century through to the early twentieth was firmly rooted in a revitalisation of the past. The spirit of popular piety was reignited through a

return to the vibrancy of Medieval forms of devotion. Pilgrimages, for instance, which had formed a key part of the expression of lay piety in the Middle Ages, saw an unprecedented increase in popularity and practicality through the advent of steam engines and ships. Those that led to Lourdes illustrated the strengths of this approach especially well, as the shrine attracted pilgrims with miracles through which even the most hopeless of medical cases were healed. Although the Church showed itself to be averse to modern



politics, it made effective use of these new technologies of transportation to fight against secular ideas and in fact, quite paradoxically, to give hope to the laity in areas where science could not.

In a similar manner the Church harnessed the press, which expanded massively after 1848, to further its aims. Pius IX emphasised the importance of actively engaging in public discourse: he went so far as to issue a *motu proprio* urging his bishops to use it to defend the truth, and he became the first pope to have his addresses amended for publication. Catholic journals proliferated across Europe, and whilst on the one hand these did enflame adversities in the same way as internet and media debates do today, they played a fundamental role in strengthening faith and

demonstrating its continued relevance in the modern world.

Another core aspect of the Catholic revival was its focus on education. In Belgium alone, a bishops' campaign in the 1880s raised enough support from the laity for nearly 3400 schools to have been set up within a five-year timeframe.ⁱ Schools for the wealthy and the deprived flourished across Europe. Colleges run by religious prepared young men for positions of political and military influence, and establishments for the poor were only one example of the engagement of devout and energetic women in social action during this period.

By the turn of the century, popular engagement in the life of the Church had prospered and religious vocations were blossoming. Although the stance of the papacy in

1864 had reminded many of King Canute attempting to turn back the tide, the success of this Catholic revival serves as a reminder that the teachings and traditions of the Church are at the heart of its endurance. □

(Picture: *The Blessing of the wheat in Artois*, by Jules Breton, 1857, Musée d'Orsay: Public Domain; © Photo RMN - Hervé Lewandowski.)

ⁱ Els Witte, 'The battle for monasteries, cemeteries and schools: Belgium' in *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120-1.



The *Diary of a Country Priest* Today

By Fr Patrick O'Donohue, FSSP

Have you ever doubted God's presence with you in times of trouble? When you ponder the increasingly secularised society surrounding you are you ever tempted to wonder, 'Why doesn't God intervene?' Georges Bernanos' 1936 novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest* tracks the struggle of a nameless young cleric in poor health while serving in a rural French parish where people have abandoned the faith. The parish is filled with troubled souls. It is a grim and joyless place, peppered with unloving and seemingly unlovable characters. Even the brats in his catechism class taunt him with an irreverence that is beyond their age: "Children are children—but, oh, why should these little girls be so full of enmity?" The malice and gossiping of the villagers increase as the priest's stomach cancer grows worse. This bleak plot is accentuated even more starkly in the crisp black and white film version made in 1951. What the priest confides in his diary is like an echo of the *Reproaches* in Holy Week which express the remonstrance of Christ with His people: "My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!"

Meanwhile his brother priests' preoccupation with tackling social justice problems is to the detriment of their priestly mission. They are not interested in his plans for renewal and prefer instead to address in a "masterly fashion" the problem of village banks and co-

operative farming: "Not one of those men would ever suppose that the Church could be in danger, no matter for what reason.... Money matters seem to have a strange fascination for them." Since the main character's only care is for souls, it leaves him feeling useless: "Somehow I can never quite believe that God will really employ me—to the utmost: make complete use of me as He does of the others."

This creeping secularisation within the Church leads to a despondency that pervades his life and that of his superiors: "a shameful form of despair in some way like the fermentation of a Christianity in decay.... Our superiors are no longer official optimists. Those who still profess the rule of hope, teach optimism only by force of habit, without believing in what they say." Nevertheless, the young priest is faithful in the face of his flock's faithlessness and in the face of a friend from seminary abandoning his vocation and the promises he made on his ordination day.

Then at the end of the novel, when the priest is on his deathbed, he makes the sudden realisation, through what must be a divine



illumination, that "Grace is ... everywhere." God has all along been at his side and has operated through his priesthood which seemed so unimpressive and insignificant in worldly eyes. This casts the entirety of the diary in a new light. Even though he had felt "that my life, all the sap of my life will flow to waste in sand", it is now like a revelation that his sacrifices were not in vain. All along they had been accepted by God and grafted into the mysterious redemptive suffering of the Tree of Life, and in this way, they became channels of grace into the world. Nothing was wasted despite the outward futility and obscurity of his pastoral efforts and prayers. In this final moment of light, he is made to



understand that God was not indifferent, for even a single moment, to his plight or his diary's *cri de cœur*. Though He seemed absent, God's divine grace never ceased operating in the priest's soul.

What was the country priest's greatest fault? It was his lack of trust in God accomplishing His holy will in the face of hopelessness and apparent human failure, just as Our Lord saved the world in the apparent defeat of the Cross. 3pm on Good

Friday looked like an unmitigated disaster on the surface, but it was at that precise moment that He triumphed over sin and death. The world's metrics of success are not God's. Christ Crucified turned the horror of the Cross inside out and made it the way to eternal life.

All this invites the reader to look at the mundane complications of life from the perspective of eternity. The slings and arrows which the priest character endured had been a hidden

source of power and light, not in and of themselves, but through the mystery of the Cross which God has ordained for those who love Him. This is the marvel of the grace hidden behind the trials and tribulations of life. A salutary thought for our times. □

(Pictures: Georges Bernanos, Wikipedia Public Domain. French village, by Sigmund/Unsplash.)

What was the trade of Saint Joseph?

By Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP

Was St Joseph a carpenter? A carpenter is a worker who builds or repairs wooden objects and structures. According to the Greek Gospels St Joseph was a *tekton* indeed, as attested by St Matthew 13:55, and St Mark 6:3. The word *tekton* means a builder in general and a carpenter in particular. Little over a century after Our Lord, around 155-160, St Justin Martyr states in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 88, “When Jesus came to the Jordan, He was considered to be the son of Joseph the carpenter; and He appeared without comeliness, as the Scriptures declared; and He was deemed a carpenter (for He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and yokes; by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an active life).” Tradition has accepted this interpretation, which is followed in the English Bible.

In French the word *carpenter* (*charpentier*) excludes joinery. It restricts the woodwork to the wooden structure supporting the roof of a house. A carpenter in this sense is the man who assembles wooden beams and timber frame on the top of the walls to support the roof of the house. This fits very well with the main function of St Joseph as the putative Father of Jesus. The only true father of Jesus is God the Creator, whom *Genesis* describes as “roofing” the earth with a solid dome called the *firmament* or vault. Thus, since Jesus as God is the Son

of the divine Father who roofed the earth, as man Jesus is the foster-son of a roof-builder. The word *firmament* in *Genesis* reads *stereóma*, meaning *a solid body, a support, strength, firmness*. In the New Testament, the same word *stereóma* expresses the moral quality of steadfastness: “in spirit I am with you; rejoicing, and beholding [...] the *steadfastness* of your faith which is in Christ” (Col 2:5).

The role of Saint Joseph as head of the Holy Family surely implied moral *strength*. St Joseph is therefore a carpenter in a spiritual sense as well, securing and joining together the virtues which build the

moral edifice of the soul of the just man. Just like the young Jesus would have learned from St Joseph his trade as an apprentice carpenter, from St Joseph as well Jesus would have learned and developed human virtues as St Luke affirms: “And so Jesus advanced in wisdom with the years” (2:52).

The professional handling of wood beams further points to the core mission of the Lord Jesus. He came to die on the Cross for the salvation of mankind. But what is a cross, essentially, but two wood beams assembled? No doubt, when Our Lord would have first seen the cross prepared for Him in the courtyard of Pontius Pilate, after his scourging,



He would have accurately reckoned the weight and solidity of these two pieces of wood. For at least two decades in Nazareth, as the apprentice of St Joseph, He would have carried, adjusted, and assembled similar pieces of wood. With a professional eye then, Jesus the foster-son of the carpenter St Joseph, would have walked towards the wooden beams and would have thought, more ardently even than his apostle St Andrew did when led to the place of martyrdom, “O good Cross, so long desired and now set up for my longing soul, I confident and rejoicing come to you; exultingly...”

Since the cross is the instrument of our redemption, so the cross is to the salvation of mankind what roof beams are to a household: without them there is no shelter, no home, no safety, no peace. The cross is the new *firmament* set by the Redeemer upon our vulnerable heads, to protect us from the assaults of evil. God the Eternal Father had sent His beloved Son Jesus Christ to perform this supernatural carpentry work: that is, the salvation of the world through the Cross. Similarly, St Joseph the carpenter had trained his adopted son Jesus to handle wood beams. As Man, Jesus was most adequately prepared for handling the



Cross. But unlike Isaac carrying the wood of his sacrifice unaware of its purpose, while only his father Abraham knew it; on the contrary Jesus knew why He was training as a carpenter, while St Joseph didn't know that his foster-son would die on a cross.

May St Joseph teach us to perform every work as a supernatural sharing

in the Redemption of the world wrought by his foster-son, his God and ours, the Saviour Jesus. □

(Picture left: *Christ in St Joseph's workshop*, by Matteo Pagano, MNBA, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Public domain/Wikipedia. Above: James Owen/Unsplash)

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Contact FSSP ENGLAND:
Priestly Fraternity of St Peter,
St Mary's Priory, Smith Street, Warrington
WA1 2NS Cheshire, England
01925 635 664 warrington@fssp.org
fssp.org.uk

(Picture: Geography class at St Mary's Shrine, Warrington.)

