

St Joseph: A Quiet Strength

Trish Ennis is a lawyer. She also writes on faith, conscience and the spiritual life.



Web Gallery of Art, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

St Joseph with the Infant Jesus by Guido Reni, Hermitage Museum, c. 1635

We often overlook the quiet and supportive people in our lives, taking their steadfastness for granted. Joseph appears only briefly in the Gospels, and he never directly speaks a word in them. Everything we know about his courage and faith comes from what he does, not what he says.

He is a man who faced a situation that could have brought shame – discovering that Mary was with child before they lived together – and yet

he simply got on with life. He trusted God, protected his family and went about his work with quiet dignity. That, to me, is a kind of heroism. We don't always notice it, but it's the kind that shapes the world.

When Joseph first hears about Mary's pregnancy, he doesn't understand what God is doing. He feels disappointment and uncertainty, the kind we all know when life veers off the path we imagined. Yet his first in-

stinct is mercy. He plans to step away quietly, not wanting to expose her to public shame. Even before an angel appears, Joseph is already choosing compassion and kindness over pride and self-protection. It's a small, hidden holiness that honours another person's dignity even in painful circumstances.

Then God speaks through the angel, telling him not to be afraid, that Mary's child is from the Holy Spirit and that he is to name the child Jesus. Joseph doesn't argue or demand explanations; he simply obeys. The Gospel says, 'He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him' (Mt 1:24). That quiet obedience is not weakness. It's courage, entrusting God with his reputation, his future and the life he had imagined for himself.

Joseph takes Mary into his home, protects her on the journey to Bethlehem, finds shelter when there is none and rises in the night to take his family to Egypt when danger threatens. His life becomes a pattern of steady care and quiet courage. Faith often looks like this: caring for family, keeping promises, forgiving when it's hard and continuing to pray when answers are slow to come. Joseph reminds us that this hidden, ordinary faithfulness is real holiness.

Joseph also represents a kind of man we may overlook: the ones who don't seek recognition but who quietly hold things together, the fathers, husbands, brothers and friends who work hard, carry responsibility and try each day to do right by the people entrusted to them. Their lives may not look heroic, but without them families and communities would quietly unravel. Joseph dignifies that hidden

faithfulness.

Tradition calls him a carpenter, though the Greek word *tekton* can mean builder or craftsman. His work shaped him, teaching patience, attention and steadiness of heart. It's a reminder that holiness doesn't only happen in dramatic moments. Every act done with care and love can be part of God's plan. Grace moves in kitchens, workshops and waiting rooms just as much as it does in churches.

Later, Joseph disappears from the gospel story. Tradition holds that he died before Jesus began his public ministry, likely with Mary and Jesus by his side. He has long been invoked as the patron of a happy death. But his patronage reaches further than that: fathers, families, workers, travellers, anyone facing uncertainty. His silence is not emptiness; it's the space where God can speak.

Pope Francis said of Joseph, 'I have a great love for St Joseph, because he is a man of silence and strength. On my table, I have an image of St Joseph sleeping. Even when he is asleep, he is taking care of the Church! Yes! We know that he can do that. So when I have a problem, a difficulty, I write a little note and I put it underneath St Joseph, so that he can dream about it! In other words, I tell him: "Pray for this problem!"'

Joseph's story reassures us that holiness often looks ordinary. It shows itself in small acts of kindness and service to others, steady faithfulness and courage lived quietly each day. When life challenges us, Joseph reminds us that true strength lies in those who act with care, keep their promises and carry the weight of love without seeking applause.