
Saint Joseph: A Saint for the Red-Blooded Man

**An Evensong meditation by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Feast of St. Joseph**

Is there a place for the red-blooded man in the church? I do not know exactly what I mean by a “red-blooded man,” but I suppose it has something to do with the ordinary, sports-playing, loves-to-hunt-and-fish, likes-to-tinker-in-the-garage, doesn’t-use-a-lot-of-words, husband-of-one-wife type. The red-blooded man likes energy, but he is not obnoxious.

The red-blooded man will tend to do the right thing, but he will not talk about it. He was –and maybe still is– the ancient hunter, fending on his own, dealing with the raw stuff of the world, and then husbanding crops and a household. “Red-blooded man” is not such a bad term; a red blood cell transports oxygen and carbon dioxide to body tissue. Red blood is good, hearty stuff.

From time to time, one person or another will lament that this type of person does not seem to play a large role in churches. He is out fishing or playing golf on Sunday. He is not the type to sit quietly upright at a bookish Bible study. He wonders why church is so fussy and gossipy. He wonders why the clergy dress up so. He wants more action in his life than what church seems to offer.

Every generation or so, a new style of Christianity will seek out to win the red-blooded man. In the nineteenth century, for instance, American churches began to stress the values of athleticism and physical strength; some folks called this tradition “muscular Christianity.” It was enormously successful. Perhaps the best representative of that era was the YMCA, the Young Men’s Christian Association, “a pioneer in fostering athletic recreation and defending the values of ‘play’ in the face of much puritanical criticism” (see Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, page 742).

Actually, the Roman Catholic Church was also gradually giving more attention to the ordinary, working man. They did so by honoring one of our lesser observed saints, Saint Joseph. Yes, that St. Joseph: Mary’s husband. Only a few Roman Catholic communities stressed the feast for St. Joseph until the last century (though the Dominicans and the Franciscans added him to their calendars in the fourteenth century). It was Pius IX in 1870 who declared Joseph “Patron of the Universal Church” and encouraged his patronage. Joseph’s name was added to the Roman Canon of the Mass in 1962, when John XXIII was pope.

Today, if we are looking for that saint who represents the red-blooded male, Joseph is our man. He plays a prominent role in Matthew’s birth account (when the angel appears to him, not to Mary, in a dream); but not much is said about him elsewhere. He was a carpenter, liked to work with his hands, didn’t say much, stood by his woman, did the right thing, took care of his young family when they had to flee to a foreign country, raised a special child, and probably raised several special children. He didn’t hog the spotlight, and ancient stories say he died a peaceful death. That’s it.

Now, Joseph is the patron saint of all sorts of people: fathers of families, manual workers (especially carpenters, obviously), laborers, house hunters, and all who desire a holy death. And there is definitely a place in every church for Joseph. There are even Josephs who are priests. Josephs build the Habitat for Humanity house (obviously!) Josephs are fantastic at running capital campaigns and building campaigns. Josephs like to get their hands dirty. They do not like to waste time, unless it’s with people they enjoy. There can even be some women who are Josephs, can’t there?

His feast day was this week: March 19. I know that another saint, Saint Patrick, got most of the attention this

past week, especially in bars on March 17. But on Thursday, March 19, we greeted a regular day that belonged to Saint Joseph. March 19 is a regular work day again, like most of our days. Honor the ordinary, hard-working guy on that day, and today. Remember Joseph, and welcome him into your community of faith.

AMEN.

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*