

The Carmelite News

MARCH 1995



A jolly St. Joseph makes a change!

FORTHCOMING NOVENAS

To St. Patrick	17th - 25th March
To St. Joseph	19th - 27th March
For Easter	16th - 24th April
To St. Jude	15th - 23rd May

Hello, my friend. I'm sorry this letter is a little bit late, but it is all my fault in getting it written. The Good Book tells me that a ready smile turns away wrath, so let me offer you a joke to start us off.

A century ago a Jesuit missionary returned to the South Sea island he had evangelised as a young man. He was horrified to discover that the whole tribe had reverted to cannibalism. Depressed and alarmed he saw one of his most promising converts who had been an altar boy. He took him by the shoulders and looked him sternly in the eyes: "Surely," he said. "Surely you didn't take part in the feast, my son?" The man was horrified: "What, eat human flesh?" The priest breathed a sigh of relief. Here at least was one person who had kept the faith. And the man went on: "How could I possibly do that, Father? It was on a Friday!"

Because I am a bit late, you will see that the Novenas for St. Patrick and for St. Joseph overlap, but I'm sure you won't mind saying two prayers for a few days, or at least I hope you won't, or I'm in trouble with my boss.

AN EASTER THOUGHT

Some years ago in the grainlands of America there was introduced a famous strain of wheat called *Marquis*. Millions of bushels of wheat were produced year after

year. It was claimed that it was the most prolific edible grain available and the lives of millions depended on it. Yet 40 years before you could have put all the *Marquis* wheat in existence into one seed packet. Such is the power of life that from a small experimental crop such a new and invaluable resource could grow so quickly.

Jesus himself said, "Except a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds." And in this lies the message of Easter - He died, and rose again, showing the power of God to give new life. As a result millions of people found faith and hope and meaning in life. Celebrate Easter, and let that power into your life again. So that you may have life and have it more abundantly. Alleluia!

ST. JOSEPH

When Pope John XXIII took possession of the basilica of St. Peter shortly after his election he was taken on a detailed guided tour of the church. He was shown all the altars and reliquaries enshrined under them, all the pictures and statues of popes and saints, even the excavations of the ancient Christian cemetery under the foundations.

And when it was all over, he thanked the guides for their service but said he would like to ask a question. Thinking he was going to ask about some detail of the place they said

"Ask us anything, anything at all."
"Well," the pope said, "I thought St. Joseph was one of the principal patrons of the Church." "Yes, he certainly is," said the officials. "Then it is strange that here in the principal basilica of the Church there is no picture, statue or whatever of St. Joseph." And after a little thought of all the nooks and crannies they might have missed, they had to agree that there wasn't. "Leave it with us," they said, "We will get one made immediately."

Now, I don't know if you knew but all the pictures over the altars in St. Peter's (except one) are actually mosaic copies of the original canvases that once hung there. They were made over the years to replace the originals which were being damaged by the smoke from the candles on the altars. Some of them are very good mosaics, reproducing in coloured stone all the shades of colour in the original paintings. Some are less good, but most are acceptable. This time the administrators of the basilica let themselves down. They commissioned a mosaic straight into stone, without a painting to guide them, and it is pretty awful. The colours are bright and crude, and the scene insipid. Someone said it would have been more at home on the lid of a box of chocolates than in St. Peter's, and I have to agree. St. Joseph has not been served well by artists.

There are two related reasons for this failure: firstly scripture tells us little about him, and secondly human imagination has not been slow to build on these very slender foundations



To admit that you were wrong yesterday is to acknowledge that you are wiser today than you were then.

and freely to fill in the gaps with guesswork and devotional zeal. The few biblical particulars give the impression of a just, kind, serious and level-headed man, prompt in action but self effacing. This was not enough for the apocryphal writers, several of whose wilder fictions were concerned with St. Joseph. It was due to them that Joseph has been depicted by artists as an old man.

Because he only figures at the beginning of the Gospels (his betrothal to Mary, the nativity and the flight into Egypt) it was imagined that he must have died. Following this line of argument the influential but non-canonical book called the **Protevangelium of (St.) James** makes him an old man at the time of his betrothal to Mary, even though the duties implied in the protection of the Holy Family and in the up-bringing of Jesus was unlikely. His liturgical cult was slow to develop. The first hints of it come in another apocryphal book, **The History of Joseph the Carpenter**, which seems to have been written in Egypt during the 5th or 6th centuries AD. Slightly later "martyrologies" - which are actually just lists of saints - (Rheinau, 8th century, and early 9th century from Ireland - Oengus and Tallaght) show entries for St. Joseph, and the calendars of Winchester, Worcester, Ely and other places do so before AD 1100. So it seems that the islands on the edge of Europe lead the way, despite European saints like St. Bridget of Sweden and Bernardino of Sienna who had devotions to St. Joseph. Their devotion seems to have been a reaction to the medieval mystery plays which usually played St. Joseph as a figure of fun to provide comic relief against the very serious story of

Salvation. The Carmelite breviary of 1480 and the Roman breviary of 1482 have feasts for St. Joseph, and the Roman Missal did by 1505. But the diffusion and popularity of this feast at a high rank in the Roman Church was due in great part to St. Teresa of Avila (officially Teresa of Jesus now), who dedicated the mother-house of her reformed nuns

to St. Joseph and frequently recommended devotion to him in her writings. He was declared Patron of the Universal Church by Pius IX in 1870, and his name was added to the Canon (Eucharistic Prayer) of the Mass in 1962 by Pope John XXIII, which is roughly where we came in.

Naturally he is the patron of fathers, of carpenters, of manual workers generally (hence the feast of Joseph the Worker on 1st May), of procurators and of bursars (all who run the finances of a household). Less obviously he is the patron of those desiring a holy death. This devotion, which became widespread in the 17th century, is based on the account of his death in The History of Joseph the Carpenter. This document makes Joseph fearful of death and filled with self-reproach. He is comforted by the words of Jesus and Mary, who promise protection and life to all who do

good in the name of St. Joseph. Hence many churches, hospitals, and religious congregations are dedicated to St. Joseph. The popularity of the name is high among Catholics. In the New World, Montreal is a centre of devotion to St. Joseph.

The Collect of the current Missal and Breviary runs:

AT THE NAME OF JESUS

JESUS is the FOUNTAIN

"And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of your house; and you give them to drink of the river of your delights, for with you is the fountain of life.

(Psalm 36:7b-9)

His blood cleanses us, and enables us to drink of the life of God? JESUS SAYS . . . Are you thirsty for more of God? Let me satisfy you. As you fill yourself with me, I will flow out of your innermost being to bless others with never-ending rivers of living water.

Almighty God, at the beginning of our salvation, when Mary conceived your son and brought him forth into the world, you placed them under Joseph's watchful care.

May his prayer continue to help your Church be an equally faithful guardian of your mysteries, and a sign of Christ to mankind.

Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Perhaps the old prayer may be more useful in making a Novena:

Let the merits of the husband of your all-holy Mother, Lord, assist us:

through his intercession may we be granted

that which no effort of our own could win for us.

Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

For those who want something a bit more expansive and imaginative let me recommend the little booklet entitled "St. Joseph in the Gospels" by Sister Francis McAndrew,

published by CTS in 1993 which offers an interesting set of meditations and prayers firmly based in scripture.

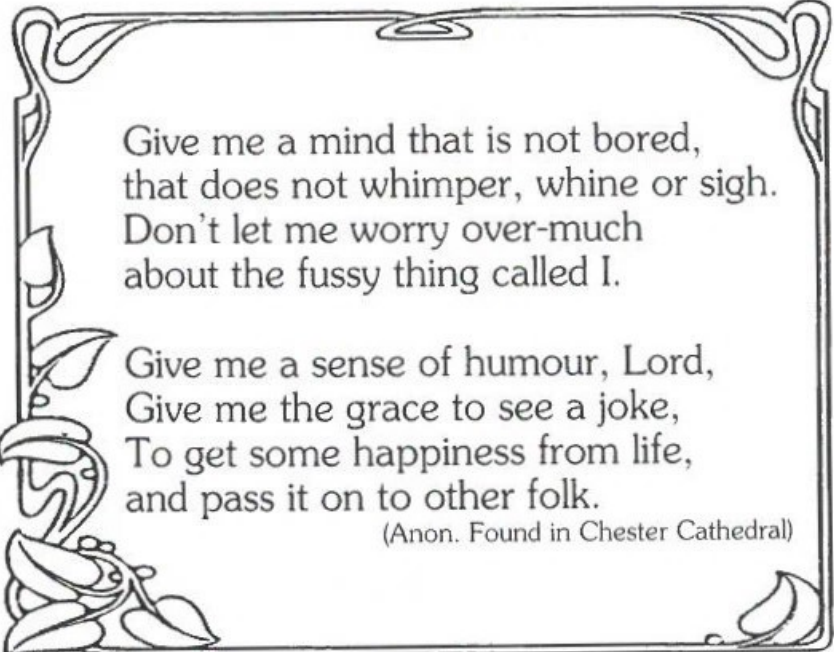
HAPPY DEATHS?

Anyone who has suffered heavy metal music or the like blasting through the night, and pounding feet in the flat above will see the attraction of the this advert:

Mayhew & Sons
Funeral Directors
Parties catered for

A WORD TO THE WISE

The Old Testament is not too well known to most Catholics. People sometimes think it is all gloomy prophets denouncing sins, and lots of Laws that seem very peculiar to us today, and lots of stories about long ago kings such like anachronisms. Now I would be the first to admit that those parts of the Old Testament are a bit hard going, requiring much study to make sense of them today. However, they are not the whole story. There is another group of books in the O.T. that does not get much publicity, but which I think have much to say to modern people without too much brain-work required to understand them. These books are called the **Wisdom** books. By name they are the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, (also called in some modern translations Qoheleth), Job, Sirach (also called, confusingly, Ecclesiasticus), Wisdom. (Sometimes in the group are also the Song of Songs, and some of the Psalms.)



Give me a mind that is not bored,
that does not whimper, whine or sigh.
Don't let me worry over-much
about the fussy thing called I.

Give me a sense of humour, Lord,
Give me the grace to see a joke,
To get some happiness from life,
and pass it on to other folk.

(Anon. Found in Chester Cathedral)

These books represent the Israelite equivalent of literature found in all civilizations around the world. They represent the fruits of meditation on life that enable you to say how to live the Good Life and they are referred to as the Wisdom Tradition. (This tradition continues into the New Testament, but is not collected into special books. It occurs chiefly in the Prologue to St. John's Gospel, the Beatitudes, The letters of St. Paul that speak of Christ as the "image" of the invisible God, and the Letter of James.)

The authors of the Wisdom books of the O.T. formed a distinct class of scholars alongside the priests and the prophets (see Jeremiah 18:18) and it was their task to translate the general moral principles of the Law and the Prophets into practical rules for everyday life. In Israel's early days the wise man or woman was simply one who showed special shrewdness or quick-wittedness or perspicacity. Thus the wise woman of Tekoa (2Sam. 14:2-20) and the wise woman of Abel (2Sam. 20:16-22). Solomon's wisdom is shown by his knowing what to do when two mothers claim

the same child (1Kg. 3:16-28) and by having ready answers for the Queen of Sheba (1Kg. 10:1-7). Joseph is accounted wise in Egypt because he can interpret pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41:39). The wisdom writers were not theologians, but they took the faith for granted and concerned themselves with daily behaviour.

It is not surprising that the great age of wisdom came after the Exile in Babylon. It was a time for reflection: the firebrands of prophecy had long been grey embers.

The wisdom writers had no doubt that to serve God one must live a good life, and the good man did what was right while the fool did what was wrong. It is the ordinary, unspectacular virtues that are the concern of the wisdom writers: kindness, diligence, honesty, chastity and sobriety are the warp and woof of character be it of saint or sinner. A good place to begin looking at the Wisdom literature is the Book of Proverbs - but take it in small doses. Proverbs is strong on detail but weak on plot. You will recognise many of the proverbs because they have come to be part of the English language: "A soft answer turneth away wrath", "Hope deferred makes the heart sick". Others ought to be: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." (How we are condemned in one short sentence!) So get the good book off the shelf and make a start on the Wisdom Literature: I can promise you that the time spent will be well rewarded. One of the good things is that it teaches you to think for yourself because often you will find apparently contradictory proverbs, and you have to work out which applies in which

situation. Constantly they offer choices, calls to take sides for good or for ill.

He who has a generous eye will be blessed,

for he gives of his bread to the poor. (Prov. 22:9)

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor

will also cry himself and not be heard. (Prov. 21:13)

There is much food for thought in such sayings, and you don't have to be clever to see how they work out in our own lives. For the value of seeking and finding this wisdom read Job, chapter 28.

SEEN AND HEARD

I am never sure about the modern hymns we hear in church today. They seem a bit short on theology to me. How about this line:

*Drop kick me, Jesus,
through the goalposts of life.*

Perhaps this may be expected to lead to "instant conversion"?

Be good till next time, and then some.

God bless,

Our Lady guard,
all saints pray
for you and for me.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "David J. Fox" with "O. Carm." written in smaller letters below it.

David J. Fox, O. Carm