

THE ESPOUSALS OF JOSEPH AND MARY

“Whoever intends to become a member of this Institute of the Stigmatine Fathers and Brothers, must always bear in mind the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph and learn from them: love of poverty, dedication to prayer and meditation, readiness to be obedient on all circumstances even if they are difficult or contrary to human nature. Love of God and a committed striving for His glory. Love of one’s neighbour whose spiritual welfare he will care to achieve with fervent zeal even unto death.”¹

In this passage of Fr G.M Marani – from his Compendium on the Constitutions – we find some practical themes on the Bertonian devotion towards the Holy Spouses: especially the imitation of their virtues, which should be a characteristic in a religious family striving to live authentically the ideal of community and mission. We can say that in fact the devotion to the Holy Spouses always has been seen in this light, by the community of the Stimmate under the guidance of the Founder: as a determining factor for the growth of the religious spirit, of the fraternal communion, of the apostolic zeal.

Then we can understand why a very relevant role was attributed to the devotion of the Holy Spouses also in the pedagogic field, for the formation of novices and professed students.²

“All possible effort must be exercised so that our young candidates may be enamoured with spiritual things and devotion to Our Lady and St. Joseph, by encouraging them to imitate their examples as the opportunities arise. Above all they are to be exhorted to fulfil all tasks, even the small ones, with great diligence, especially when they are not seen by anybody. As a consequence, this diligent way of acting in view of pleasing God, and of imitating Our Lady and St. Joseph who reached great perfection in their most hidden life, will become almost as second nature to them.”³

There are many accounts by the Stigmatines, along their bicentenary history, which express filial veneration to Mary and Joseph as Spouses, united in the bond of matrimony.

Mary and Joseph become for us a reference point not only for the personal “perfection” – as St. Gaspar calls it – but also for the common strive to become “family”, to become community, to become Brothers who share joy and pain daily.

Let us consider for a moment about Mary and Joseph as spouses.

In the Marriage, the two become one: which means that, in order to understand them better, we should not keep this couple apart from each other. Each of them has personal qualities – and they are exceptionally great –: but, in the unity of the Marriage, they experience unique and complementary aspects as respect to each one. As a married couple, they take part in the primeval vocation of humanity to be at the image and likeness of God. In many occasions, St. John Paul II and Pope Francis

¹ J. M. Marani Compendium of the Constitutions, CS II, p. 165.

² Ignazio Bonetti, *Alla scuola di Dio con S. Gaspare Bertononi – Note di spiritualità*, 1989, p. 108.

³ J. M. Marani, Rules, CS II, p. 256.

said: the likeness to God needs the communion of humanity and the unity of man and woman, and it gets a specific sign in the espoused union.

And Jesus, member of this unity, is not just a third one, but totally takes part of the no-longer separable unity of this family.

The Feast of the Holy Spouses should be for us Stigmatines the celebration of a communion with Jesus and among us: where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, he is present. And when we welcome Christ, he makes us his Body.

As many already said – and better! – Mary and Joseph as Spouses, i.e. together, and Jesus with them, are symbol, example, incentive and support of the Stigmatine religious life. And they are so, even for many other people who approach the spirituality given us by St. Gaspar Bertoni.

Today the Stigmatines, involved in the pastoral ministry, show to the faithful the Holy Spouses as model of marital harmony and of dedication to a holistic – i.e. human and spiritual – growth of their children.

Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, pray for us!