

## THE CHIVALRY OF ST. JOSEPH

Today more than ever, the Church needs the noble strength and practical wisdom of  
the patron saint of fathers

By Tracey Rowland  
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*Annunciation Triptych (ca. 1427–32) by the workshop  
of Robert Campin/The Cloisters Collection, 1956*  
*Annunciation Triptych (ca. 1427–32) by the  
workshop of Robert Campin/The Cloisters Collection,  
1956*

In the third panel of the Mérode altarpiece, a 15th-century triptych also known as *Annunciation with St. Joseph and Donors*, St. Joseph is busy building a mousetrap. This is probably a reference to St. Augustine's metaphor of the cross as a mousetrap set for the devil. St. Joseph is therefore doing his bit as guardian of the nascent Church by helping to construct a trap for the devil.

In this and many other depictions of the domestic life of the Holy Family, St. Joseph is portrayed as a man who "sorts" problems in a practical way. He finds solutions by being both brave and prudent. He had to preserve Our Lady's dignity when she was found to be with child before their marriage. He had to get his family to safety when Herod's henchmen slaughtered the Holy Innocents. Like the medieval Christian knights who later made arduous journeys to protect pilgrims and sacred places in the Holy Land, St. Joseph had to face danger and deal with it.

"In St. Joseph, justice is combined with tenderness, strength and decisiveness with flexibility and openness to the will of God," said the late Catholic writer Stratford Caldecott in a 2002 address. "He is an adventurer, too, like the 'questing knights' of later legend."

Quoting the French poet Charles Péguy, Caldecott added: "There is only one adventurer in the world, as can be seen very clearly in the modern world – the father of a family. Even the most desperate adventurers are nothing compared to him."

Father Jean-Jacques Olier, who founded the Society of St. Sulpice in the 17th century, argued that St. Joseph is unique among the saints because of the mysterious bond that exists between him and God the Father. A multitude of saints have represented Christ in this or that aspect of their heroism, but only St. Joseph, among all the saints, has a special vocation to represent God the Father.

Today, St. Joseph is the patron saint of fathers – both fathers by nature and spiritual fathers, of whom priests are the obvious example. He is also the patron saint of those who grow up without a father, often as a consequence of the devil's war against the family – a war in which fatherhood is under systematic attack.

If you want to attack the Logos, you need to attack fatherhood. If you want to attack the priesthood, you need to attack fatherhood. If you want to attack the family, you need to attack fatherhood. The powers of darkness have not yet abandoned their project to cripple humanity, their defeat at Calvary notwithstanding. The destruction of the family is their endgame strategy, as Sister Lucia of Fátima testified on the basis of the private revelations she received.

The deepest meaning of chivalry is to use one's strength to defend the faith and the vulnerable, and to do so without any regard for one's own self-interest. Nobility exists precisely in self-surrender, which is clearly exemplified in St. Joseph, who was noble by disposition as well as by birth.

St. Bernardino of Siena commented, "St. Matthew establishes the direct line of all the fathers from Abraham to the spouse of the Virgin, clearly demonstrating that all patriarchal, royal and princely dignity came together in him."

All chivalrous men, all children without fathers, all priests on the front lines of a cosmic battle, all women who wish they had a knight to protect them – all would do well to pray to St. Joseph as St. Teresa of Ávila did:

*O holy protector of the Holy Family, protect us children of the Lord Jesus Christ; keep far from us the errors and evils which corrupt the world; assist us from Heaven in our struggles against the powers of darkness. And as you once protected the Divine Child from the cruel edict of Herod, now defend the Church and keep it safe from all dangers and threats.*

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