



JUST Love

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ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF SAINT ELIZABETH

Saint Joseph, Advocate of the Poor and Marginalized

by Fr. Terrence J. Moran

On December 8, 2020 Pope Francis called for a Year of Saint Joseph. Joseph is a most popular saint – patron of the universal Church, of a happy death, of workers, of countless countries and is even subject to the indignity of having his statue planted upside down in real estate deals. Might Joseph also have something to say to us who strive to promote peace, justice, and the integrity of creation?

We are accustomed to calling Joseph a carpenter and have seen countless images of him in his shop at a work bench covered with wood shavings. However the Greek word that the gospel of Matthew uses to refer to his profession is *tektōn*. Its meaning is closer to craftsman or even handyman than to carpenter. In a small village like Nazareth there would have not been enough work on a daily basis for Joseph. So he was likely a day laborer, travelling from worksite to worksite. It's not impossible that he worked at the construction of the splendid city of Sefhoris, only about five miles from Nazareth. There he would have seen the miserably poor slaving to build palaces for the obscenely wealthy. Joseph's travels would have enabled him to witness rather widely the conditions of his people. No doubt his heart widened as he listened to the stories of people crushed under the burden of debt and taxes, of the precarious life of the peasant farmer, of lives spent under the shadow of the Roman Empire which used crucifixion as an instrument to terrorize its colonial subjects. And even today, people find in Joseph someone uniquely sympathetic to the needs of those made poor and marginal.

Among the most poor and marginal in the world were and are women and girls. Joseph was extraordinary in his patriarchal culture in the way he took seriously the word and spiritual experience of a poor and marginal woman – his wife Mary. The law told him there were only two possibilities in the face of the news of her extraordinary pregnancy – to denounce her publicly

or to divorce her privately. Either would have meant disaster for the life of the young girl Mary. Joseph had the courage to listen to a dream – a marginalized part of himself – that enables him to believe that God is doing something completely new in his life and the life of Mary.

Devotion to Joseph does not mean trusting his ability to sell a house if you bury his statue in the yard. It means to listen attentively and widely to the stories of those made poor and marginal and to allow our hearts to widen in compassion. It means paying attention to movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. It means entertaining the possibility that God is showing us a new way forward, not in bankers or corporation presidents, but in a young woman like Greta Thunberg. True devotion to Joseph means compassionate listening, imaginative dreaming, and deep commitment to the new thing God is doing in the world.

St. Joseph...

Who believed in Mary's word, make us a church that listens to women's experience and their testimony of the action of the Spirit in their lives;

Who raised your son to be a peacemaker, make us a church of nonviolent resistance to war;

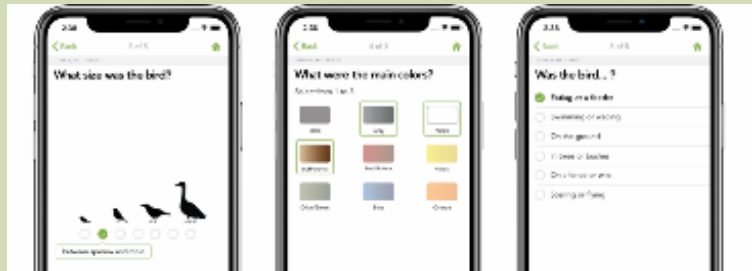
Who knew the joys of craftsmanship and the fatigue of work, make us a church that teaches the dignity of labor and that joins in the workers' struggle for just wages and decent conditions.

Who listened to the voice of a dream, make us a church of deep contemplation, cautious of superficial answers, open to God's surprises;

Who was a refugee, make us a church that is a home to the wanderer, shelter to the terrorized, haven to those in flight from violence and war;

Who was a member of a most unconventional family, make us a church of welcome to all families in all their wonderful diversity;

Who taught Jesus the wisdom in the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, make us willing disciples of Earth's wisdom and loving kin of all creation.



Pope Francis reminds us (*Laudato Si'*, 77), “Every creature is the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world.” Many people don’t know their human neighbors, much less the other-kind neighbors with whom they share land, water, and air. As spring approaches and bird song again fills the dawn hours consider leaning about your bird neighbors by using the free **Merlin Bird ID** ap. By answering three questions you can identify the bird species you observe. It’s also possible to make an identification from a photo. Check it out <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org>

For the Love of Justice; Seven sacred works for young activists Lydia Wylie-Kellermann

If you are an older activist – share this article with a young person. Discuss it with them. How can you encourage them in their struggle for a just and peaceful world?

Know your history: Walk it. Breathe it. Build deep relationships with the elders in your circles. Listen to their stories. Let the listening and retelling become resistance. Remember your ancestors. Say their names out loud and often. Give thanks that you are not alone, You are not creating this movement out of nothing. It’s been done over and over again, Know it. Honor it. Your work is simply to offer new gifts to old work.

Place matters: Ground yourself somewhere. Get your hands in the dirt. Plant asparagus and fruit trees. Put down roots, Let the land tell you her story. Weave together the struggle and history of the people and land on which you stand. Know your neighbors. Create local community. Be present to the here and now while working for the future. Build community.

Honor your anger: Undo the learning that anger is bad. Read the news and accept your desire to scream. Look around you-weep. Feel it. Express it. Move it into your feet and hands and voice. Let your anger at injustice drive you toward the love and urgency of justice.

Understand your privilege: Acknowledge and leave behind feelings of arrogance and entitlement – the curses of this generation. Know your privilege. Be mindful of it at every meeting, in every action, in every community. Work against it. Surrender it when you can. Surround yourself with people who don’t look or think or act like you. Let others take the lead. Stand in solidarity. Listen always. Learn stories by heart. Don’t be reduced to your privileges or oppressions. Don’t label one another – know one another. Be people first. Remember Martin Luther King’s triplet of evil -racism, militarism, and materialism. The struggles against these three are all the same struggle.

Nourish your spirit: Read the sacred and ancient texts of



communities from long ago. Dance in the rain. Climb trees. Wonder at the stars. Laugh until your stomach hurts. Be still and silent. Honor the darkness. Let voices be raised in harmony. Nourish your spirit alone. Nourish it in community. Taste your tears. Feel joy in your gut. Live deeply. Celebrate resurrection in its many forms.

Refuse to give up: Fight with everything you’ve got. Stand at this critical historical moment. Injustice is coming from every direction. Let go of the obsession with perfection or results. Do what feels right in your bones and don’t worry about what will be the most effective. Take serious risks. What are you willing to die for? Put your body somewhere...anywhere. Find hope even when there is no logic.

Give gratitude: In everything, give thanks. Thanks be for those who have gone before, who have sung the songs, who have given their lives. For the cloud of witnesses who watch over you and now and who prayed for you before you were born. Offer gratitude that you are not alone in this struggle. There are many resisting and creating in infinite ways and in every direction. Give thanks for this beautiful earth that gives you life, feeds your spirit and hold a history and a future beyond you. And give thanks that although “the arc of history is long; it bends toward justice.” We see it and know that it is so.

Lydia Wylie-Kellermann is a writer, editor, activist, and mother. She is the editor of *Geez* magazine, which explores the intersection of activism, art, and spirit, and is the cofounder and curator of the Radical Discipleship blog. She lives with her partner and two boys in Detroit, Michigan.

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