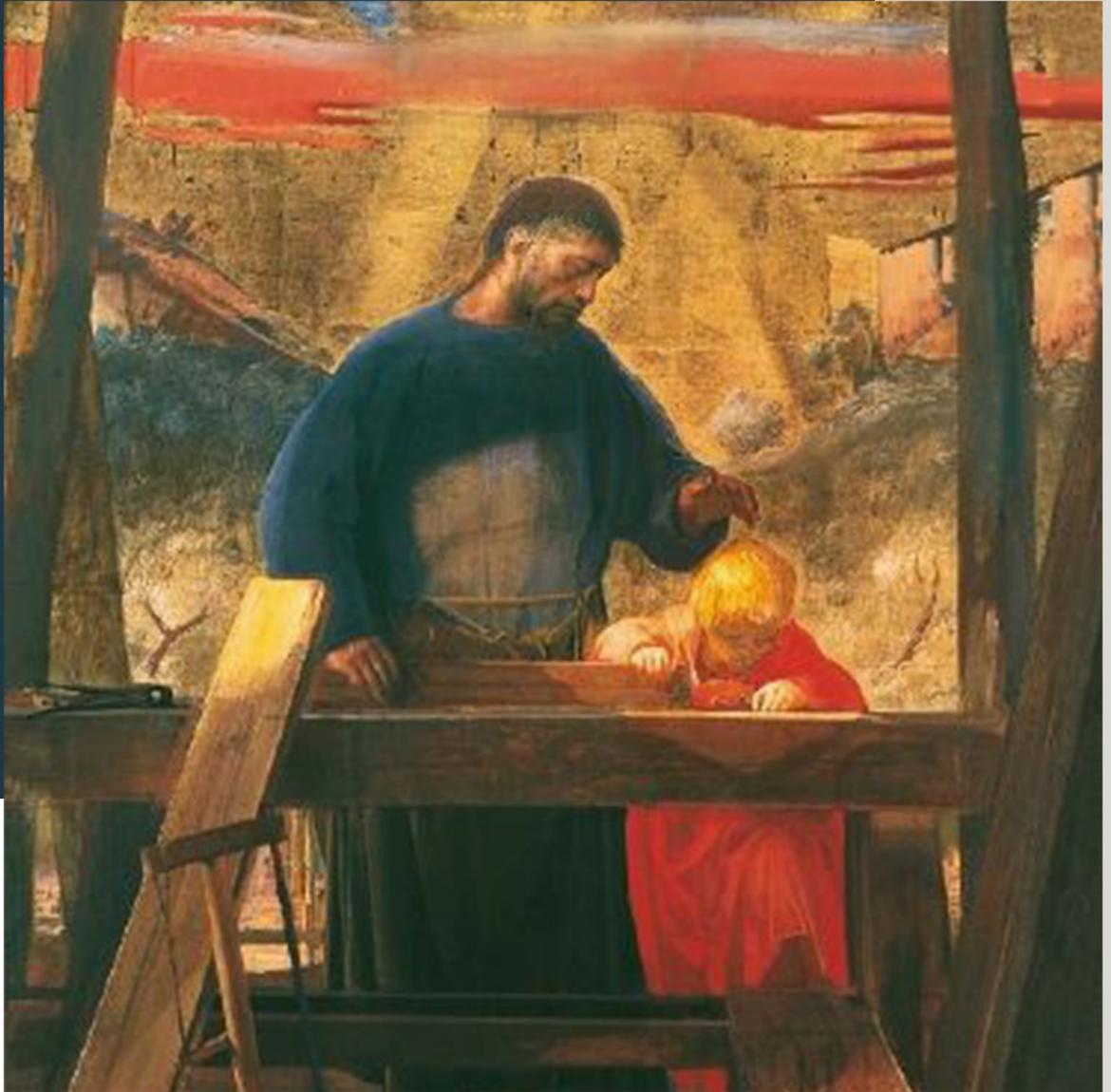




**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**



Saint Joseph, Model of the Educator

Jean-Louis SCHNEIDER, fsc

SAINT JOSEPH, MODEL OF THE EDUCATOR

Our Common Rules (1718) designate St. Joseph as the “patron and protector of the community” (RC 30,19,10). It’s a day of celebration which implies a day off for the schoolchildren. St. Joseph, as we know, was designated by our Founder as “patron and protector of our community” (RC 39,19,10), and many of our educational institutions throughout the world have placed themselves under his name.

For the feast of St. Joseph, a certain number of texts are to be taken into account in order to measure the importance of this devotion in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, as well as its place in the life of the students¹. Moreover, in *Lasallian Theme III*, Brothers Michael Buttigieg and Léon Lauraire have written an article entitled “Devotion to Saint Joseph” (TL 98), which can be referred to with interest.

Finally, Pope Francis has just given us an Apostolic Letter entitled *Patris corde*, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. In this letter, St. Joseph is presented successively as: “A beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father, a father in the shadows”, but he is not called “Father educator”. Yet it is under the traits of the educator that Saint John Baptist de La Salle presents Saint Joseph in “Meditation 110, for the feast of Saint Joseph”.

It should also be noted that St. Joseph is also very present in the *Meditation 6 for Sundays*, for the Sunday between the Circumcision and the Epiphany. This Meditation comments on the Gospel of the day (Mt. 12:13-15), insisting on the obedience and the taste for retreat of St. Joseph; obedience and retreat being attitudes that the Brothers should taste and practice; but there is no question of education.

Meditation 110. For the feast day of Saint Joseph **1st POINT**

Because Saint Joseph was made responsible by God for the care and external guidance of Jesus Christ, it was important that he have the qualities and virtues necessary to fulfill worthily so holy and exalted a ministry. The Gospel tells us about three, all very fitting for the responsibility entrusted to him: *he was just; he was very submissive to God’s orders², and he had a very special solicitude for the education and the protection of Jesus Christ³.*

The first quality that the Gospel attributes to Saint Joseph is that he is just. This is also the main virtue he needed in order to be able to provide guidance to Jesus Christ. Because our Lord is God and holy, it would not be fitting that the person in charge of guiding him not be holy and just before God. It is even entirely proper that Saint Joseph be, after the Most Blessed Virgin, one of the holiest people to be found in the world at that time, so that he might have some conformity with Jesus Christ, who was entrusted to him and confided to his care.

1 See the list at the end of this presentation.

2 Mt.1:19.

3 Cf. Mt.1:20-24.

The Gospel also says of him that he is just before God, that is, holy in every way. We even have grounds to believe that Saint Joseph, thanks to a special privilege, was entirely exempted from sin.

You also have been charged, very much like Saint Joseph, with a holy work, a work that is very similar to his and requires that your piety and your virtue be more than ordinary. Take Saint Joseph as your model, for he is your patron, and strive to be worthy of your ministry and to excel in virtue by following the example of this great saint.

2nd POINT

The second virtue that the Gospel points out to us in Saint Joseph is his holy and entire submission to God's orders. God instructed him by an angel to remain with the Blessed Virgin when he was questioning whether he ought to leave her; at once he banished the thought of leaving her from his mind. After the birth of the Child Jesus, God warned Joseph during the night to take the Child to Egypt to save him from the persecution of Herod; *at once he arose and departed to bring the Child and his virgin mother to Egypt⁴* . After Herod's death, God told Joseph to come back to Judea, and he returned there without delay⁵ . Oh, how admirable is this prompt and simple obedience in this great saint! He does not hesitate a single instant to carry out what God desires of him!

Do you have as much at heart to do God's will as this saint did? If you want God to bestow many graces on you, both for you and for the Christian education of the children you have to protect and to guide, you must imitate this saint in his love for and in his fidelity to obedience, which of all the virtues is the one most appropriate for you in your state and in your work and the one that will bring you the most grace.

3rd POINT

The Gospel also makes us admire in Saint Joseph the care he has for the holy Child Jesus, *which he showed in the promptness with which he took him to Egypt⁶* , when God told him to do so; in the precaution he took, on leaving Egypt, *not to take him to Judea, for fear of Archelaus, who then occupied the throne of his father, Herod⁷* , and in the sorrow he felt at having lost Jesus when they were returning from Jerusalem, as the Most Blessed Virgin testified in these words: *Your father and I have been searching for you in great sorrow and in great affliction⁸* . Two things inspired the great solicitude that Saint Joseph felt for Jesus: the commission that the eternal Father had given him and the tender love Saint Joseph had for Jesus.

You must have a similarly great attention and affection for preserving or procuring the innocence of the children entrusted to your guidance and for keeping them away from whatever might interfere with their education or prevent them from acquiring piety, just as Saint Joseph had for all that could contribute to the welfare of the Child Jesus. For you have been made responsible for these children, just as Saint Joseph was made responsible by God for the Savior of the world. This is also the first care

4 Mt.2:13,14

5 Mt.2:19-21

6 Mt.2:14

7 Mt.2:22

8 Lk.2:48

you ought to have in your work if you wish to imitate Saint Joseph, who had nothing more at heart than to provide for the needs of the Child Jesus.

Ministry of Saint Joseph, Teachers' Ministry: From the Child Jesus to the children of artisans and the poor

In a very classical way, this Meditation is divided into three points. As in most of the *Meditations for the Feasts of the Saints* by John Baptist de La Salle, a quality, a virtue or a particular trait of the life of the saint is evoked first, then developed and applied to the life of the Brother.

In many Meditations, one of the points may include an application to the ministerial commitment of the Brother; more rarely, but that is the case here, each of the three points includes this application to the ministry. We also notice in this Meditation 110 that the virtues evoked for Saint Joseph are presented with the help of Gospel citations, which is normal since the life of Joseph is known only through the Gospel, and in this case, it is the Gospel according to Saint Matthew that has priority.

The first word of MF 110, is “Saint Joseph”, and the last word is “Child-Jesus”; the word “Gospel” is present in all the points, and even sometimes redoubled: MF 110,1,1; 110,1,2; 110,2,1; 110,3,1. Thus, physically, the Gospel frames or enshrines this Meditation 110, it is a gospel narrative that concerns both the Holy Family and the relationship between God, the Masters and the children. The Founder invites us to a “sharing of the Gospel”. In telling the story of God, of St. Joseph, of the Child Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin, he also tells the story of God, of the teachers, of the children, our story.

His account is populated with the characters of the Gospel: God, Joseph, the Child Jesus, Mary, but also the angel of God, Herod, Archelaus. John Baptist de La Salle keeps strictly to the Gospel account; only once, in the first point, does he extrapolate this account by recalling a belief of his time: “There is even reason to believe that Saint Joseph, by a particular privilege, was completely free of sin”.

From one point to another, Monsieur de La Salle establishes a constant parallel between Saint Joseph and the Teachers, between the Child Jesus and the children entrusted to us, God being at the origin of the requests addressed to Joseph as to the Teachers. Throughout Meditation 110, we find the usual vocabulary of John Baptist de La Salle, applied sometimes to Saint Joseph, sometimes to the Masters: care, guidance, those entrusted to you, those whose care and guidance you have, ministry, employment, state. The same vocabulary as in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, or in Meditations 33, 56, 133 and many others.

The end of the first point of MF 110, which applies Joseph's qualities to educators, is deeply Lasallian:

You also have been charged, very much like Saint Joseph, with a holy work, a work that is very similar to his and requires that your piety and your virtue be more than ordinary. Take Saint Joseph as your model, for he is your patron, and strive to be worthy of your ministry and to excel

in virtue by following the example of this great saint.

The word “virtue” also refers to the 12 virtues of a good Teacher⁹: “Gravity, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, restraint, gentleness, zeal, vigilance, piety, generosity”.

In Meditation 39 (For the vigil of the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ), John Baptist de La Salle passes from “virtue” of MF 110,1, to “holiness”: “You ought to be holy in no ordinary degree,” (MF 39,2,2).

We can still identify, as a frequent educational attitude in Monsieur de La Salle: the role of example. The Teacher imitates Saint Joseph, the pupil imitates the Teacher. Attention to the virtues is also a possible path which is proposed in the *Explanation of the Method of Prayer*.

The second point evokes Joseph’s “vocation”: “God instructed him by an angel to remain with the Blessed Virgin when he was questioning whether he ought to leave her; at once he banished the thought of leaving her from his mind.”. This point underlines Joseph’s obedience to God. We know that obedience¹⁰ was one of the virtues necessary for the Brothers, and John Baptist de La Salle reminds them of this frequently and forcefully: Meditations 7 to 15, the *Common Rules*, Chapter 20, the vow of obedience to the Superior and to the body of the Society, frequent reminders in the Letters addressed to the Brothers, etc.

In the second point of Meditation 110, the application to the Teachers appears at the end of the point:

Do you have as much at heart to do God’s will as this saint did? If you want God to bestow many graces on you, both for you and for the Christian education of the children you have to protect and to guide, you must imitate this saint in his love for and in his fidelity to obedience, which of all the virtues is the one most appropriate for you in your state and in your work and the one that will bring you the most grace.

In reading this passage, one realizes that it is not so much a question of obedience of the “religious” type as of the search for God’s will, of the way of listening to it, of the will to put it into practice for those who are entrusted to us. For John Baptist de La Salle, this will of God for young people is revealed in prayer, as the Meditation for Retreat 198 reminds us in the first point:

Because Guardian Angels are highly enlightened and know the good as it is, through them God makes known this good and the secrets of his holy will to those whom he has predestined to be his adopted children in Jesus Christ and by whom he has called them to be his heirs¹¹. By the light these angels share with those who are called, they teach them the good that must be practiced and what they must do to become heirs.

This is symbolized by the ladder that Jacob saw in a dream when he was going to Mesopotamia. Angels were going up and coming down the ladder. They were going up to God to make known to him the needs of those for whom he made them responsible and to receive his orders for them. They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding the will of God concerning their salvation.

9 See in Lasallian Themes III, Theme No. 98, “Virtues of the Teacher,” which presents the “Twelve Virtues of the Teacher

10 See in Lasallian Themes III, theme #87, “Obedience”.

11 Ep.1:5, 9, 11

You must do the same thing for the children entrusted to your care. It is your duty to go up to God every day in prayer to learn from him all that you must teach the children and then to come down to them by accommodating them at their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated for them to you in your prayer, as well as in Holy Scripture, which contains the truths of religion and the maxims of the holy Gospel.

We see here that the Guardian Angels and St. Joseph have the same function for Lasallian educators.

This second point of MF 110 stages the departure of the Holy Family to Egypt, their stay in that country and then their return to Palestine. Joseph's readiness to obey God's orders is highlighted. In Meditation 6, for the Sunday between the Circumcision and the Epiphany, which comments on the Gospel of that day, Matthew 2, 13-15, the same one that is taken up again in the second point of MF 110, the development proposed by Monsieur de La Salle turns around the meaning of the retreat that the Brother should have after having accomplished his ministry in the school. The community is this retreat which he must quickly join, avoiding the contamination of the world. It is only in the third point of MD 6, again starting from the Gospel of Matthew, that obedience is mentioned, this being centered on community life and regularity, and not on the ministry.

The third point of MF 110 makes us contemplate the life of the Holy Family, with the role of Joseph, after the return from Egypt: the choice to go and live in Nazareth and the coming to Jerusalem with the disappearance of Jesus when he was 12 years old. It will be noticed that from the end of the first paragraph of this point, it is a question of responsibility and "tender love" of Joseph towards Jesus. This theme is found in the application passage to the Brothers:

You must have a similarly great attention and affection for preserving or procuring the innocence of the children entrusted to your guidance and for keeping them away from whatever might interfere with their education or prevent them from acquiring piety, just as Saint Joseph had for all that could contribute to the welfare of the Child Jesus. For you have been made responsible for these children, just as Saint Joseph was made responsible by God for the Savior of the world. This is also the first care you ought to have in your work if you wish to imitate Saint Joseph, who had nothing more at heart than to provide for the needs of the Child Jesus.

Opening our Lasallian horizons

Many of the Meditations as well as certain passages of the Common Rules, in the chapters on the School, echo this third point of MF 110:

The needs of children are presented and developed in Meditation 37 (For Rogation Monday):

Such is the plight of those whom Providence calls upon you to teach and whom you must train in piety. God has led them to you; God makes you responsible for their salvation; God gives you the responsibility to provide for all their spiritual needs. To do this ought to be your constant effort. (MD 37,1,2).

The children who come to you either have not had any instruction and have been taught the wrong things or, if they have received some good lessons, bad companions or their own bad habits have prevented them from benefiting. God sends them to you, so that you can give them

the Christian spirit and educate them according to the maxims of the Gospel. (MD 37,2,1).

The three loaves that you ought to ask for, continues the same Father, represent knowledge of the three Divine Persons. If you obtain this from God, you will have what will satisfy those who come to you in their need for instruction. (MD 37,2,2).

This God of goodness places them in your hands and undertakes to give them everything you ask of him for them: piety, self-control, reserve, purity, and the avoidance of companions who could be dangerous to them. (MD 37,3,2).

Meditation 33 (For the second Sunday after Easter), is entirely focused on the needs of children and the responses of the teachers, as is Meditation 56 (For the third Sunday after Pentecost).

Tenderness

They will love all their pupils tenderly; they will not, however, be familiar with any of them, and they will never give them anything through particular friendship but only as a reward or an encouragement. (RC 7,13).

They will manifest equal affection for all pupils, even more for the poor than for the rich, because they are much more entrusted by their Institute with the former than with the latter.. (RC 7,14).

Do you have these sentiments of charity and tenderness toward the poor children whom you have to educate? Do you take advantage of their affection for you to lead them to God? If you have for them the firmness of a father to restrain and to withdraw them from misbehavior, you must also have for them the tenderness of a mother to draw them to you and to do for them all the good that depends on you. (MF 101,3,2, Saint Francis de Sales).

This saint is a great example of what you ought to do for the children God has entrusted to you. This queen made her primary work to do what is essential in your state. Consider this an honor for you, and regard the children whom God has entrusted to you as children of God. Have much more solicitude for their education and instruction than you would have for the children of a king. (MF 133,2,2, St. Margaret of Scotland).

You are by your state obliged to instruct poor children. Do you love them? Do you honor Jesus Christ in their person? With this in mind, do you prefer them to those who have a certain amount of material wealth? Do you have more concern for the former than for the latter? (MF 133,3,2, St. Margaret of Scotland).

And we must add the set of Meditations for the Time of Retreat, which revolve around the educational relationship, and therefore the needs of children and young people and how to relate to them in order to lead them to God.

Evening prayer at school (1738)

Let us pray to Saint Joseph, our Patron and Protector.

Glorious St. Joseph, who was chosen by the eternal Father to be his substitute on earth in the mystery of the Incarnation; by the Son to be his foster father during his mortal life; and by the Holy Spirit to be the faithful spouse and guardian of the purity of the most holy Virgin: obtain for us from the Father perfect submission to his holy will, from the Son interior application to his divine mysteries, and from the Holy Spirit purity of heart and body, and complete fidelity to his graces.

QUESTIONS

What virtues need to be developed in your educational context? Why or why not? What values do they express?

Today, what is God asking of you in the education of those entrusted to you? What step(s) is He asking you to take?

For you, what is the significance of the meditation on St. Joseph: to provide for the needs of the children entrusted to your care “on behalf of God”?

TEXTS to be taken into account on Saint Joseph

MD 6. For the Sunday between the Circumcision and the Epiphany

MF 110, for the feast of Saint Joseph

The Common Rules, RC 10.8; 27.22; 28.6; 29.10; 30.16; 30.19.10; 30.19.15; 30.20.43; 30.21.18; 30.21.12; 30.20.18; 31.7; 32.17.

The Duties of a Christian (the cult): DC 44, 18. Instruction 18. For the feast of St. Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin.

The Exercises of piety that are done every day in the Christian Schools, E 10,4 Litanies of Saint Joseph.

The collection of various small treatises (R 10,2,7).

Litanies of Saint Joseph (1951).

Lasallian Theme III. Devotion to Saint Joseph.

Patris corde

Saint-Denis, March 29, 2021

Brother Jean-Louis SCHNEIDER



La  Salle