St. Joseph Lived His Fatherhood Fully, Says Pope

Notes Saint's Fidelity and Total Dedication

YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon, MARCH 18, 2009 (Zenit).

Although St. Joseph wasn't the biological father of Jesus, he lived his fatherhood fully in the sense that he was at the service of Christ and his human development, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope said this today upon presiding over a celebration of vespers with local clergy and with representatives of ecclesial movements and of other Christian confessions at the Basilica of Mary Queen of the Apostles.

The Pontiff set out to reflect on the figure of St. Joseph, whose feast day the Church celebrates on the 19th of March. St. Joseph is the patron saint of the Pope, who was born Joseph Ratzinger, and the patron of the universal Church.

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Addressing those present, the Holy Father said a "meditation on the human and spiritual journey of Saint Joseph invites us to ponder his vocation in all its richness, and to see him as a constant model for all those who have devoted their lives to Christ in the priesthood, in the consecrated life or in the different forms of lay engagement."

St. Joseph, he said, "is not the biological father of Jesus, whose Father is God alone, and yet

he lives his fatherhood fully and completely."

"To be a father means above all to be at the service of life and growth," Benedict XVI added. "St. Joseph, in this sense, gave proof of great devotion. For the sake of Christ he experienced persecution, exile and the poverty which this entails. He had to settle far from his native town. His only reward was to be with Christ."

He continued: "When Mary received the visit of the angel at the Annunciation, she was already betrothed to Joseph. In addressing Mary personally, the Lord already closely associates Joseph to the mystery of the Incarnation.

"Joseph agreed to be part of the great events which God was beginning to bring about in the womb of his spouse. He took Mary into his home. He welcomed the mystery that was in Mary and the mystery that was Mary herself. He loved her with great respect, which is the mark of all authentic love."

Non-possessive love

"Joseph teaches us that it is possible to love without possessing," said the Holy Father. "In contemplating Joseph, all men and women can, by God's grace, come to experience healing from their emotional wounds, if only they embrace the plan that God has begun to bring about in those close to him, just as Joseph entered into the work of redemption through Mary and as a result of what God had already done in her."

"Joseph was caught up at every moment by the mystery of the Incarnation," reflected Benedict XVI. "Not only physically, but in his heart as well, Joseph reveals to us the secret of a humanity which dwells in the presence of mystery and is open to that mystery at every moment of everyday life.

"In Joseph, faith is not separated from action. His faith had a decisive effect on his actions. Paradoxically, it was by acting, by carrying out his responsibilities, that he stepped aside and left God free to act, placing no obstacles in his way. Joseph is a 'just man because his existence is 'ad-justed' to the word of God."

"The life of Saint Joseph, lived in obedience to God’s word, is an eloquent sign for all the disciples of Jesus who seek the unity of the Church," the Pope concluded. "His example helps us to understand that it is only by complete submission to the will of God that we become effective workers in the service of his plan to gather together all mankind into one family, one assembly, one *ecclesia*."