

St. Joseph Day Homily – March 19, 2009
Sister Barbara Kraemer

It is wonderful to celebrate this feast of St. Joseph with you here in St. Joseph Chapel—honoring St. Joseph, patron of the universal church, and a special patron of the School Sisters of St. Francis.

Recently our leadership teams from around the world met here at St. Joseph Center, and I asked two of the provincials: Who is St. Joseph for you? Sister Enelly Ortiz from Honduras said that St. Joseph is a protector—protector of the Holy Family and of our religious family. That is the picture of St. Joseph in today's Gospel—protector of Jesus and Mary when they had to flee their country and go as refugees to Egypt. Jesus and Mary could trust Joseph. They depended on him to take care of them.

Sister Marie Lourdes from India shared a story of the Indian Sisters' experience of St. Joseph. She was among the first group of 12 Indian women who, in the early 1960s, left their homeland to enter our congregation and receive their religious formation in Germany. Someone accompanied them to the airport in India to see them off, but they had to transfer planes in Rome. They could speak neither Italian nor English; they could not communicate with anyone at the Rome airport. A man appeared, and with sign language he helped with the review of their documents and saw that they got to the right terminal for the flight to Germany. When they were safely in the right place, the women looked around but could not find him.

Later, the sisters learned more about the beginnings of our congregation; they heard of many similar experiences that our foundresses had with St. Joseph. They realized that the man they met in the Rome airport must have been St. Joseph.

Yes, this experience was typical of the stories we sisters have heard about Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons and Sister Clara—our foundresses--and their unwavering trust in God and in the saints of God, especially in St. Joseph.

From the beginning our foundresses prayed with deep trust in St. Joseph's help as they looked for a place to found the community and a way to get there. Mother Alexia's prayer was: "Dear St. Joseph, take care of us. Go ahead of us to America and find a place for us."

Often St. Joseph helped them through others, like Father Gerard, who in a dream heard a man say to him: "I am St. Joseph. Tell the Sisters that I want them to be in Wisconsin. I have already made preparations for them and everything will be well."

"Years later when Mother Alexia would speak glowingly of St. Joseph she would tell of Father Gerard's experience. And when thinking of all that she and the others had gone through she would add wryly: '*Ja, ja, der heilige Joseph*. When he says that everything will go well he has in mind to say that it will be as it fared with him: out of the cross and suffering comes blessing.'" [*He Sent Two*]

Our first motherhouse building here was placed under the name and protection of St. Joseph. It burned to the ground in 1891. And when the workers were digging a new foundation in March 1892, they found "that the original four-story structure had been erected upon wooden supports. Mother Alexia had in mind this greater disaster, the possible collapse of the whole building, when she said of the fire, 'Saint Joseph has given me a memorandum on the last day of his month. And yet he meant well.'" [*He Sent Two*]

Father Mike Bertram, our celebrant, is a Capuchin of St. Joseph Province. Their province was established in the Midwest in the same year that St. Joseph was named the patron of the universal church.

As members of the universal church we recognize St. Joseph as patron of all of us, and we trust him to be our protector and guide as he was for Jesus and Mary. At the same time St. Joseph is a model for who we should be for others.

From the founding as a congregation to this day, we School Sisters have trusted in Joseph for guidance and help. But even more, Joseph was and is a model for our lives, inspiring us to be like him for others:

Mother Alexia guiding the community and seeing to its firm establishment in the late 19th century, even when she herself could not have known how things would turn out.

Five of our German sisters who left their homeland in 1931 right after they professed their first vows, young women traveling by ship across the world to an unknown land in order to help Honduran orphaned children. These young sisters needed to be guides and protectors for the young people who placed their trust in them.

Our sisters in the United States who went out to rural and urban parishes, to Indian reservations, and to segregated parishes in Chicago and the South to teach, and to bring the gift of art and music to children and families who trusted in them.

All of us who come to the aid of others, not seeking acknowledgement and sometimes not knowing how to help, but reaching out

with a phone call to an older homebound person;

with a healing hand and quiet presence for someone who is facing cancer surgery;

by tutoring or teaching English as a Second Language to a child or adult who needs help to learn;

by sitting with a person who doesn't know where to turn in this economy, perhaps the mother of a homeless family. She can trust that things will be better because you are there with her.

On this feast of St. Joseph, our patron, may our prayer be:

“St. Joseph, you are the one who can help.”

We place our trust in you. Take care of us.

We, in turn, will take care of others.