September reflections for the Year of St. Joseph
Tutor of Christ—Joseph and Catechesis

The humility of Joseph:
A lesson for parents and teachers

It is a truth universally acknowledged that teaching is not an easy profession. When someone asks me what I do for a living, and I respond, “I teach high school,” their reaction is usually one of sympathy or gratitude that they chose a different career path. I often hear: “Good for you, but I could never be a teacher!” Perhaps it’s true that some people just aren’t cut out to be teachers, but even the most experienced teachers at times feel like they are attempting the impossible. It can often seem like we lack what we need—whether that is more time, resources, training or support—in order to do our job well and to meet the needs of our students. After all, we are only imperfect human beings, and our abilities, energy and patience have limits!

I imagine that this might be how St. Joseph felt when he began to recognize the magnitude of his call to be the foster-father of Jesus. It would be Joseph’s responsibility to teach the Christ Child to pray, to honor and obey his mother, to work with his hands and to follow his father’s example of tender love and virtue. It would be Joseph’s particular example of fatherhood that Jesus would follow in the future when he was teaching and training his own spiritual sons, the apostles. Because Joseph was such a humble man, so aware of his own human frailty, he must have wondered why God chose him for this role. weren’t there others who were more knowledgeable or qualified to the task? How could a simple carpenter from Bethlehem become the teacher of the Son of God?

The truth is, it is precisely the humility of Joseph that made him the ideal “Tutor of Christ.” Because Joseph was so aware of the inadequacy of his own abilities and gifts, he had no choice but to depend on God to make up for everything he lacked. He had to teach his Son, who also happened to be God’s Son, from a place of poverty. Joseph had to simply do his best and trust that God would make his sincere efforts bear fruit.

What an apt lesson for teachers—and for parents! The Church teaches that parents are the “primary educators” of their children, which means that fathers and mothers have the greatest responsibility for forming their children in the faith. (Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 2220) In fact, the catechism calls the family “the first school of the Christian life,” where children learn to care for others, to forgive offenses, and to pray. (ccc 1666) To many parents, creating such a “school” of faith in their homes might seem like a monumental task, but St. Joseph reminds us that God the Father entrusted even His own Son to human parents. Parents can be confident in the knowledge that since God chose them for this holy work, He will provide the means to educate their children in the faith, if parents can recognize their own incapacities and ask for His help.

If every parent is a spiritual teacher, one might conversely say that every teacher—especially every teacher in a Catholic school—is a spiritual parent, tasked with helping to form children in faith and virtue. As a consecrated virgin, I do not have children of my own, but it is my privilege to be a spiritual mother to my students. On days when I am worn out and feel keenly my own inadequacy, I remember that it greatly pleases God when I approach the work of teaching and spiritual motherhood from a place of poverty and humility. He has entrusted these children to me despite knowing what an imperfect person I am, so I know that He will provide me with everything I need to teach and to love them well. †
The School of Nazareth:
Christ’s docility to Joseph’s witness

My first day at LSU will forever remain in my memory—and my nightmares! Promise filled the day as I walked to my classroom. Hundreds sat in the auditorium; the room rattled with the click of calculators and the opening of notebooks. Physics 101 was under way.

Almost immediately, I felt left behind in the dust. The professor quickly scribbled some equations on the board and demanded answers. Before I could even grab my calculator, seemingly everyone in the class blurted out the solutions as if bored with the problems’ simplicity. What was apparently review material seemed like Greek to me. The class moved on with a fury. Clearly, I was no longer at my little Catholic school in Franklin. Needless to say, both the content of the class and my fellow students made me feel unworthy and inferior. What could I possibly offer to any study group? Was it time to throw in the towel? I was out of my league and I knew it.

If I felt this way in the face of college physics, imagine St. Joseph before the God of the universe. Indeed, without Joseph’s permission the Creator of all things announced to Mary that she would be the mother of Him through whom the cosmos was made. God invited Joseph to guard and raise this same child. Tutor of Christ? How can this be? How on earth could Joseph teach anything to the very Word of God through whom the cosmos was created? I think this is precisely the point. The wisdom of God came on earth not to learn from professors in ivory towers, but to encounter humanity in a family and a home. As head of the Holy Family, Joseph has a key role to play in this encounter of Christ.

Nazareth, too, is our school. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus.” (CCC 533) This school is not one of sophistication and complexity, but simplicity. Through his poverty and silence, Joseph teaches us that the mark of faith is not principally spoken or written words—but the possession of God shown in one’s entire way of life.

At LSU, I often met attitudes of over-confidence, self-motivation and competition. These attitudes make teaching and learning, giving and receiving extremely difficult—if not impossible! Christ’s attitude is different. He who possesses the perfection of all the virtues enjoys the fullness of docility, the virtue by which one is open to receive goodness and truth from outside oneself. In Joseph, Christ discovered the virtues of silence and diligence. In Joseph, Christ discovered poverty of spirit, joyful obedience and the outpouring of charity. In Joseph, Christ discovered anew the beauty of his creation. He discovered all of this, not through a blackboard, but through the holy witness of Joseph’s life.

Christ was docile to Joseph not because He had to but because He chose to. Christ, the only person to choose His parents, chooses Joseph not for his sophistication but for his beauty, his integrity and his complementarity to Our Lady. How fitting it is then that we should choose Joseph as our model in the faith as well.

REFLECT AND PARTICIPATE
As the Diocese of Lafayette celebrates the Year of St. Joseph, reflecting upon the virtues of adoration, obedience and service, several events have also been planned in which all are invited to actively participate. Events scheduled for September include:
• Sept. 1 (5:00 p.m.): Parish Mission, St. Joseph Church, Evangeline
• Sept. 3 (6:00 p.m.): West Deanery Celebration, St. Joseph Church, Rayne
Additional Information about the Year of St. Joseph may be found at diolaf.org/stjoseph.