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Reflects for us on St Joseph in Seven Colours



Unlike his Old Testament namesake, St Joseph probably didn't possess anything so flamboyant as an 'amazing technicolour dreamcoat', but as Patron of the whole Church, we look to him as an example of a bright spectrum of virtues. So if, in Heaven, he does inherit a 'coat of many colours', perhaps these are some of the threads from which it's woven...

PURPLE is the colour of royalty, which St Joseph wore because of his descent from King David. The purple of his coat was one of the most important gifts which he gave to Christ, who could then be called the 'Son of David' and the true King. Christ wore that purple robe on the day of His coronation by thorns, but His royal foster-father was His first model of servant-kingship. St Joseph, patron of leading by example, pray for us.

GREEN stands for the earth which provided the material of St Joseph's craft. Europeans found it easiest to conceive him as a woodworker, although the Greek word 'craftsman' would make stonemason a more likely profession. What matter? Did Joseph the Carpenter construct the wooden cradle which prefigured the wood of the Cross? Or was he the stonemason who formed the cornerstone which the builders rejected; the rock from which the living waters flow? Either way, Joseph was the artisan who taught the Lord God in His human form, to work again the materials of the Earth He created. St Joseph, steward of creation, pray for us.

RED stands for the example of St Joseph the Worker, who reveals the dignity of each person in the use of their God-given abilities, and of work itself, however menial, as a co-operation in God's work of creating and sustaining the world. In Genesis, Joseph was sold as a slave, but through his diligence, God was able to bring about unimaginable good. The daily labours of St Joseph are not recorded in Scripture, but we might imagine his quiet faithfulness in putting bread on the table for the Bread of Life. St Joseph, patron of 'average Joes', pray for us.

WHITE lilies are often given to St Joseph in art, representing his purity of heart and of body. In Genesis, Joseph was thrown into prison after refusing the advances of Potiphar's wife. When St Joseph took Mary as his wife, he was acting, as it were, on behalf of God the Father: giving her his protection, but preserving her as the Virgin Mother of Jesus. For many centuries, St Joseph was not such a prominent figure in the Church as he is today, but God, in providential timing, has brought him out of the shadows. So why now? Perhaps because God knew the war that was coming against marriage and the family, so He gave us a captain to turn to as an example and intercessor. St Joseph stands as patron of families, a father figure for a fatherless generation, one who embodies every virtue of masculinity. St Joseph, tower of strength and self-sacrificing love, pray for us.



SILVER for the moonlight which outlined St Joseph as he slept, though his heart was awake and listening. Like his predecessor, he was a dreamer, but a dreamer with his feet on the ground, with the practical wisdom to intuit the meaning of his dream and know how to act. In Genesis, Joseph's dream revealed his future honour, with his brothers bowing down to him, but first his faith had to be tried: he was carried off to Egypt, stripped of everything; only then did another dream reveal how to bring all Egypt, and his own family, through the time of drought. In the Gospel, St Joseph's dream showed him the honour of being husband to the Mother of God; but first he had to suffer, to leave everything behind and flee into Egypt, in poverty, until the right time to return was revealed. Thus he saved his family, and became the saviour of the Saviour of the world! St Joseph, patron of dreamers and doers, refugees and rescuers, and of obedience to vocation, pray for us.

GOLD was the grain which Joseph stored up in Pharaoh's Egypt, and which sustained the surrounding nations through famine. Gold, too, the grain which was milled into bread for Christ's first Eucharist, the Bread of Life which sustains us still. St Joseph, patron of feeding the world, pray for us. Gold also must be the glory which now surrounds this most humble of men, and greatest of saints after his bride, Our Lady. But as he slips quietly out of the Biblical narrative, we assume that Joseph had died by the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and therefore that he would have experienced one more colour...

BLACK of Sheol, the shadowed sleep of those who died before Christ opened the gates of Heaven. The quiet twilight, waiting for dawn. Perhaps St Joseph joined his Patriarch counterpart there, alongside their fathers. St Joseph was not sinless, and so took his place among the rest of unredeemed humanity, waiting for his foster-Son to unpick the lock of Adam's chains. The blackness is of our sins, of our separation from God; the blackness which would have been our lot, had Christ not taken flesh, had Mary not said yes, had St Joseph not made a safe home for them, and brought the young Jesus up into the world which He was to redeem and save. One poet imagines the scene when Christ appears, in His brightness, to liberate Sheol, and none of the gathered company of prophets, priests, and patriarchs can find words to greet Him, or a song to express their praise, except one: St Joseph lovingly embraces the Redeemer and says, 'How is Your Mother, Son?' St Joseph, husband and father of our salvation, pray for us.



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