St. Joseph the Worker (God’s Resonating Voice)

“All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ... serve ye the Lord Christ.”

1. Polyphony is a kind of music that combines simultaneously a number of parts, each forming an individual melody and harmonizing with each other. So, in polyphony there are many voices but no one single voice stands out in particular. There is, therefore, a certain anonymity and self-effacement when singing polyphony. All the singers combine harmoniously (and anonymously, as it were) to produce a beautiful sound for the Lord. As a result, this music is heavenly for many reasons: in its most popular form, its origins are traceable to the Catholic Church and Her faithful Catholic composers like Palestrina; the majority of its pieces are about God and His Mysteries; and the music itself symbolizes heaven in that many voices come together, harmonize wonderfully, and yet no one single voice dominates. Heaven is about seeing GOD face to face...and loving and adoring Him. It is not about us.

2. Normally, when polyphonic pieces conclude, they break into many voices and harmonize with a resonance that thrills the soul. I recently listened to a live choir sing Allegri’s Miserere...on Good Friday. This is the very piece, once upon a time, allowed only to be sung in the Sistine Chapel, that keenly affected Mozart. I heard later from the choir that this piece ends with nine different voices harmonizing! It melted the souls of the listeners... tears were not wanting.

3. The resonance of these nine voices is analogous to how God works with us in this life. He speaks to us in a variety of voices such that when they all harmonize, we are struck by the resonance... causing our souls to be thrilled at the sound. Perhaps something of this is captured in the Canticle of Canticles where it says: “My soul melted when He spoke” (5:6).

4. What voices are these? There are those heard on outside of the soul and those heard on the inside. The voices heard on the outside are the Sacred Scriptures, Sacred Tradition, the Teachings of the Church, the sayings of the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints as well as the Ancient Liturgy and Traditional Catholic Artwork & Icons. When the Popes and Councils try to present any teaching as official, they oftentimes spend no little effort showing how the teaching resonates with all these voices. This is because
popes and the bishops united to him are called by God to be custodians and servants of the Deposit of the Faith... not innovators. If they innovate, a strange voice is heard... one that causes dissonance... one that the sheep do not recognize. Not surprisingly, cacophony results.

5. Examples of this are not wanting. Pope John XXII (d. 1334) thought that the saints went into a sort of hibernation when they died, a sleep wherein they waited for the General Judgment and Resurrection of the dead in order to get back their bodies before going on to see God face to face in heaven. This notion is erroneous for many reasons... among them, none of these sleeping saints would be able to intercede for us, whereas we know they do... because we pray to them and they answer our prayers (and even appears at times...and they not appear as “sleeping”).

6. Pope John XXII, the second of the Avignon popes, preached his error from the pulpit a number of times. This discordant papal voice caused a division to occur... most readily among the Dominicans, with one group taking the side of the Pope and another group opposing him. He repented on his death bed...and the Church was not long in defining the truth under Pope Benedict XII (his immediate successor). It is notable how he began his official document “By this Constitution which is to remain in force for ever, WE, with apostolic authority, define the following...” Note the WE. In other words, he is not speaking of his own... but in a sort of choir. He goes on: “the souls of all the saints ... immediately (mox) after death (unless in need of purification) will be with Christ in heaven... joined to the company of the holy angels. ... these souls have seen and see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision” (Benedictus Deus, 1336). Thank you Pope Benedict XII for resolving the tension.

7. The voices on the inside come from the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost (sometimes called the Divine Instinct), operating in the soul of the true believer, as well as our reason operating under the virtue of prudence, and finally we hear the voice of our conscience when dealing with matters of morality.
8. When all these voices are resonating, we have a clear sense, the sensus fidei, telling us all is well... that this thing being spoken of is from God. There is much here to bring peace of soul in times like these.

9. So, what if we hear a single voice proposing something to us? This voice might be from some outside source or even some inside source. Perhaps someone has a vision... a locution... or hears a prelate of the Church say this or that thing heretofore unheard of. Is one voice sufficient?

10. We might easily think of the just man St. Joseph. When he discovered his most beloved spouse, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be with Child by some miraculous means, he heard a voice coming from the Law. He knew from this voice that legally he could not publicly present himself as the father of this child. It was not his child. Yet all the other voices in his heart and mind were saying that Bld. Mary was a precious treasure, a spouse of spouses who could never be replaced. ... that she was pure, innocent... holy, full of grace. Every fiber of his being wanted to stay by Mary’s side... What to do? How resolve this tension? He searched the Law for a way out and discovered only one... divorce. Another voice was needed to resolve the tension...and so one came from heaven through an angel. The Child was of God... and Joseph was to take Blessed Mary into his home. No divorce allowed. Not surprisingly, the very Child in Mary’s womb would soon do away with the discordant voice of divorce!

11. Adam and Eve listened to a single voice—Eve that of the serpent, and Adam, that of his wife. After foolishly acting on that single voice, they fell from grace and panicked when another voice was heard. Thus, we hear from book of Genesis: “And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of paradise” (Gen 3:8). How many people down through time have listened to a single voice only to bring upon the world great tension, division, error, and dissonance... such that many many people have fled from God and hid themselves because of sin. We know their names... among the worst: Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Aleister Crowley, Jim Jones. How many charismatic leaders have risen up in the world to say they know the answers and try to lead souls... only to end in destruction. This proves that one voice is not sufficient? We need harmony... resonance that thrills and melts the soul.
12. On the other side of things, among others, St. Joan of Arc comes to mind. She was visited by St. Michael, put through a three year Novitiate... and then sent out. But even St. Joan had three different saints speaking to her, and she herself spoke at times with her priest in confession and was carefully examined by a group of bishops and priests at Chinon and Poitiers before she was considered authentic... as one sent by God. Later the Church examined all she said and did and added yet another voice to the record... that she was admirable in every way. Bottom line is this: we need more than one voice! One is not sufficient.

13. Seeking this resolution of voices is one of the motivations behind the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. He wanted the soul to live and work within the polyphonic environment of God voice coming from without and within. St. Ignatius learned by experience the great peace of soul that results... peace that enables the person to do great things for God. So, for example... he gives many principles on how to think with the Church, starting with the need to put “aside all private judgment”... while seeking the harmony of voices from among other things... the Church’s Magisterium and Magisterial teachings (all of them, not just the most recent), the priest in confession, the Liturgy, the Fathers and Doctors, Scholastic philosophy and theology, the laws of God and the Church, and one’s superior.

14. Clearly, then, if someone comes forward with a strange idea ... or claims to have heard some voice, we should not immediately believe them. We must be patient and wait for the other voices to be heard... to see if they chime in to make the harmony occur before cooperating with these people. In fact, we should resist them until this resonance is heard.

15. If, however, all we hear is dissonance, of which the faithful have been hearing lots in these modern times... we certainly must resist (here we can think of the recent papal document Amoris Laetitia which by all accounts contains a discordant voice). Think of St. Bernadette at the Grotto. Recall how early on in the visions she heard a cacophony of voices coming from the River Gave behind her, telling her to give up... and to get out of there. She heard them but did not give them much attention. Instead she focused on the beautiful Lady in the niche...and that heavenly Lady sent those voices from hell packing. She resisted. Thus, in
hearing this same cacophony today, we must not be discouraged or lose hope, no matter whence they come. Rather we need to realize that this too shall pass. Harmony will be restored... the resonance our souls long for will be heard and felt. This has been promised by Our Lord... and we will receive the promise, if we keep our focus on the beautiful Lady.

17. Let us be sure not to add any discord or dissonance of our own to the cacophony! Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, need to overcome their differences and not make scenes in front of their families and children.

18. One last point I would like to cover today has to do with the anonymity of the voices in polyphony. This is important because some in our times are attacking those who desire to remain more or less anonymous and unknown. “He must increase, and I must decrease,” said St. John the Baptist. Many of these are not interested in making a name for themselves (here we can think of the author of the excellent book called *The Family Under Attack*, as well as numerous articles printed on *Rorate Caeli*, *Latin Mass Magazine* and other places... as well as various sermons). This attack on anonymity is not surprising in a time filled with personality cults and people who promote themselves to make a living in selling books. It is not surprising in a time with *ad hominem* attacks are often used instead of clear and level headed thinking. Without a man to attack... people today get upset. Our Lord was attacked in this way as is seen in today’s Gospel: “is not this the carpenter’s son?” St. Albert the Great (from the lesson for today in the Roman Breviary) explains how “all these were said in contempt.”

19. The motto of St. Philip Neri was *amare nescire*: To love to be unknown. This seems to be turned on its head today...with so many loving to be known!

20. In any case, once again, St. Joseph comes to our aid. Let us turn to him for the importance of this lesson, because he gives a marvelous example of how to work anonymously. Listen to Fr. Faber: “Some saints represent to us [the] communicativeness of God, and others His reserve. Saint Joseph is the head and father of these last. Calmness amidst anxiety, considerateness amid startling mysteries, a quiet heart combined with an excruciating sensitiveness, ... calm, incurious, unquestioning,
unbewildered, reposing upon God—these are the operations of grace which seem to us so wonderful in Joseph’s soul.” So, it seems to be a hallmark of St. Joseph to disappear from the scene after performing acts of heroic virtue. For just as he disappears from the Gospel without a word, so has he done time and time again down through the ages (he is not asleep as Pope John XXII thought). He rescued St. Teresa of Jesus on multiple occasions, once even preventing their wagon from going over a cliff. Afterward, he was no where to be found. Only the faith of the great St. Teresa told them who it was. He once rescued Bd. Junipero Serra from dying in a California desert. Only later did the saint realize it was St. Joseph. We can also recall his work on the miraculous spiral staircase in the Loreto Sister’s chapel in Santa Fe, NM. After making it, he disappeared without a trace. This sort of thing has happened many times with St. Joseph. He likes to remain hidden and unknown. Why? He knows how much God loves self-effacement. In this he gives us something to imitate.

21. Once again, this is very important in our times when the media and others will either make a person out to be a star (a cult of personality) or a villan... a time when popes have all but ceased to use the royal we in their teaching, when so many in such teaching positions use their own opinions... rather than harmonizing with the voice of God. St. Joseph shows us how to give no room to this destructive self-love. He shows us that it is not about us...but about God and His eternal truth.

22. “All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ... serve ye the Lord Christ.”