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# PART 2

## JESUS THE CHRIST

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died  
and was buried; he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand  
of God the Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.*

# 8

## The Gospels

Almost everyone likes books about heroes. These books can encourage and inspire us. They can help us have bigger dreams for our lives and become better people.

The Gospels are books about the greatest, most inspiring hero of all time. Jesus Christ is a man who is also our Lord and Savior—the Son of God. He reveals the truth about God and about our lives. He tells stories that force us to stop and think about what we are doing and why. He shows us that our lives have a meaning and purpose. He assures us we are loved and are able to love God and others in return.

### KEY WORDS

Gospels  
inspiration  
synoptic

**This is the Good News about Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)**

Jesus has inspired millions down through the ages to follow him. Now he invites us to get to know him. We sometimes hold back. We think we know him already.



Where would you be in this picture? Sitting close to Jesus, wanting to know and follow him? Standing outside the circle, afraid to change your life?

We think we are too busy or too young. Down deep we may fear—and it might be true—that we will need to change some things in our lives if we get to know Jesus well. But we cannot be afraid to let into our lives the person who best knows and loves us. Jesus will show us how we can become truly great.

## Jesus and the Scriptures

How can we get to know Jesus Christ and the fullness of truth he brings? To answer this, think about how we get to know people in our families who lived before us. Sometimes our still-living older relatives tell all kinds of stories about family




### Think About It!

"Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all people" (Mark 16:15). Imagine that Christ has just given this mission to you and your friends. You don't have a lot of money. Probably you don't have many friends in important places. You don't have much experience in speaking to other people. But you know you need to, want to, and can do it. How would you go about spreading his teachings? We have means of communication that were not available to the Apostles. What means would you use most? Why?



## FUN FACT

Have you ever had to copy some writing by hand? Now we have machines that can copy anything written or printed. But before the 1500s, even printing presses didn't exist. Trained people had to copy by hand writings like the Gospels. They must have been patient and careful to be as accurate as they were.



members who have already died. Maybe the people who have died—or the people who lived with them—

left written records like diaries or memoirs.

This is the way it happened with Jesus. The men he was closest to, the Apostles, were the chief witnesses of his public life. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, they told others about Jesus' life and teachings. They did this through their preaching and by their examples. The Holy Spirit guided them to remember everything we need to know for our salvation.

The Holy Spirit also led some of the Apostles or their helpers to write down their teachings about Jesus' life and message. These writings became the four **Gospels** of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word *gospel* means "good news."

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

(2 Peter 1:16)

We learn about Jesus' life and teachings chiefly from the four Gospels. They are at the heart of the whole Bible. The Old Testament prepares the way for Christ, the promised Savior. The New Testament centers on him and on following him with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Other written reports of Christ's life appeared in early Christianity. But the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are special. They are the only Gospels included among the inspired books of the Bible.

**Inspiration** means God is the ultimate author of these books. He wanted them written, and he wanted certain points to be made. The Holy Spirit led the human writers to say without error the truths God wants told for our salvation.

The human writers were not just puppets. They had to do their own research and may have written with certain questions or problems in mind. Each had his own style of writing. Each may have omitted details or combined different sermons of Jesus into one. But the Holy Spirit made sure they gave

## Did You Know?

### Reading the Scriptures

Many people living during Jesus' earthly lifetime could not read. So the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) were read out loud in the Jewish places of worship, called synagogues. Luke's Gospel, for example, shows Jesus returning to Nazareth, his hometown. In the synagogue he reads out loud a passage from the Book of Isaiah. In the passage is a promise of a savior coming to bring Good News to the poor. Jesus says that promise has come true in him (see Luke 4:14–21).

Christians have kept the practice of reading and explaining the Scriptures during worship services. Especially in Catholic worship, we read from both the Old and New Testaments. This helps us see how they relate to each other.





## PRAY IT!

Dear God,  
Thank you for telling me  
about yourself in the  
Scriptures. Thank you  
for showing me yourself  
most fully in the Gospels.  
May the Holy Spirit help  
me understand Jesus' life and  
teachings. Let them inspire  
me to grow in friendship with  
you. Help me serve you and  
others as the Gospels teach us  
to do. May I become more and  
more like Christ, so that others  
can see him in me.

Amen

honest reports of all  
the important points of  
Jesus' life and teach-  
ings. They passed on  
the truths God wants us  
to know to follow Jesus  
and be saved.

## Writing the Gospels

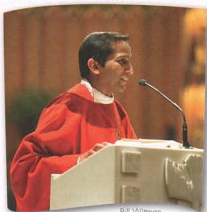
Have you ever done one of those oral history reports that are popular assignments at some schools? They can be fun. You talk to people who lived through some big historical event. You may look at written records they have. Then you write a summary.

Other students may do a report on the same historical event. They may talk to different eyewitnesses. They may include other facts or order them differently. Their reports will end up slightly different from yours.

The Gospel writers did something similar. Each one chose facts about Christ's life and teachings that had been passed on by word of mouth. They may have used earlier writings about Jesus' life and teachings. For example, Luke's Gospel explains his approach and purpose clearly.

Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message. And so, Your Excellency, because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you. I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught. (1:1–4)

The four Gospels all portray Jesus Christ, and so they do share many of the same stories about his life and teachings. In particular, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke often record the same events in about the same order. They are called the **synoptic** Gospels, because these similarities are clear when their contents are “seen together” or listed side by side. The Greek word from which synoptic comes means “seen together.”



Bill Witman

At Mass we stand for the Gospel and listen carefully, because what is proclaimed is truly Good News! Just as we stand to hear the Gospels, it is important to take a stand for what the Gospels teach us about Jesus.



## **PRAY IT!**

### **Liturgy Connection**

The Liturgy of the Word is the first major part of the Eucharist. A reading from the Gospels is always included. The order of readings for Sunday Masses follows a three-year rotation. Each year in the cycle is referred to by letter: A, B, or C.

Many of the Sunday Gospels during the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter come from John's Gospel. A reading from the other three Gospels is usually read on the remaining Sundays. (We call these weeks outside special liturgical seasons "ordinary time.") Readings from Matthew are proclaimed in Year A, readings from Mark in Year B, and readings from Luke in Year C. So, the Church helps us think about the whole Gospel message over time.

But each is slightly different, because the sources and readers of each were different. Matthew, for example, writes mostly for Jewish people. He often shows how Jesus' life fulfills the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. Mark writes more for Gentiles, that is, people who are not Jewish. So he explains Jewish customs and words. Early Christian writers say Mark gives us Peter's teachings.

The Gospel of Luke often reminds us that Jesus came to save all people. It records some unique stories and teachings that stress this point. For example, the story of the prodigal son shows that God's mercy can forgive the worst sinners (see Luke 15:11–32). The story of Lazarus and the rich man teaches that we should love people who are poor as God does (see Luke 16:19–31). Luke also tells more about Jesus' childhood. Even when he is a child, some people see that Jesus comes to fulfill God's promise to send a savior (see Luke 2:22–50).

John wrote his Gospel some years after the others were finished. His organization and focus are different from those of the synoptic Gospels. He also reflects more deeply on Jesus' teachings.

His readers were mostly Greek-speaking and not Jewish. He wants to make clear right from the beginning of the Gospel that Christ is truly divine, the Son of God. John's Gospel doesn't start with the earthly life of Jesus as the others do. Instead, he shows that the second Person of the Trinity exists always with God and is God. He is the Word by which God expresses himself in Creation and the Old Testament. Finally, God shows himself fully by having the Word become someone like us.



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Mark writes his Gospel. Mark's Gospel is the earliest of the four Gospels. It is also the shortest. Find out more about this Gospel and the other Gospels written by Matthew, Luke, and John.

## Getting to Know Christ

A few key ideas can help us get the most out of reading or hearing the Scriptures, as follows:

First, the writers' different audiences and purposes help explain what each author includes and stresses. Matthew, for example, is not trying to bore us with his lists of Jesus' ancestors. He's showing his

Jewish readers that Jesus really is from the line of the Messiah (see Matthew 1:1-17).

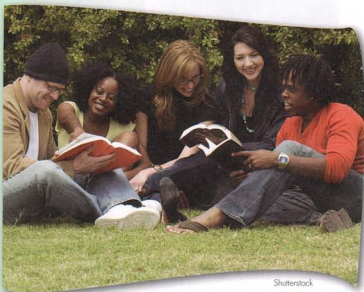
**I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3)**

Second, we do not have to understand every word to get the basic idea. But knowing the literal meanings of words can deepen

our appreciation. At the same time, the Gospels often use physical things to stand for spiritual things. For example, Jesus says his disciples will fish for men. Jesus means by this that his disciples will work to bring others to his Kingdom.

Third, events in the Gospels often complete or make perfect events that happened earlier in the

Have you ever participated in a Bible study group? Reading and discussing the Bible with others can be a great way to grow in faith and knowledge of God's Word and how it applies to your life.



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Old Testament. In chapter 6 of John's Gospel, for instance, Jesus recalls how God provided a kind of bread for his people in the desert so they wouldn't die (see Exodus, chapter 16). Then Jesus reveals that he is the perfect bread from heaven that gives eternal life to everyone who believes in him.

Fourth, we do not have to figure out everything ourselves. Many Bibles have helpful notes and comments. Thoughtful Christians have written many commentaries on the Gospels.



## LIVE IT!

God speaks to us personally in the Scriptures. We read them to understand. We also want to apply God's word to our daily lives. So, we need more of a plan for reading the Gospels than for reading other books.

First, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand and live the Gospel message.

Second, we can read carefully. We can imagine the people and events and even "make a movie" of them in our minds.

Third, we can pause to think about what we have read and apply it to our own lives. How does the Spirit encourage, teach, correct, challenge, comfort, or inspire us in this passage?

Sometimes this practice will give us big insights. Other times, we seem to see nothing. But if we keep trying with faith, the fruits will be great.

Finally, we are not alone. The Spirit especially guides the bishops who have succeeded, or followed, the Apostles. They have the full power and responsibility to explain the Scriptures and Tradition rightly. But the Church also urges us to study and think about Jesus. If we ask in prayer, the Holy Spirit will guide us in our reading.

Reading the Gospels has changed lives. Missionaries have risked their own safety to bring the Good News to those who have not heard. Others have



## Looking Back

### Copies of the Gospels

Did you know that the original copies of the four Gospels from the early centuries have fallen apart or been destroyed? So how do we know our Gospels are the same as what the authors wrote?

This is a question experts ask about all old books. They study and compare the oldest whole and partial copies of those books to determine their accuracy.

Bible experts have found hundreds of early copies of the Gospels. We have more and older copies of them than of any other ancient book. Experts say that the copies from different places and times are basically the same. So our versions of the four Gospels are extremely reliable, more so than any other ancient book. We can thank the early Christians who treasured these books and accurately copied and preserved them.



made the lives of those around their homes much better by their Gospel-inspired words and deeds.

If you want to make a difference in the world, try reading the Gospels. You will meet unforgettable, real people like Mary, Joseph, Peter, James, and John. Above all, you will get to know Jesus, the most unforgettable and real person of all. He will enlighten, challenge, encourage, comfort, and amaze you. He will become your hero and ideal. He will make you truly happy in this life and the next. He will enable you to inspire others.



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In 1947 herders discovered old manuscripts in a cave near where Jesus lived. They are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. They include some of the oldest biblical manuscripts ever found.



## 9

# JESUS CHRIST, TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

Imagine getting some really unbelievable good news. Pretend you've tried out for the basketball team or school play but figured you had no chance of starting or getting a big part. Or imagine you'd love to have another child in the family, but your parents have said it wasn't possible. Then suddenly you learn your dream has come true. You're named a starter. You're chosen to play the part. You're going to have a little brother or sister.

Can you think of some great news you have received? Think about all the people you wanted to tell. For the past 2,000 years, the Church has been telling the best news ever.



Jose Luis Pelaez, Inc./Blend Images/Corbis

As good as news like this is, the Church has even better news for the whole human race. The Gospel of John tells it as follows: "The Word became a human being, and full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son" (John 1:14). This incredible Good News of the Gospels is called the mystery of the **Incarnation**, the truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second Person of the Trinity, is both fully God and fully man. He took on our human nature, which means that the Son of God became one with us. By doing this Jesus makes it possible for us to get to know him, trust him, love him, follow him, and show him to others. He wants us to join freely with him in the great adventure of spreading his Kingdom. He wants to teach us what human and divine life are all about. He wants to give us the power to imitate him, to become like him, so he lives through us. He wants us and those around us to be happy now and forever.

He always had the nature of God, but . . . of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. (Philippians 2:6-7)

## PRAY IT!

Jesus,  
Thank you for your great gift of love in becoming human for us. Help me to honor and love you as my Savior, Lord, and God in all my thoughts, words, and actions. Teach me through your holy life to live a holy life too. Through the Holy Spirit, give me the grace to know and follow your teachings with humility, generosity, and persistence. May others see your goodness in me. Amen.

## Who Is Jesus Christ?

How do we get to know who Jesus Christ is? We might start by thinking about how we get to know and understand people in general. We spend time working, playing, and relaxing with them. We think about what they say and do. We get to know them as persons. Someone is kind and caring. Someone else is determined and stubborn. We get to know their talents and abilities. One is great in math. Another is a terrific storyteller.

We get to know Jesus Christ in a similar way. Only, because his earthly life is long in the past, we have to rely on the reports of others who were with him at the time. Those reports are part of God's Revelation, which is passed on to us through the Scriptures and Tradition. What do the Scriptures and Tradition tell us about Jesus?

They show us that Jesus is a divine person with two natures. He keeps the divine nature that he has had for eternity. He also takes on our human nature. He is not just God or just man or some sort of half-and-

Jesus wept when his friend died. He must have laughed sometimes too, because he was one of us. He was like us in all things except sin and experienced the same emotions we do.



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## LIVE IT!

How can we get to know Jesus better?

We can pay attention to the Good News of his life and lessons. We can read the Scriptures on our own or listen to them at Mass. We can read writings or listen to talks by people who have thought about Jesus Christ.

We can speak with Jesus. We can pray to him in a group or on our own. The Spirit will use our openness to Jesus to help us grasp his life and message.

We can be touched by Christ in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Jesus works through them to help us know and follow him better.

We can see Christ shine through the witness of faithful people.

We can study the lives of saints and learn to see goodness in people we know. Jesus gives us many ways to build our relationships with him.

half mix of the two. He is truly and fully divine and truly and fully human, but without sin of any kind.

Jesus Christ is truly human, like us. He grows, walks, talks, works, has friends, and jokes around. He enjoys meeting and talking with people of all kinds. When Jesus' friend Lazarus dies and when he thinks about how his own people will reject him, he cries. He enjoys a good meal, good talk, the beauty of flowers, and the innocence of children. He gets hungry, tired, and angry. When people ignore him or are ungrateful, his feelings are hurt.

"The Son of God . . . worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a hu-

## Did You Know?

### Jesus Talks About His Divinity

Jesus is slow to reveal he is God. In the Gospels he sometimes refuses to answer questions about his godhood (see, for example, Matthew 16:20, Mark 8:11–12, and Luke 20:1–8). Why? If you look closely, you will see it depends on when and to whom he is talking.

God had taught the Jewish people that he was the only God. If Jesus had claimed to be God right from the beginning, the other Jews would have killed him for blasphemy—which eventually happened, anyway (see John 8:59, 10:31). Blasphemy is an action regarded as an insult to God. Jesus needed time to show by words and deeds that divine power worked through him. Then his followers could accept his word that he was one with God. Jesus often would not answer questions about his divine nature from those who ignored the proof of his words and deeds. They wished only to trap him, not know him.

Miracles, like Jesus' walking on water, are signs of Jesus' divinity. He truly is God.



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man will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin<sup>1</sup> CCC, number 470).

Jesus Christ is truly God. He does things only God can do. He performs miracles of healing and raising the dead. He forgives sins and foretells the future. He dares to explain and add to God's teachings from the Old Testament. Simon Peter calls him "the Son of the living God," and Jesus agrees. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:16–17).

Although Jesus is only thirty years old in human age, he claims to have existed before the founder of the Jewish people. "Before Abraham was born, 'I Am'" (John 8:58). "I AM" is the name God gives himself when Moses asks on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 3:14). Jesus says he is the real and natural Son of God, not an adopted son or just someone close to God. "Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me" (John 12:45). "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). Jesus is God himself. In fact, his accusers charge that he breaks Jewish law "because he claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:7). He does not deny it.

Jesus also allows others to call him "Lord." We might think this is just an older way of showing respect for people. It might be like saying "sir" or "ma'am." But in the Greek Bible, LORD is the word used in place of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, which is a special name for God. So to call Jesus Lord is like calling him God. It expresses our belief in Jesus' divinity. That is especially clear in the reaction of Thomas to the risen Jesus: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).



## PRAY IT!

### Liturgy Connection

Jesus is at the center of every liturgy and especially the Eucharist. We address our praise, needs, thanks, and sorrow for sin to him as our Lord. We end our prayers with "through Christ, our Lord." It is only through him, with him, and in him that we can approach the Father.


We know Jesus will understand us in our weaknesses. He can and will present our needs to the Father and respond to them. "On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

"This is my own dear Son—  
listen to him!" (Mark 9:7)



## FUN FACT

Ordinary people in Jesus' time did not have last, or family, names. They were identified by their first names and by their hometowns or their fathers. Our Lord is called Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus, son of Joseph. Christ or Messiah is not Jesus' last name but rather his title and role. It is like saying George Washington, President.



## What the Incarnation Means for Us

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* gives the following summary of who Jesus is. "At the time appointed by God, the only Son of the Father, the eternal Word, that is, the Word and substantial Image of the Father, became incarnate; without losing his divine nature he has assumed human nature" (CCC, number 479).

It is important that Jesus is really both God and man for several reasons. First, Jesus is called the *Christ*, the Greek word for the Hebrew word **Messiah**, or "anointed one." In the Old Testament, priests, kings, and sometimes prophets were anointed. That is, they had precious olive oil poured over them to show that God had chosen them for a special purpose. The Messiah promised by God was expected to be a priest, prophet, and king who would save the people of Israel. In fact, the name **Jesus** means "God saves." That is the prime goal of his mission to us. He comes to save us from the Original Sin that we all inherit and that infects human nature. He also can save us from our personal sins that hurt us and our relationships with God and



others. Christ comes to give us the grace—that is, a share in God’s own divine life and love—to save us from sin and death.



Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, 'Jesus' love is personal, tender, and unchanging; he is present with us always, especially in the Blessed Sacrament', copyright © Radiant Light 2008, [www.radiantlight.org.uk](http://www.radiantlight.org.uk)

“Lean on me.”  
Imagine Jesus saying that to you, especially in tough times when you need a friend the most.

### Looking Back

## Mistakes About Christ

The Church has always affirmed Jesus Christ’s divinity and humanity in response to people who have said he was either only God or only human. While the New Testament was still being written, some people claimed Christ was only divine. So John, for example, insists on the physical presence of “the Word of life.” “We have heard it, and we have seen it . . . and our hands have touched it” (1 John 1:1).

Others in the early Church argued that Christ was not divine or not equal to the Father. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) responded by affirming Jesus’ full divinity. You may come across people today who believe that Jesus was only human. We can try to help people who believe this to see Christ’s full picture in the Scriptures. We can pray that God will help them understand and believe the truth.



## KEY WORDS

Incarnation  
Messiah  
Jesus  
mediator

Second, because Jesus is both God and man, he is the one and perfect **mediator** between us and God. You know how sometimes when two friends fight, a third friend will talk with each of them and get them to be friends again? That is part of what a mediator does; a mediator helps restore broken relationships.



For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

As our mediator, Christ offers himself in sacrifice on the cross and in Mass to restore our relationships with his loving Father. He goes to the Father on our behalf and comes to us on behalf of the Father to reveal the love of the Father for us.

Third, by becoming truly man, Jesus shows he wants to and can be our friend. Good friends understand us well and stick by us. They are there for us, stubbornly loyal, sometimes brutally honest.

As God, Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves and has the highest hopes for the saints we can become. He loves us and is patient with us beyond all human measure. As man, Jesus understands us, our strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows, emotional highs and lows. He sympathizes, encourages, advises, and corrects, all with great affection.

Fourth, Jesus offers himself as a teacher and a model for us to imitate. You probably have heroes already whom you imitate. You may admire and try to become like a certain athlete or performer. Christ is our model for a holy life. "I am the way, the truth,



### **Think About It!**

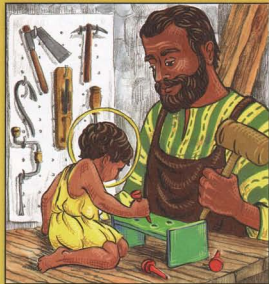
As a fully human person, Jesus is an example for us. But we need to think about his life and teachings to follow him. For example, Christ tells us we will be happy and God's children if we work for peace (see Matthew 5:9). How can you work for more peace in your family? for more peace among your friends? What other teachings of Jesus do you remember and how can they guide your life?

and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6). Jesus presents the Beatitudes as ideals that we should strive for, but he also lives them. If we want to follow him, he tells us that we must love one another as he loves us (see John 15:12).

But how can we possibly become like Christ? Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote, "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might

## PEOPLE OF FAITH

### Saint Joseph



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God called Saint Joseph to be the husband of Mary and legal father of Jesus. Joseph heroically did what God wanted even when it caused him to suffer. He married his beloved, Mary, although she was mysteriously pregnant. He left his relatives, friends, job, and home to lead his family into Egypt so Jesus would be safe from King Herod's massacre of the innocent children.

make men gods."<sup>2</sup> (CCC, number 460). Through the grace Christ gains for us, we become children of God. Especially in Baptism and the other sacraments, the Holy Spirit helps us think, feel, and act as Jesus would. "God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a truly religious life through the knowledge of one who called us to share in his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Most of Joseph's life was not that exciting. But he showed the same steady faith and obedience to God's will during his quiet years in Nazareth. He fulfilled the ordinary duties of a husband, parent, worker, and citizen well and with love. Like any good father, Joseph taught Jesus many things, including his own trade of carpentry. In her *Autobiography*, Saint Teresa of Ávila encourages praying to Joseph. Jesus, she says, who obeyed him on earth, honors Joseph in heaven by always doing what he asks.

It's easy to imagine Joseph as a reliable, upright person who does what needs to be done without a lot of talk. His commitment to doing the right thing in the Gospels inspires us to do what God wants without whining or complaining. He teaches us to look at and listen to Jesus in silent prayer. March 19 is his feast day.