



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

The humility of Joseph:
A lesson for parents and teachers



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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?

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

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. (c.f. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2223) 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. †