



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

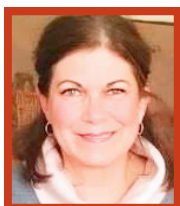
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J.M.J.



Dear Mission Friends:

Those of you who are Catholic school alumni surely remember having to print “JMJ” on the top of every paper you turned in, from artwork to homework to tests. It was a simple sacramental asking Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to bless your work. If you skipped it, points were deducted, and so it soon became an automatic reflex, its true significance forgotten for most. How it warms my heart that a few of you who write it on the top of notes you send in to our office must still remember its purpose!

At a thrift shop a few years ago, I was reminded of another tradition from my childhood—also revolving around Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and also one that I didn’t fully appreciate until I grew up. My eyes were drawn to a unique rendition of the Holy Family (*above*), not only because it was in sepia, but also because “JMJ” was engraved all around the frame. When I turned it over to see how much it cost,



I saw instead a typed prayer (*right*), recognizing it right away: At the dinner table on every special occasion, just after saying grace as usual, my father would catch us before we grabbed our forks and quickly interject, “I have a special prayer I’d like to add tonight.” My siblings and I—and later my own children—would moan and roll our eyes, gazing longingly at the turkey and gravy until he came to St. Joseph’s part, and we knew he was on the home stretch. (Though occasionally he’d add a “Hail, Holy Queen” in there, just because he had the floor.)

Consecrating My Home and Family to the Care of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

O Jesus, behold our family prostrate before thee. Once more do we consecrate ourselves to thee—our trials and joys—that our home, like Thine, may ever be the shrine of peace, purity, love, labor, and faith. Do thou protect and bless all of us, both absent and present, living and dead.

O Mary, loving Mother of Jesus—and our Mother—pray to Jesus for our family, for all the families of the world, to guard the cradle of the newborn, the schools of the young and their vocations; to be strength to the weak, a staff to old age, a support to widows, and a father to orphans.

O Joseph, holy guardian of Jesus and Mary, assist us by thy prayers in all the necessities of life. Ask of Jesus that special grace, which he granted to thee, to watch over our home at the pillow of the sick and the dying, so that with Mary and with thee, Heaven may find our family unbroken in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Amen.

It was always the same prayer but we never really learned it—he mercifully raced through it without enunciating much—so what a joyful surprise it was to recognize my late Dad’s prayer on the back of that old picture! We could resume his cherished custom (and I could enjoy testing everyone’s patience, too.)

In an excerpt from one of his prose-poems (*below*), Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our missionary in Rabinal, Guatemala, expresses the importance of continuing such seemingly archaic traditions.



"Reading the Bible," Jean-Baptiste Greuze, 1755

In years to come, will faith have a drum beat, a bell to ring, a dance to dance?
 Or will it be an endless litany of ideas, murmured in low tones,
 Or a flowery montage of images to dazzle with no substance?
 As youth submerge themselves in their phones, disconnected from the past,
 As the world spins out of control, untethered to its history,
 Careening in a downward spiral toward a bleak future,
 Drums must continue to be beat, flutes played, and prayers recited.
 Symbols must continue to be reminders, motionless against time,
 Witnesses to a living museum-piece of culture and faith.

Tradition is human experience put to music and movement.
 Life is dance—the cadence changes but the dance remains.
 God, the Lord of the Dance, is with us in his church.
 From death comes life, if we believe as Jesus taught us.
 If we—his church—stand firm, we will pass through the dark night
 And rise up with him, our contact with the God of History.
 Deeply felt experience will find a way to communicate itself.

In another recent report, Fr. Tim describes (and puts to verse, *page 3*), one such symbolic tradition that continues to thrive in Rabinal: “*Perhaps a beautiful custom here in the mission, the Posada, might bring a bit of joy to all of you.*

The Posada is a community reenactment of Mary and Joseph searching for a place for Jesus to be born. For nine nights (in honor of Mary’s nine months of pregnancy), participants, singing hymns about their futile search, are turned away at various

homes, the group growing larger and larger, until finally one pre-arranged family welcomes them inside, followed by a celebration with scripture readings, songs, and some hot tea and cookies for all.



"Even in an age when strolling the streets at night is not thought safe, or when staying warm at home is much more appealing, somehow the Posada ("Inn") has endured, which tells us that people want to find ways to celebrate what represents the hope of mankind, a better world, the birth of our Savior. The cycle of these feasts must not be broken."

Fr. Tim's words call to mind the lyrics from an ageless tune featured on Ken Burns' recent country music documentary:

***We sang the songs of childhood
Hymns of faith that made us strong
Will the circle be unbroken
By and by, Lord, by and by?***

We all have traditions that we honor, especially this time of year, born from our faiths, our cultures, our locales, our families. Keep them fresh, keep reminding yourselves of their significance, and, as will my family with my Dad's prayer, pass them on to keep the circle unbroken.

Peace and good will,
Lesley Warnshuis

Posada Time

*Clouds appear and pass, the rain stubbornly holding off.
Long ago rivers became creeks, and then dried up altogether.
The land is crusted and cracked, hard as baked bricks.
Even stems of wild flowers snap, sounding like a crushed beetle.
Yet along the streets of each village and in the darkened alleys of the town
Flows a twinkling stream of lighted lanterns,
Held aloft by a motley group of children and their parents,
Family members, friends, and onlookers,
Singing their songs of the season, welcoming the Savior.
It is Posada time, the nine days before the birth of Jesus.*

*The grand festivals of the confraternities of the Virgin of Patrocinio,
The Immaculate Conception, and Our Lady of Guadalupe
Were celebrated with joyful devotions, Masses, and communal meals,
Exploding in exuberant processions with live marching bands
And dazzling displays of pyrotechnics.
Now each neighborhood is preparing its humble display of The Holy Family
To be presented for a blessing at the parish church
And to be carried in procession to the beat of turtle shells
In the cold starlit nights of December, from the 15th to Christmas Eve.
Posada time has begun.*

*From what underground source of energy do these wells of joy arise?
What force moves us out of our comfortable cushioned chairs
In front of our television, computer, video game, phone, or book
To wander the cold streets in imitation of a humble couple,
Mary and Joseph, in their search for a night's lodging,
To stand at door after door and face impenetrable icy stares
And complacent, uninviting hearts?*

*This icy truth requires understanding and compassion.
Who among us would give up his own bed for a total stranger?
Can the innkeepers be blamed for not knowing
Whose mother is at their door?
Where is the angel to announce them?
The angels did announce a river of love
Flowing from the side of Jesus to lift up dispirited souls.
The Son of God came to offer them a healing spirit,
A message of hope and good will.
But he purposely hid from us so that we couldn't pick and choose,
So that we had to decide to welcome all.*

*The Posada carries an important message:
Do not judge those who reject us.
Join in the flow of that motley band, the church of Jesus.
Carry that torch of truth and grace and pass it on
As your gift to others this Christmas.*

Despite—or maybe because of—Rabinal's frequent lack of rain in the growing season causing a dire shortfall in their staples of corn and beans, families still plan and participate in the holy season's festivals. Here are scenes from past Posadas.



CONCERNING THIS LOVELY PICTURE

◀ a word from Father Stedman

"As if They had gone to a photographer in Nazareth and had the Family picture taken." is what I felt when I first saw this picture recently. As if a camera's eye had caught Them at one of Their happiest moments on this earth—Joseph still living. Mary a young Mother of twenty-three. Jesus in the radiance of youth.

Consider Jesus—looking up to His Eternal Father. Jesus is leading; the brightness of His Divinity shining through His little human Body—the Leader of all enduring Family life.

Consider Mary—wistful, seemingly looking ahead towards Calvary; a tinge of maternal sorrow is beginning to overshadow her girlish face.

Consider Joseph—pondering prayerfully, yet trudging along, as it were: eyes on earth where he must earn a livelihood for his two sacred charges. But he sees the earth with Jesus on it.

Left, a descriptive interpretation, copied from the back of the picture on page 1, of each of its three subjects.

YEAR-END GIVING AND TAX BENEFITS

As you plan your year-end giving, please consider a contribution to Dominican Mission Foundation, entitling you to a tax deduction while providing much-needed support to those we serve.