

FEAST OF THE HOLY SPOUSES

Jan 23

Rev. Giancarlo Mittempergher, CSS (2006)

St. Gaspar Bertoni, founder of the Stigmatines, entrusted his Congregation to the Holy Spouses Mary and Joseph, in their marriage (*espousals*).

It seems strange that our founder would choose the Holy Spouses as our model for a community of consecrated religious who do not marry but, in fact Joseph and Mary lived a celibate marriage. Mary and Joseph were both called to set aside their plans and become a part of God's plan for salvation.

Similarly, we Stigmatines, as religious, take a vow of celibacy staying together as brothers in community, dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus.

Joseph and Mary were called by God to be instruments to bring the Messiah into the world - a divine gift - not by their initiative but by the will of God. Similarly we are called to be instruments for God to bring Jesus to the world through evangelization and preaching of the Word.

Why, then, imitating Joseph and Mary *in their marriage*? Because marriage is a covenant, and a communion, and a sharing, and a happy event. Besides, the Bible says that our new life in Christ is in the form of a *marriage feast* (Is 62:1-5; Hosea 2:1-24; Eph 5:22-27.32; Rev 19:7.9).

The Stigmatines imitate Mary and Joseph in their response to God's call, their availability to do God's will at any moment, their vocation of bringing Jesus into the world and the joy of being instruments and servants of the Good News of Jesus.

The 23rd of January has been chosen for this feast of *the espousals of Mary and Joseph*, a devotion that originated in France in the 15th Century.

When St. Gaspar took possession of the little church of St Francis' Stigmata, in Verona, in 1816, which was abandoned and desecrated by Napoleon, he reconstructed the main altar replacing the picture of St Francis with a new painting of the espousals of Mary and Joseph, that he himself commissioned.

He wished his sons to live out in their community and public lives the virtues of the Holy Spouses. The celebration of this feast was open also to the many Christian couples that found this devotion very inspiring for their own vocation.

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Rev, Giancarlo Mittempergher, CSS was born in Trento, Italy, in 01/18/1941. He made his first profession in 19nd was ordained a Stigmatine Priest in Pretoria (South Africa) in 12/04/66. He worked in the missions in the Diocese of Pretoria for 18 years, was formator in the Seminary of Theology for 9 years and novice master for 11 years. Presently (2006) he is the Superior of the new Stigmatine foundation in Sacramento, California (USA).