

Hope in a Statue

Dr. Greg Bourgond

In a discussion yesterday I was asked about my childhood. The inquirer was curious about what makes me tick. I shared with him that trauma came early in my life. At 12 years of age my parents were in heated divorce proceedings. I remember the arguments but thought all families argued that way. The divorce came as a complete surprise to me. It represented the end of all I knew to be my world. I was paraded before a divorce judge to decide which parent I wanted to live with. I remember the judge saying, "Hurry up son, make up your mind, we haven't got all day." I was being asked to pick between both parents whom I loved. I blurted out my answer and ran from the courtroom. When I made it outside to the steps I ran to one of the cement lions on each side and threw my arms around it and wept. That was the end of my childhood that day.

When my parents would argue I would escape to my room and clean it. It was the only way I knew to maintain order in my small world--to mediate the chaos around me. I had this distorted perception that if I cleaned my room enough peace would come to my home and my parents would get along. When the arguments became louder, longer, and crueler I would run to the Catholic Church a few blocks away to find peace and solace. More than once, I found myself standing before the statue of Joseph. Somehow and in some way I felt safe there. As a small boy Joseph represented all I had hoped to find in a father. I knew from my religion classes and catechism instruction in the parochial school I attended that Joseph didn't abandon his family even after he found out Mary was pregnant under suspicious circumstances. He stuck with his family.

At the cross Jesus asked one of his apostles to take care his mother. Joseph, we surmise, died earlier in Jesus' life. But he left a legacy as a faithful husband and father. He taught Jesus a craft. He wasn't an absent father who was there physically but not really there. He wasn't an emotional father that showed up at important events but not much more. He was a strategic father that provided for his family, stuck in there when the going got rough, and guided his family as every father should.

Joseph was my security during those troubled times. I came to a personal relationship with Christ much later when I was 23. Many years have lapsed since I threw my arms around that cement lion. Many years have elapsed since I found recluse in the presence of a statue of Joseph. I don't question God's provision in the time of need. I do know that Joseph stands as a model of fatherhood for me to this day. We may be a product of our past in many ways but we need not be a prisoner of it. Jesus sets us free from that kind of prison. Professional counseling can help but it cannot provide true freedom. It may help for a time but it provides no lasting solution.

The only source of renewal and lasting transformational change is Christ, nothing less.

The conversation I had yesterday reminded me of God's provision to a small boy in desperate need. It came from an unexpected source. As I look back I know God loved me then as He loves me now. Dear God, please thank Joseph for modeling true fatherhood. Amen!