**ST JOSEPH,** **TRUSTING AND TRUSTWORTHY**

What do we make of St Joseph? We see artists' impressions of him as a lovable, grey-headed old man holding the child Jesus.

Some people have the idea that Joseph was much older than Mary his wife, although there's no foundation for it in Scripture. Perhaps, the reasoning behind making St Joseph an old man is to make him more like a father than a husband to his young wife, whose virginity is therefore safeguarded, and the supernatural conception of Jesus is made more credible.

To explain the gospel’s mention of “the brothers of Jesus”, some think that Joseph must have had children of a previous marriage and that he married Mary as a widower and an older man. This explanation is also intended, I think, to save Mary’s virginity. But “brothers” can also include cousins in the Middle East.

Our scriptural knowledge of the foster father of Jesus leaves a lot to be desired. There's not much said about him, and we have none of his spoken words.

Following the lead of Pope John XXIII, it's about time we based our devotion to St Joseph on what scriptural basis there is. We should accord to him the importance that God himself gave him as guardian of Mary and Jesus.

The Church’s public worship is an excellent guide for personal devotions. The Mass of March 19 appreciates St Joseph, the husband of Mary, at his proper worth. The words of the Book of Sirach, speaking about Moses, are often applied to St Joseph. One line is very apt: "For his trustworthiness and meekness, God selected him from all mankind."

The gospel reading (Mt 1: 18) demonstrates both his trust in God and his trustworthiness. It also weakens any grounds for thinking that Joseph was a lot older than Mary. If Mary was engaged to him and soon to be married, then normally among the Israelites, she would have been about fifteen and he about twenty.

She was found by him to be pregnant. By Mosaic law, which they both strictly observed, her husband was therefore bound to expose her as an adulteress. He knew that he wasn't the father of her child, but he loved her and trusted her, so much that he didn't want to give the Law its way, Adulteresses were stoned to death. So, can you imagine the ordeal he went through? In this kind of human situation, trust in God is heroic when God alone has the answers, but God is often slow to tell us why we have been subjected to such a tragedy.

Even when the answer was given: “because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:21), it was impossible to understand and had to be accepted entirely on faith.

St Joseph emerges, then, as a young man with extraordinary, even heroic, trust, and faith. "For his trustworthiness and meekness God selected him from all mankind."