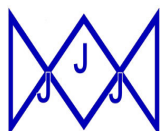


## *Mary and the men on the founding Monogram: A communion of companions*

In May this year, Sr Marie Foale wrote on the founding Josephite Rule written by Fr Julian Tenison Woods in October 1867. This Rule, lived by Mother Mary and her early companions, was signed by Bishop Shiel and approved for use in his Diocese of Adelaide on 17 December, 1868.

The following segment from Chapter Three of the Rule not only instructs sisters on the distinctive monogram to be worn on their habit, but it also holds the key to a spirituality of 'companionship' that Julian was keen to promote with Mary amongst the early sisters.



*"The professed sisters shall wear upon their hearts a large monogram of the Blessed Virgin [A' without the crossbar + 'M', for 'Ave Maria'] between three letters 'J' in honour of Jesus, Joseph and John the Baptist, thus, typifying the Holy Family."*

The inclusion of John the Baptist in the Holy [extended] Family is probably stranger for us today than it would have been in the culture of Catholic Western Europe where there was a well-established tradition of devotion to John. Art by Leonardo da Vinci [1452-1519] and Bartolomé Murillo [1618-1682] and others depict Jesus and John as companionable children growing up together. The tender vein of that art possibly helped Julian intuit the significance 'companionship' could be amongst young colonial women in a brand-new venture within Religious Life in a new world.



**Murillo's "San Juan Bautista Nino" and "El Buen Pastor"**

The Rule shows the influence of various aspects of European spirituality that had inspired Julian in his personal journey. His devotion to the Holy Family draws on what he experienced amongst the Passionists in England [from 1850] and the Marist Fathers in France [in 1853]. Both honoured the Holy Family, as did the Josephites of Le Puy in France, whose homely lives amongst ordinary people impressed him so much when he encountered them. Then when concluding his training for the priesthood amongst the Jesuits in Sevenhill, SA, [across 1856-7], Julian would have become aware of the importance St Ignatius placed on 'companionship' with Jesus.

### **Consider the following from Ch 6 of the Founding Rule:**

*"[The sisters] shall also speak much to [the children] of devotion to the glorious Mother of God, to St Joseph and to St John the Baptist, the companions of our dear Lord's infancy, and members of the Holy Family."*

Julian's inclusion of John within the Holy Family strengthens the point he and Mary together want to make to the first sisters about this significance of 'companionship' as a model for their life together and for their ministry. In shaping the Rule, they sought to form these early young women, not just as sisters, but as teachers of small children, and as carers and guides in their dealing with others, especially needy people like orphans, the elderly and frail, those in labour and those dying, and the many destitute people of colonial Australia.

Whereas some aspects of the spirituality of this Rule are 'time-bound' to an era not our own, the need to companion people with tenderness, compassion and kindness is one theme of the Rule that is timeless, classically of the Gospel, and revolutionary in fact.

**Consider a segment of Ch 1 of the Rule that bears this out:**

"In honour of their glorious patron, they shall recognise in the children committed to their charge the person of the Infant Jesus and try to discharge the same holy office towards them which St Joseph did to his charge."

**Segments of Ch 6 give prominence to the need for companionship of others in life and ministry**

"Let them remember that the conversation of St. Joseph and Jesus is to be their model ...

They are to make themselves the companions of the children, and not assume the authority of superiors except in the gentlest manner.... making their children happy ....

Let them remember that the children will be attracted to Jesus by a smiling exterior, but would be repelled by too much gloom, or spoiled by boisterous hilarity .....

They should talk cheerfully to their charges, so as to gain their young hearts."

**Throughout her compassionate life Mother Mary of the Cross gave clear witness to having embodied all that Julian and she hoped to bring forward through this theme of "companionship".**

This emphasis on 'companioning' in Julian's founding Rule recognised that people 'catch' and sustain faith through supportive, friendly, tender, familial relationships, and through the sort of inspiring example that mutuality in companionship 'works' within people.

A later Church era would call the monogram's theology 'incarnational' for its recognition of the significance of human relationships and its acknowledgement that God's Word and God's face is revealed through human life and experience in ordinary life with ordinary people in the extraordinarily graced enterprise of being human together. The monogram's spirituality integrates faith and life in the wonderful affirmation that the ministry of generating human happiness is a worthy, holy enterprise and integral to the mission of God in the world, that God who wants to be in communion with us.

An American theologian, a Sr of Saint Joseph connected with Le Puy, France, gives some insight into this way of approaching the Mystery of God in the mystery of being human.

**Elizabeth Johnson CSJ, *She Who Is*, Crossroad, NY, 1992, p.14**

*"Because God is the creator, redeemer, lover of the world, God's own honour is at stake in human happiness. Wherever human beings are violated, diminished, or have their life drained away, God's glory is dimmed and dishonoured. Wherever human beings are quickened to fuller and richer life, God's glory is enhanced. A community of justice and peace [thriving among human beings] and God's glory increase in direct and not inverse proportion."*

**Companionable communion as a vision within the Rule written by Fr Founder, Julian Tenison Woods, and lived by Mother Mary of the Cross, is a lens through which all later Josephites can respond to God's call with one another and amongst others in contemporary times.**