

The Kennedy Dynasty Posting for Week One “The Patriarch”

Father Joseph, Emperor of Kennedy World, was one of the most successful business tycoons of the Twentieth Century—and surely one of the most unlikable. President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to him as a “S.O.B.,” and said “I never want to see that man again.” That opinion was widely shared. Joe was one of those men who wanted it all, regardless of how many he had to crush in the process. Rules were for suckers, honor was an anachronism, and Church traditions were for the womenfolk, not for rogue entrepreneurs like him. He strode across the Hollywood movie industry of the 1920s, Wall Street, and Democratic Party politics like some Nietzschean giant, making a fortune along the way. Fortune magazine once calculated his wealth as between \$200 and \$400 million dollars, making him one of the ten wealthiest men in the country. But such success was accompanied by a growing hubris, and a dangerous sense of invulnerability in the man known as “the boss.” Fantastic wealth often leads to folly, and such was the case with Joe. He never learned to curb his tongue, and made many powerful enemies as he clawed his way to the top of W.A.S.P. society. An unabashed appeaser and anti-Semite during the late 1930s, Joe openly predicted the impending victory of fascism in Europe, and the death of democracy at home. As such, he scuppered his chances of making it to the White House. After Pearl Harbor, no one wanted to hear such Cassandra-like pronouncements from a presidential aspirant. After shooting himself in the foot with his many gloomy prognostications of a totalitarian future for America, Joe shifted his own political ambitions and placed them on the shoulders of his sons. When his first born Joseph Jr. was killed in the war, son number two Jack was next man up. Joe confidently engineered an open path to the White House for this charming World War II hero (an image Joe massaged and magnified into a major political asset) whom he promised to sell to American voters “like soap-flakes.” Using all his public-relations savvy (“It’s not *what* you are, but what people *think* you are that counts” was his mantra) young Jack first wins a seat in congress in 1946, the Senate in 1952, and the highest Office in the land in 1960. With his third son Bobby in Jack’s cabinet, and his fourth in the Senate, it looked as if Joe’s dreams were well on their way to fruition. A true dynasty was in the making. But then, of course, the tide turned. Call it karma, if you will, or perhaps it was just bad luck. But in a span of eight years, Joe would be struck down with a paralyzing stroke, live to see two of his boys murdered, and a third self-destruct at Chappaquiddick. This is the stuff of Greek Tragedy, and many snarky observers said “It couldn’t have happened to a nicer guy.”

In fairness, it should be pointed out that Joe wasn’t all bad. Only cartoon figures are completely one-dimensional. He adored his children, and would do anything to support them. A large part of his maniacal financial acquisitiveness was designed to set up his brood for the good life. However, Joe wouldn’t tolerate slackers: he didn’t want to see

his offspring act like spoiled aristocratic brats, whiling away degenerate lives in sybaritic indulgence. No, Kennedys were *born* for public service, and he insisted that they make something of themselves. “To whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48)” could have been his family motto. To his credit, Jack’s magnificent “Ask not” address was a true reflection of the Kennedy spirit at its best.