

Solemnity of St. Joseph

Simon Fraser University

19 March 2014

Dear Father Fernando, students and brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

I am very grateful to Father Fernando and to the Catholic Chaplaincy here at SFU for their kind invitation to be with you to celebrate this Mass on the feast of St. Joseph. I am especially thankful for the presence of CCO on campus and their mission of evangelizing university students. So many of you are labouring so zealously in the Lord's Vineyard here! It is a great testimony to your faith in the Lord that, despite all the distractions of university life, you come to this chapel celebrate the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This place is a centre of spiritual respite in the midst of your often harried life. And so, it is good, very good, for us to be here together.

St. Joseph

Now allow me to say a few words about the man of the hour, the one whose feast the Church is celebrating today: St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Guardian of Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. St. Joseph is also the patron of the universal Church and of Canada, and our biggest shrine is dedicated to him, the Oratory in Montreal, which some of you might have visited.

God entrusted to Joseph his two greatest loves: his only Son, to

care for him as a child and young man; and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to care for her as his spouse. That humble carpenter of Nazareth did not disappoint the trust God placed in him. To the very end of his earthly life he showed himself to be a “faithful steward,” tending in a manly way for his family and carrying out all that the Lord had asked of him.¹

The Gospel

Now let’s take a look at today’s Gospel. Joseph and Mary were in Nazareth but were not yet living together. In the meantime, Mary, after having welcomed the Angel’s announcement, was with child by the power of the Holy Spirit. When Joseph realized this, he was bewildered: the child was not his and he could not imagine that Mary would bear a child out of wedlock. Despite his confusion and inability to understand, he seeks to do the will of God. He is ready for the most radical renunciation. He chooses what for him is an enormous sacrifice: “Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly” (Mt 1:19).

We need to meditate on these words in order to understand the great trial that Joseph had to endure in the days preceding Jesus’ birth. It was a trial similar to the sacrifice of Abraham, when God asked him for his son Isaac (cf. Gen 22): to give up what was most precious, the person most beloved.

¹ Cf. Blessed John Paul II, Homily (19 March 1987), 4.

But, just as in the case of Abraham, the Lord intervened: he found the faith he was looking for and he opened up a different path, a path of love and of happiness. “Joseph, son of David” he says, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:20).

This Gospel passage reveals to us the greatness of St. Joseph’s heart and soul. He was already following a good plan for his life, but God was reserving another plan for him, a greater mission. Joseph was a man who listened to God’s voice. He was deeply sensitive to his inscrutable will; he was a man attentive to the messages that came to him from the depths of his heart and from on high.

Joseph did not persist in following his own plan for his life; he did not allow the bitterness of disappointment to poison his soul. Rather, he was ready to make himself available to the news that, in a such a bewildering way, was being presented to him. And thus, he became even freer and greater. By accepting himself according to God’s design, Joseph fully finds himself. His freedom to renounce his own plans challenges us and show us the way.²

The best way for us to venerate Joseph as one of the Church’s greatest saints is to imitate his virtues: to live as Joseph lived. Two of these I would like to highlight: the trust of Joseph and his silence.

² Cf. Francis, Angelus (22 December 2013).

The Trust of Joseph

Although the first reading from the second book of Samuel which we heard does not speak explicitly of Joseph, it does teach us a good deal about him. The prophet Nathan, in obedience to God's command, tells King David: "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body" (2 Sam 7:12). David accepts that he will die before seeing the fulfilment of this promise, which will come to pass only after his death.

What we see here is a profound truth: seeing the fruits of one's labours is not always granted by God. Parents quite rightly desire to give the best of themselves to their children, and they want to see them achieve success. David puts his trust in God for what he will not see come to pass.

In the same way, Joseph trusts God. Throughout all of history, Joseph is the man who gives God the greatest display of trust, even in the face of the astonishing news of Mary's pregnancy.³

What was said of Mary by her cousin Elizabeth, we can say also of Joseph: "Blessed are you who believed" (Lk 2:45). Yes, Joseph trusted in the mysterious plan that divine Providence had prepared for him. In today's Second Reading, the Liturgy compares Joseph's faith to that of Abraham, the one whom St. Paul calls our father in faith (cf. Rom 4:16-

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Yaoundé (19 March 2009).

18). Even though old and with his virility spent, Abraham trusted in God, against all evidence, that he would be the father of many nations. Joseph is heir to that faith: he had a simple, humble trust that God would be faithful to him.

The Church holds Joseph up for our veneration as the believer who was completely open to following God's will – a will, I might say, that it was not always easy for Joseph to understand, in the same way it is for us.

The Silence of Joseph

How long Joseph lived, how many years he laboured as a carpenter, Scripture doesn't tell us. He would not live to see his foster son leave home for his ministry, to witness his miracles with awe. He would not weep at his Crucifixion nor rejoice at the tomb on Easter. Joseph simply carried on day after day, carrying out his responsibilities faithfully and sacrificing the reward of seeing the fruit of his labour; that is, he was denied a father's joy in seeing the success of a child launched upon the world.

The silence of both Scripture and Tradition concerning the end of Joseph's earthly pilgrimage is meaningful. This father leaves as his legacy his silence. Indeed, not one word of his is recorded in the Gospels. Joseph makes no noise at all. Not a single word.

Joseph's silence is steeped in contemplation of the mystery of God

in an attitude of total availability to the divine will. In other words, his silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart and which guides his every thought and action. He prayed by listening.

Joseph was a quiet, self-effacing yet strong and gentle man. He would not fit comfortably into *People Magazine*. Even if, like Joseph, we are not likely to appear there either, today we are required to keep a resume, tout ourselves and our accomplishments, assert our rights so as not to be anyone's doormat. Ours is a time of push and shove.

Can today's celebration lead us to consider such countercultural practices as silence, gentleness and patience? Let us allow ourselves to be "filled" with St Joseph's silence! In a world that is often too noisy, that encourages neither recollection nor listening to God's voice, we are in such deep need of it.⁴ Just think how often do we speak, not only before we have listened, but to avoid listening in the first place.

Conclusion

Let us honour Joseph today by imitating his example.

This morning we pray during this Eucharist that the powerful intercession of St. Joseph will strengthen us in this time of Lent to trust God more completely and listen to him more attentively.

⁴ Benedict XVI, Angelus (18 December 2005).

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