

The Advent of Saint Joseph

4th Sunday of Advent (A) - Mt 1:18-24

Ave Maria Catholic Church, December 18, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us to contemplate the “yes” of Saint Joseph.

The Eternal Son of God was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, not by the action of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the angel proclaims to Joseph: *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us.’”* (Mt 1: 22-23).

That is the sign of the Messiah. A Virgin conceives and bears a son: God with us! God could have chosen a different path. In his omnipotence, God could have sanctified us through other means. However, this was his plan of redemption: a Virgin conceived and bore a son, the Emmanuel, *God-with-us*.

God not only chose Mary, the mother of Christ but God also chose Joseph to be the custodian of the most beautiful mystery of love. God chose Joseph to be the protector of God’s plan of redemption. God chose Joseph to be the head of the holy family, the chaste husband of Mary, and the guardian of Jesus.

Who is Joseph? Joseph is the just man.

Saint Matthew tells us that Joseph was *a just man, a righteous man* (Mt 1:19). In biblical language, this means one who is adorned with all the virtues. Saint Matthew emphasizes the justice of Saint Joseph when he describes the perplexity that tormented him when Mary is “found to be with child.”

Mary did not feel she had the right to inform Joseph of the mysterious event. Joseph learned that his wife was with child, and knowing that he himself was not the natural father of the child, his mind was in a state of agonizing confusion.

Joseph was convinced of Mary's innocence. He did not believe that he had an obligation to accuse Mary to the authorities.

We can certainly think that Joseph prayed and waited. And since he did not have other clear signs, he was ready to leave Mary quietly. However, God responded to his faith: *“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home,”* (Mt 1: 20).

We can imagine the joy that filled St Joseph's heart. The angel's words confirmed his vocation to be the husband of Mary and the custodian of the love of God who fulfills his plan of redemption.

What is Joseph's role in the plan of redemption?

He had to be the father figure of the holy family. This is what we learn from our reading of the gospels, especially in Saint Luke's second chapter, where Saint Joseph is called the father of Jesus, as Mary is called his mother.

Recording the presentation of the Child in the temple, Saint Luke writes: "*And when His parents brought in the child Jesus,*" (Lk 2:27). After the prophecy of Simeon, the narrative continues: "*The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him,*" (Lk 2: 33).

Later, in the same chapter, we hear that "*each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,*" (Lk 2: 41). Then, when Jesus went up to the temple at the age of twelve, noticing that the boy was missing, Joseph and Mary searched for three days until they discovered him in the temple. On that occasion, the gospel relates the words of Mary to Jesus: "*Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety,*" (Lk 2: 48).

All these passages reveal that Joseph exercised paternal rights over the child Jesus. That is the role announced by the angel. This is what we heard in today's gospel: "*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.*" (Mt 1: 20-21).

Naming the child was considered, according to the Jewish tradition, as a special prerogative of the father: it was an exercise of paternal authority. And so, eight days after His birth, on the occasion of the circumcision, as Joseph directed, the child was called Jesus.

We also learn from the gospels that Jesus was obedient to Joseph as to a father. After the finding of Jesus in the Temple, Jesus went down with his parents and was subject to them. (Lk 2: 51). Jesus chose to be subject to His earthly father. Jesus' humble subjection gives us an example of submission to lawfully constituted authority, and it also emphasizes the dignity of Joseph, whom Jesus obeyed.

Let us go to Joseph!

If God chose Joseph to be the protector of Jesus on earth, why do we hesitate to have him as our protector? Saint Teresa of Avila, the great apostle of devotion to Saint Joseph, writes in the sixth chapter of her *Autobiography*:

I took the glorious St. Joseph for my advocate and protector and commended myself earnestly to him . . . God seems to have given other saints power to help us in particular circumstances, but I know from experience that this glorious Saint Joseph helps in each and every need. Since on earth, Our Lord was subject to this man who was called His father, so now in heaven, He still does all that Joseph asks.

Let us present our needs to Joseph, the earthly custodian of Jesus, and we will know from experience that those words of Teresa of Avila are true. Amen