Weekdays of Advent: December 18th

Gospel text (*Mt* 1:18-24): Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “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.” (…).

St. Joseph, the spouse of Mary and Foster father of Jesus

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(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today, we fix our gaze on the figure of St. Joseph. St. Luke presents the Virgin Mary as "betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David". Yet, the one who gives the most importance to the adoptive father of Jesus is St. Matthew, who emphasizes that, thanks to him, the Child was legally introduced into the lineage of David, fulfilling the Scriptures, in which the Messiah was prophesized as the "son of David.

But the role of Joseph could not be reduced to this legal aspect. He is the model of a "righteous" man, who in perfect harmony with his spouse welcomes the Son of God made man and watches over his human growth. Among other aspects a particular importance is to be given to his silence, which is permeated with the contemplation of the mystery of God, in an attitude of total availability to the divine will.

—Jesus, you learned from your "father" Joseph —on a human level— the intense interior life, which is the condition of authentic righteousness, the "interior righteousness" which you taught to your disciples.

Saint Joseph, just man, lives the Law like “Gospel”

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Today, Matthew tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. According to the prevailing Jewish law, betrothal established a juridical bond between the two parties, so that Mary could be called "Joseph’s wife", even though he had not yet taken her into his home… But Joseph noticed that Mary was expecting a

son.

Joseph does not know the origin of the child. He has to assume that Mary has broken their engagement and —according to the law— he must dismiss her. He has a choice between a public juridical act (he can bring Mary before a court) and a private form: Joseph decides on the latter option "in order not to put her to shame. As a "just" man, he tries to interpret and apply the law correctly. He does it with love; he does not want to publicly expose Mary to the ignominy. He wishes her well even in the hour of his great disappointment. He lives the law as 'Gospel'. He seeks the path that brings law and love into a unity.

—Saint Joseph is inwardly prepared for the new, unexpected and humanly unbelievable message that he will receive from God.

Joseph's capacity to perceive the divine (an angel appears to him in a dream)

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Today, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream, but a dream that is real and reveals what is real. This shows us an essential quality of the figure of Saint Joseph: his capacity to perceive the divine and his ability to discern. Only a man who is inwardly watchful for the divine, only someone with a real sensitivity for God can receive God's message in this way.

The message conveyed to Joseph is overwhelming, and it demands extraordinarily courageous faith. Can it be that God has acted in this way toward a human creature? Joseph is inwardly considering the right way to respond to Mary's pregnancy. And now Joseph is explicitly addressed as "son of David", which also serves to indicate the task assigned to him in this event: as heir to the Davidic promise, he is to bear witness to God's faithfulness.

—"Do not be afraid": By means of this same exhortation from the angel, Joseph is drawn into the mystery of God's Incarnation.