

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.” 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.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home”

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Today, the liturgy of the Word invites us to think of the wonderful example St. Joseph gives us. He was extremely sensitive towards Mary, his betrothed.

There is no doubt that both were excellent people, in love with each other like no other couple. However, it is plain to see that the Almighty wanted their love to go through some very demanding circumstances.

Saint John Paul II wrote: “Christianity is a surprise from a God who has taken sides with his creature”. As a matter of fact, He has taken the initiative: To come to

this world He has not waited for us to deserve it. He proposes His initiative; He does not impose it upon us: It is as though God asked us for “permission”. To Mary He proposed —never imposed anything! — the vocation of being the Mother of God: “He, who had the power to create everything from nothing, had refused to rebuild what had been desecrated if Mary had not agreed to it” (Saint Anselm).

But God, not only is asking us for permission, He also wants us to take part in His plans, to make a heroic contribution. And so it was for Mary and Joseph. In fact the Christ-child needed parents. Even more so: He needed his parent's heroism, for they had to go to extremes to defend the life of the “little Redeemer”.

What is really beautiful is that Mary revealed only a few details of her childbearing: Such an important fact is reported in just two verses (cf. Lk 2:6-7). On the other hand, she was more explicit when speaking of Joseph's thoughtfulness towards her. The fact was that “before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:19), and in order not to risk discrediting her, he would have preferred to disappear discretely and to renounce her love (something that was socially unfavorable to him). Thus, before the law of charity had been proclaimed, Saint Joseph was already practicing it: Mary (and his loving attentions with her) was his law.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer. The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent” (Saint Bernard)

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“Let us allow ourselves to be ‘filled’ with St Joseph's silence! We are in such deep need of it! During this season of preparation for Christmas, let us cultivate inner recollection” (Benedict XVI)

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“The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility. ‘That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’,

said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée (Mt 1:20). The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son’ (Is 7:14)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 497)