Fourth Sunday of Advent (A)

Gospel text (*Mt* 1:18-24): 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.

“When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him”

Fr. Edson RODRIGUES
(Pesqueira, Pernambuco, Brazil)

Today, the Advent liturgy presents us with Joseph, who receives a mission from God: The Word of God, who will be born of the Virgin, will also be placed under his paternal care. The prophet Isaiah had announced some 700 years earlier: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Is 7:14). Perplexed and unable to understand such a great mystery, Joseph — God-fearing, and a “just and good” man — had decided to leave Mary quietly and allow her to return to her parents. But in the words of the messenger, he finds the reason to abandon this decision and to embrace the mystery and the plans of God: “Do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home!” (Mt 1:20). The Holy Spirit, who in Mary brought forth the incarnate Word, gives meaning to and confirms what the angel told Joseph, who receives the great mission of naming and caring for the God-Child conceived in the virginal womb of a young woman from Nazareth (cf. Mt 1:20-21).

Saint Bernardine of Siena says that “when divine Providence chooses someone for a particular grace or an exalted state, it also grants that person all the gifts needed to fulfill the mission.” And so Joseph,

freed from fear and anxiety, became a collaborator in the work of the Incarnation, fully equipped to assume this honorable and demanding mission.

Today we live amid fears and uncertainties, in situations that sometimes discourage us and make us want to abandon ship, seeking escape routes as solutions to difficult realities. But in the midst of silent and contemplative prayer, the Lord also says to us: “Do not be afraid!” (cf. Mt 14:27), encouraging us to accept His designs with confidence and determination.

In our own time, Pope Leo XIV encourages us: “God loves us all, and evil will not prevail. We are all in God’s hands and, without fear, united to the hand of God and to one another, let us move forward.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “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)

- “Saint Joseph was the model of a ‘just’ man who, in perfect harmony with his wife, welcomed the Son of God made man in an attitude of total availability to the divine desires.” (Benedict XVI)

- “‘God sent forth his Son’ (Gal 4:4), but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free co-operation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, ‘a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary’ (Lk 1:26-27). The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 488)

Other comments

“When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him”

Fr. Pere GRAU i Andreu
(Les Planes, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the liturgy of the Word invites us to consider and admire St. Joseph's character, a truly good man. About Mary, God's Mother, it has been said that she was blessed among women (cf. Lk 1:42). About Joseph it has been written he was a righteous man (cf. Mt 1:19).

As people made after God's image and semblance, we all owe our individual identity to God the Father,

Creator of Heaven and Earth, with actual and radical freedom. And as a response to that freedom we can glorify God, as He deserves, or we can also make, out of ourselves, something quite unpleasant to God's eyes.
We have no doubt that Joseph, through his job and personal commitment to his familial and social surroundings, won our Creator's “Heart”, by considering him a man to be trusted in the collaboration of human Redemption through His Son, made a man as we are.

Let us therefore learn from St. Joseph his allegiance —already proven from the very beginning— and his good behavior during the rest of his life —closely— correlated to Jesus and Mary.

We make him patron and mediator of all fathers, whether biological or not, that in our world must help their sons to provide a similar response to his. We make him patron of the Church, as an entity intimately linked to his Son, and we keep on hearing Mary's words when she finds that the Child Jesus was “lost” in the Temple: “Your father and I…” (Lk 2:48).

Therefore, with Mary, our Mother, we find Joseph as the father. St. Teresa of Avila wrote: “I took for my advocate and comforter the glorious Saint Joseph, and commended myself fervently to him (…). I do not remember at any time having asked him for anything which he did not grant”.

Exceptional father for those of us who have heard the call of our Lord to fill up, through the priestly ministry, the place Jesus Christ has handed over to us to carry on with his Church. —O glorious St. Joseph! Do protect our families, our communities, all those hearing the call to vocational priesthood… and let us hope there will be many of us.