March 19th: Solemnity of Saint Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Gospel text (*Mt* 1:16.18-21.24a): Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

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

“His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph”

Abbé Marc VAILLOT
(París, France)

Today, the Church invites us to contemplate the kind figure of the Holy Patriarch. Chosen by God and by Mary, Joseph lived like all of us between sorrows and joys. We must look at any of his actions with special interest. We will always learn from him. We should put ourselves in his shoes to imitate him, for in this way we will be able to respond, as he did, to the divine will.

Everything in his modest, humble and ordinary life is luminous. For this reason, famous mystics (Teresa of Avila, Hildegarde of Bingen, Therese of Lisieux), great Founders (Benedict, Bruno, Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, Josemaría Escrivá) and so many saints of all times encourage us to treat him and love him to follow in the footsteps of the Patron of the Church. It is the shortcut to sanctify the intimacy of our homes, putting us in the heart of the Holy Family, to lead a life of prayer and to sanctify our work.

Thanks to his constant union with Jesus and Mary — that's the key! —Joseph can simply live the extraordinary, when God asks him to do so, as in the Gospel scene in today’s Mass. He performs, above all, ordinary tasks, which are never irrelevant as they ensure a successful and a happy life, which leads to

the heavenly Beatitude.

Pope Francis writes: “Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Faith, love, hope: these are the axes of the life of Saint Joseph and of all Christian life. The dedication of Saint Joseph appears woven from that interweaving of faithful love, of loving faith, of trusting hope.” (Saint Josemaría)

- “In the Gospels, Saint Joseph appears as a strong and courageous man, a working man, yet in his heart we see great tenderness, which is not the virtue of the weak but rather a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love. We must not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness.” (Francis)

- The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death. In the litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: "From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord"; to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us "at the hour of our death" in the Hail Mary; and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1,014)

Other comments

«Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife»

Mons. Ramon MALLA i Call Emeritus Bishop of Lleida
(Lleida, Spain)

Today, the Church celebrates the solemnity of Saint Joseph, Mary's husband. It is like a joyful interlude within Lent's austerity. But, the joy of this feast should not be an obstacle to our advancing along the path of our personal conversion, as preceptive in Lenten time.

He who, looking ahead, tries hard to accommodate his life to God's plan for us, is very fortunate. And so is he who, looking around him, tries always to properly interpret others' actions by saving their good reputation. In today's Gospel Saint Joseph is presented to us in both aspects of goodness.

God has over each one of us a love plan, inasmuch as «God is love» (1Jn 4:8). But, at times, the hardships of life make it difficult for us to discover it. And then, logically, we grumble and we reluctantly accept to carry our crosses.

Saint Joseph must have gone through a difficult time when realizing Mary «before they had lived together, was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit» (Mt 1:18). He was planning to divorce her, but «in all secrecy» (Mt 1:19). And, at the same time, when «an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream» (Mt 1:20), saying he had to become the legal father, he accepted it right away «and took his wife to his home» (Mt 1:24).

Lent is a good time to find out what God expects from us and strengthen our wish to carry it out. Let us beg God «through the intercession of Mary's husband», as we shall read in the Collect of the Mass, that we may advance in our path of conversion by imitating Saint Joseph in his acceptance of God's will and in the exercise of charity with our fellow men. At the same time, let us keep in mind that if «all the Church is indebted to the Virgin Mary, as we received Christ through her, after her, Saint Joseph should certainly be who mostly deserves our gratitude and reverence» (Saint Bernardino of Siena).