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Meditations: Fifth Sunday of Saint Joseph (with audio)

Fifth reflection for the seven Sundays of Saint Joseph. The topics are: Joseph welcomes God's plans; discovering God in daily events; and the divine logic of God's plans.

Joseph welcomes God's plans

Discovering God in daily events

The divine logic of God's plans

ORDINARY LIFE is full of events and decisions that determine the paths we take, some of them of great

importance for our future. If we normally need to ponder our choices in God's presence, it is all the more necessary when faced with especially weighty decisions and events.

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife” (*Mt* 1:20), the angel told the patriarch.

The Gospel of Saint Matthew tells us that Joseph pondered what was happening in his prayer in order to decide how to act. Hence we see him as “a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment.”[1]

Our Lady conceived Christ by faith, since she accepted God's plans and believed that the words spoken by the angel would be fulfilled. We could say the same of Saint Joseph,

who also accepted what God communicated to him. The holy patriarch trusted what was announced to him and became personally involved in it. He made God's plan his own, trusting that it was good not only for mankind in general, but also for his own happiness. We could say that a successful work of art is "faithful" to the artist's original plan. But God enters into a relationship with creatures who possess genuine freedom, so the "art" lies in learning to accept his plans and recognize their goodness for us and for those around us.

Saint Joseph's life unfolds amid ordinary situations: in his work, in his family, in all his daily life. And it is there that he learns to welcome God's gift and help make it a reality. We can ask the holy patriarch to renew our outlook and our heart, so

we are always ready to welcome God's gifts and plans.

WE ARE ALL called to form homes that, like Christ's, have their doors wide open to others. Welcoming others means having the courage to receive them with tenderness, to recognize what is good in them, to encourage them and take the initiative in seeking their good. It means having our heart always open to their needs. Saint Joseph "is certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude."[2]

The holy patriarch is a faithful man who opens himself first of all to God's voice. But he also accepts the lights and shadows of the situation in which he finds himself, and recognizes the challenges the world and the people around him pose to

his mission. “Here, once again, we encounter that Christian realism which rejects nothing that exists. Reality, in its mysterious and irreducible complexity, is the bearer of existential meaning, with all its lights and shadows. Thus, the Apostle Paul can say: ‘We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God’ (*Rom 8:28*). To which Saint Augustine adds, ‘even that which is called evil (*etiam illud quod malum dicitur*).’ In this greater perspective, faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad.”[3]

Saint Josemaría often remarked that Joseph never stopped looking for the best way to carry out God’s plans, which he made his own. “He puts his human experience at the service of faith. When he returns from Egypt, ‘learning that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as ruler of Judea, he was afraid to go there.’

In other words, he had learned to work within the divine plan. And to confirm that he was doing the right thing, Joseph received an instruction to return to Galilee.”[4] In our efforts to carry out the mission God has entrusted to us, we will encounter both successes and setbacks. But even amid setbacks we can discover God’s voice consoling, instructing, and enlightening us. “In this way, we become open to a deeper meaning. Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from stony ground.”[5]

“LOOK WHERE Christ is born,” Saint Josemaría advised us. “Everything there bespeaks unconditioned self-giving. Joseph, whose life is a succession of hardships mixed with

the joy of being Jesus' guardian, risks his honor, the serene continuity of his work, his tranquil future: his entire existence is ready availability for whatever God may ask ... In Bethlehem no one reserves anything for himself. There we hear nothing of my reputation, my time, my work, my ideas, my preferences, my money. There everything is placed at the service of God's marvelous adventure with humanity, the Redemption." [6] To accept events and other people as the holy patriarch did, we need to abandon ourselves in God's hands. When our trust is placed in God and not in ourselves, we will be able to draw lessons from everyone and everything, even from our mistakes, because behind them we can always glimpse God's hand. "The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that *explains*, but *accepts*. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to

glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning.”[7]

Saint Joseph didn't rebel against the angel's announcement, but rather strove to do all he could to carry out what he saw as best for Jesus. When seeking lodging for the Child's birth, he didn't complain at each place where they were turned away. Nor did he stubbornly insist on remaining in Bethlehem when he learned of Herod's threat, however unjust it was to be forced to set out for Egypt. As Saint Josemaría points out, in each of these events the holy patriarch “learned little by little that supernatural plans have a divine logic which at times upsets human plans.”[8] So we need to ask for the wisdom of Jesus' earthly father, to learn to understand this divine logic and welcome the people and events around us as gifts from God.

- [1] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 4.
- [2] *Ibid.*
- [3] *Ibid.*
- [4] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 42.
- [5] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 4.
- [6] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, February 14, 1974, no. 2.
- [7] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 4.
- [8] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 42.
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