

Saint Joseph's Four Dreams

In his 26 January general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on the role of Saint Joseph in Christian life, speaking about his four dreams in the Gospel.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to focus on the figure of St Joseph as a *man who dreams*. In the Bible, as in the

cultures of ancient peoples, dreams were considered a means by which God revealed himself. The dream symbolises the spiritual life of each of us, that inner space that each of us is called to cultivate and guard, where God manifests himself and often speaks to us. But we must also say that within each of us there is not only the voice of God: there are many other voices. For example, the voices of our fears, the voices of past experiences, the voices of hopes; and there is also the voice of the evil one who wants to deceive and confuse us. It is therefore important to be able to recognise the voice of God in the midst of other voices. Joseph demonstrates that he knows how to cultivate the necessary silence and, above all, how to make the right decisions before the Word that the Lord addresses to him inwardly. Today, it will be good for us to take up the four dreams in the Gospel which have him as their protagonist,

in order to understand how to place ourselves before God's revelation. The Gospel tells us of four dreams of Joseph.

In the first dream (cf. *Mt* 1:18-25), the angel helps Joseph to resolve the drama that assails him when he learns of Mary's pregnancy: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (vv. 20-21). And his response was immediate: "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (v. 24). Life often puts us in situations that we do not understand and that seem to have no solution. Praying in these moments — this means letting the Lord show us the right thing to do. In fact, very often it is prayer that gives us the intuition of the way out. Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord never

allows a problem to arise without also giving us the help we need to deal with it. He does not cast us alone into the fire. He does not cast us among the beasts. No. When the Lord shows us a problem, or reveals a problem, he always gives us the intuition, the help, his presence, to get out of it, to resolve it.

And the second revealing dream of Joseph comes when the life of the child Jesus is in danger. The message is clear: “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him” (*Mt 2:13*). Joseph obeyed without hesitation: “He rose and took the child and his mother by night,” the Gospel says, “and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod” (vv. 14-15). In life we all experience dangers that threaten our existence or the existence of those we love. In

these situations, praying means listening to the voice that can give us the same courage as Joseph, to face difficulties without succumbing.

In Egypt, Joseph waited for a sign from God that he could return home, and this is the content of the third dream. The angel reveals to him that those who wanted to kill the Child are dead and orders him to leave with Mary and Jesus and return to his homeland (cf. Mt 2:19-20). Joseph “rose” the Gospel says, “and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel” (v. 21). But on the return journey, “when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there” (v. 22). Here then is the fourth revelation: “Being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth” (vv. 22-23). Fear is also part of life and it too needs our

prayer. God does not promise us that we will never have fear, but that, with His help, it will not be the criterion for our decisions. Joseph experiences fear, but God also guides him through it. The power of prayer brings light into situations of darkness.

I am thinking at this moment of so many people who are crushed by the weight of life and can no longer hope or pray. May St Joseph help them to open themselves to dialogue with God in order to find light, strength, and peace.

And I am thinking, too, of parents in the face of their children's problems: Children with many illnesses, children who are sick, even with permanent maladies. — how much pain is there! — parents who see different sexual orientations in their children; how to deal with this and accompany their children and not

hide in an attitude of condemnation. Parents who see their children leaving because of an illness, and also — even sadder, we read about it every day in the newspapers — children who get into mischief and end up in a car accident. Parents who see their children not progressing in school and don't know how... So many parental problems. Let's think about it: how to help them. And to these parents I say: don't be scared. Yes, there is pain. A lot. But think of the Lord, think about how Joseph solved the problems and ask Joseph to help you. Never condemn a child.

It fills me with compassion — it did in Buenos Aires — when I got on the bus and it passed in front of the prison. There was a queue of people who had to go in to visit the prisoners. And there were mothers there. And I was so touched by this mother who, faced with the problem

of a son who has made a mistake and is in prison, doesn't leave him alone, puts her face forward and accompanies him. This courage; the courage of a father and mother who always, always accompany their children. Let us ask the Lord to give this courage to all fathers and mothers, as he gave it to Joseph. And to pray, no? Pray that the Lord will help us in these moments.

Prayer, however, is never an abstract or purely internal gesture, like these spiritualist movements that are more gnostic than Christian. No, it's not that. Prayer is always inextricably linked to charity. It is only when we combine prayer with love, the love for children in the cases I just mentioned, or the love for our neighbour, that we are able to understand the Lord's messages. Joseph prayed, worked, and loved — three beautiful things for parents: to pray, to work, and to love — and

because of this he always received
what he needed to face life's trials.
Let us entrust ourselves to him and
to his intercession.

St Joseph, you are the man who
dreams,

teach us to recover the spiritual life
as the inner place where God
manifests Himself and saves us.

Remove from us the thought that
praying is useless;

help each one of us to correspond to
what the Lord shows us.

May our reasoning be illuminated by
the light of the Spirit,

our hearts encouraged by His
strength

and our fears saved by His mercy.
Amen.

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