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May 1: Saint Joseph the Worker

Gospel for May 1st, feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 13:54-58*)

And coming to his own country Jesus taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this

man get all this?” And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.”

And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

Commentary

Matthew's words in the Gospel for the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker highlight the surprise of Jesus' fellow countrymen. Although they have witnessed the extraordinary nature of his wisdom and deeds, they are scandalized and reject Him. Their reaction could be paraphrased like this: “But who does this man think he is?” “Why does he do these things, since he is just one of us?” The

passage mentions Joseph indirectly, referring to him as “the carpenter,” someone who carries out a common profession with nothing extraordinary about it. “How is it possible that his son now aspires to be what he is trying to show himself to be?”

Seeing their reaction, Jesus replies by making use of a popular saying: “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.” We too can fall prey to the blindness that prevents us from seeing, perhaps out of envy, the great qualities of those around us, and from recognizing what is truly extraordinary in what seems ordinary to us. And we can also be blinded by the pride of thinking that we know those around us very well by now, and value them only for what we think we see in them.

Trying to love those close to us brings with it a great difficulty: thinking that what is repeated frequently is something “ordinary,” that there is nothing extraordinary behind it. It is easy to get used to anything that we encounter frequently and see it with a jaundiced eye. In contrast, what is distant from us or infrequent is often seen as a guarantee of its greatness. But what is truly great is the most ordinary: the air we breathe constantly, the politeness of those who live alongside us, the work we do each day out of love. And this greatness can only be perceived by a big heart, by someone willing to accept as a “miracle of love” even the smallest things that are offered. We can all help bring about this “miracle,” a miracle that doesn’t depend on the “greatness” of what we do but on the love we put into it.

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