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Meditations: 18 December

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we await the Child Jesus' arrival at Christmas.

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- Saint Joseph, heaven on earth
- His mission alongside Mary and the Messiah
- With Mary and Jesus, every difficulty is overcome

“ALREADY IN THIS LIFE, you saw God face to face.” These words from the centuries-old hymn *Te Ioseph* give expression to our feelings when we reflect on the mission of the holy Patriarch.^[1] We can well ask Mary’s spouse to teach us to contemplate the Child Jesus’ face and to find there the love he comes to offer us.

But Saint Joseph’s joy here on earth was not exempt from shadows: *Before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18)*. Joseph reacted right away with the loyalty of a faithful man filled with love for God, and he made the decision to secretly send Mary away. Everything in this family is at the service of the divine plans, the fulfilment of God’s will. Saint Joseph suffered deeply. He didn’t understand what was happening, but he never doubted his spouse or God. He was “filled with the holy fear of living alongside such great

holiness.”^[2] An angel was sent to dissuade him and show him his role in the midst of his astonishment at what was happening: *Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Mt 1:20-21).*

It is easy to imagine Joseph's joy at this double announcement. The Messiah was already on earth and he was to watch over the Child and his blessed Mother. His happiness at recovering Mary was united to his immense joy at learning that the time had finally come. For a son of David, this news was the most eagerly awaited of all. The Savior was already among them. Joseph had never dreamt of such a great and unmerited fortune. His heart was filled with joy, although he still

wasn't sure how all this would come about.

BEFORE receiving the angel's announcement, the Holy Patriarch "was following a good plan for his life, but God was reserving another plan for him, a greater mission. Joseph was a man who always listened to the voice of God; he was deeply sensitive to his secret will, he was a man attentive to the messages that came to him from the depths of his heart and from on high ... Joseph thereby became even freer and greater. By accepting himself according to God's design, Joseph fully finds himself, beyond himself. His freedom to renounce even what is his, the possession of his very life, and his full interior availability to the will of God challenge us and show us the way."^[3] —

Joseph would probably have run to tell his spouse what had just been

revealed to him. Joseph is asked to welcome Mary and the Child into his home. It is as though God asked Joseph for permission to enter the world. We too want to welcome the mystery of God's love into our own home, into our heart. Jesus does not impose himself but comes asking for a space in our life. He asks us to give him shelter and offer him our company.

God asked Saint Joseph to welcome into his home the two most precious lives that have ever existed on earth. Mary's husband gratefully accepted the gift being offered him and God showed he never allows himself to be outdone in generosity. He constantly offers us his gifts too, both big and small, and asks us to make room there for Jesus and his mother.

Saint Josemaría was filled with joy when he contemplated the holy Patriarch's simplicity: "Saint Joseph

is so wonderful! He is the saint of selfless humility – with a permanent smile and a shrug of his shoulders.”^[4] —

SAINT JOSEPH must have often reflected on the great gift of having Jesus and Mary under his roof, and he will certainly have felt specially blessed. Seeing Mary and Jesus beside him made him realize at every moment how important his mission in life was. And they will have often told him what a good father he was.

But he had to confront many difficult moments, especially that day when Jesus stayed behind in the Temple without informing them. “This Gospel episode reveals the most authentic and profound vocation of the family: that is, to accompany each of its members on the path of the discovery of God and of the plan that he has prepared for them. Mary and Joseph taught Jesus primarily by

their example: in his parents he came to know the full beauty of faith, of love for God and for his Law, as well as the demands of justice, which is totally fulfilled in love (cf. *Rom* 13: 10). From them he learned that it is necessary first of all to do God's will, and that the spiritual bond is worth more than the bond of kinship.”^[5] —

When his parents find Jesus after three days, Joseph would have been consoled to realize that Mary too failed to understand it. Having Mary by his side was the solution to all his doubts and uncertainties. With Mary everything was easier.

What more could a man ask for on earth? Receiving such a special affection from a creature like Mary and having her always by his side was like being in heaven. What difference did it make whether he was walking through the desert fleeing with his family to Egypt or working day after day in the

workshop at Nazareth. Mary's smile sweetened everything.

We ask God that we may welcome his love as Mary and Joseph did. As Pope Francis said on Christmas night: "If your hands seem empty, if you think your heart is poor in love, this night is for you. *The grace of God has appeared*, to shine forth in your life. Accept it and the light of Christmas will shine forth in you."^[6] —

^[1] — *Tu vivens, Superis par, frueris Deo.* The hymn is used in the Vespers for the Solemnity of Saint Joseph and in the memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker.

^[2] — Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Bk. 4, d. 30, q. 2, a. 2, ad 5.

^[3] — Francis, Angelus, 22 December 2013.

[4] Cf. Andres Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, Vol. III, p. 526, note 170.

[5] Benedict XVI, Angelus, December 31, 2006.

[6] Francis, Homily, 24 December 2019.

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