

Meditations: Monday after the Epiphany

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of Christmastide.

- Saint Joseph's dream
- Docility and trust
- Guided by the divine plan

AN ANGEL OF THE LORD appeared to Joseph in a dream and said to him, *Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him* (Mt 2:13). As soon as the Magi set out on their return journey, the hired

assassins working for Herod prepare to seek out the Child, the King of the Jews, to put him to death. But God takes the initiative, and warns Joseph of the danger and orders him to flee to Egypt. But the rest, how to do so and the means, is left to Joseph's prudence. He is also told to be attentive for the voice of the angel, who will tell him when to return from that foreign country.

It is striking that God would speak to Joseph in a dream, since it seems that nothing can really be said or answered then. During a dream a person is helpless, powerless. We can recall that this is also how Adam received his wife: he awakes to the gift of a new companion and mission. In our human experience of sleep, one often dreams of doing beautiful deeds. We might think that Joseph must have been silent; but in reality, while sleeping, he is invited to freely

undertake the greatest dream: to be part of God's plans.

When he wakes up, Saint Joseph doesn't even wait for the morning to set out: *He rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt (Mt 2:14)*. The hardships involved must have been daunting. They had to leave their house in Bethlehem, perhaps at great sacrifice. Moreover, the length of the journey made it impossible for them to take with them everything they would need, and the demand for haste made it impossible to sell what was left over. The persecution of the child had not even begun, but Saint Joseph firmly believed the angel and set out on his journey. A faithful and prudent servant, the Patriarch listened to God's voice without looking for other, apparently more viable possibilities. He had reasons for judging the angel's indication to be unwise. Couldn't God's

omnipotence save the child in another way? Why should they take him to a foreign town where they knew no one? Joseph, however, trusts in God's word and acts on it.

THE JOURNEY OF THE HOLY FAMILY to Egypt could not have been a comfortable one: several days of travelling along inhospitable paths on the back of a donkey, with the fear of being overtaken in the escape; with tiredness and thirst, with an uncertain future, and doubts for which there were no answers. It is moving to see them escape with full confidence in God's plans. Saint Augustine reminds us that God "knows better than man what is best at each moment, what He has to provide, take away, reduce, increase, lessen, and when He has to do it."^[1] As we see in Saint Joseph, it is in our ordinary life that we can recognise God's voice; in our daily encounters with Him in our times of prayer; in

the events of each day and in the people around us; also in the setbacks and obstacles that crop up on our path. By considering Saint Joseph's attitude and his willingness to act in accord with God's plans, we will find our eagerness to listen to God's voice grow.

If we respond to each of God's inspirations by saying: "Do you want it, Lord?... Then I want it too!"^[2] we too will be filled with the same trust we see in Saint Joseph. *Like clay in the potter's hand (Jer 18:6)*, we will place ourselves in God's hands to transform our hearts and enable us to undertake the great divine work He is dreaming of for us.

AFTER SPENDING SOME TIME IN EGYPT, an angel of the Lord appeared again in a dream to Joseph and said to him: *Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's*

life are dead (Mt 2:20). The time had come to leave the land that had offered them shelter and return to the land God had chosen as the dwelling place for the Messiah. And Joseph *rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel* (Mt 2:21). Thus *what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son”* (Mt 2:15), was fulfilled.

Joseph puts his intellect, will and heart at God's service, with a personal sense of responsibility: *hearing that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there* (Mt 2:22). “He has learned to work within the divine plan,” Saint Josemaría says, “and, in confirmation that God does in fact want what Joseph has surmised, he receives an indication to go to Galilee. That is how Saint Joseph's faith was: full, confident, complete, shown in an effective

surrender to God's will and an intelligent obedience. And, together with faith, charity, love. His faith fuses into Love: with the love of God who was fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, Jacob and Moses; with the tenderness of a husband towards Mary; and with fatherly tenderness for Jesus. Faith and love in the hope of the great mission which God, making use too of him – a carpenter from Galilee – was beginning in the world: the redemption of mankind.”^[3]

Sometimes God can also give us suggestions in what seem to us dreams. He speaks to us in a low voice and leaves us room to adapt ourselves freely to his plans. By following his inspirations we can bring all our talents into play. God doesn't impose himself on us, but “asks of us an intelligent obedience. And we should feel responsible for helping others with the light of our

understanding.”^[4] Let us ask Saint Joseph and our Lady to teach us to prepare our hearts to grasp these divine calls and to respond with prompt and intelligent docility.

^[1] Saint Augustine, *Letter 138*, 1, 5.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, 762.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 42.

^[4] *Ibid.*, 17.