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Meditations: Fourth Sunday of Saint Joseph

Fourth reflection for the seven Sundays of Saint Joseph. The topics are: Joseph's obedience; being recollected in order to listen to God; Saint Joseph's obedience anticipates Jesus' obedience.

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Joseph's obedience

*Being recollected in order to listen to
God*

Saint Joseph's obedience anticipates Jesus' obedience

AFTER THE ANGEL'S Annunciation to Mary, Christian tradition points to a similar annunciation to Joseph: "Son of David, do not be afraid 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). The holy patriarch "was a 'just man' (*Mt* 1:19), ever ready to carry out God's will as revealed to him in the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:22.27.39) and through four dreams (cf. *Mt* 1:20; 2:13.19.22)."[1] The fact that Joseph listened to the divine plan in his sleep and quickly put it into practice shows us how he was always ready to do God's will; it shows how the contemplative life should lead us to discover God the Father's loving plans and generously unite ourselves to them. This is what obedience to

God requires. In fact, the meaning of the word “obey” is precisely the capacity to listen intelligently to what another person is trying to tell us (from Latin: *ob audire*, “listen to”). It is God himself who informs Joseph of the divine marvel of his merciful plan of salvation.

Obedience, then, is far from blind compliance. A prerequisite for obedience, in all its richness, is to know how to listen with an open spirit: only a person who thinks can be obedient. Saint Josemaría reflected on this truth in a homily in 1963: “Joseph’s faith does not falter, he obeys quickly and to the letter. To understand this lesson better, we should remember that Joseph’s faith is active, that his docility is not a passive submission to the course of events. For the Christian’s faith has nothing whatever to do with conformity, inertia or lack of initiative. Joseph entrusted himself

unreservedly to the care of God, but he always reflected on events and so was able to reach that level of understanding of the works of God which is true wisdom.”[2]

The pages of the Old Testament show us God speaking in dreams on several occasions: for instance, to Adam, Jacob, and Samuel. These were people who wanted to be in constant dialogue with God, and who let Him speak to them in every circumstance in their lives.

WE KNOW THAT GOD speaks to us, that He is close to us and calls us unceasingly to unite ourselves to his Love with our whole being, in very specific situations. God speaks to us every day, at every moment, through the events and people around us. In everything that happens to us we can discover part of the divine plan that we each are called to carry out. At least twice a day, according to Jewish

practice, Jesus prayed the *Shema Israel*, a prayer that begins: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God” (*Deut* 6:4). Then as now, the first step is to be attentive to God’s voice calling us. “Saint Joseph, more than anyone else before or since, learned from Jesus to be alert to recognize God’s wonders, to have his mind and heart awake.”[3]

We need to learn to be silent, especially interiorly, if we want to hear God’s voice. Sacred Scripture tells us that the prophet Elijah did not hear Yahweh in a mighty wind, nor in an earthquake, nor in fire, but in “a whisper of a gentle breeze” (*1 Kgs* 19:12). To listen to God, to share with Him our desires and dreams, we need to quiet all the exterior voices that distract us. In the intimacy of our prayer we learn who we are and how to dialogue with God and unite ourselves to his Will.

The evangelists do not record any of Saint Joseph's words but only his actions, fruit of his obedience to God and intelligent listening in the intimate dialogue of his prayer.

“Saint Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart, which guides his every thought and action.”[4]

Thus God was able to guide the direction of the holy patriarch's entire life through those four dreams. His interior recollection and readiness to do God's will enabled him to guard the Holy Family from danger and lead Mary and Jesus to safety. We too, by fostering an attitude of silent listening, will be able to welcome God's voice and plans in our own lives.

SAINT JOSEMARIA liked to say that two short phrases in the New Testament sum up Jesus' life. In the first, Saint Paul tells us that Jesus was

“obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (*Phil 2:8*). And in the second, Saint Luke shows us Jesus growing up in Mary and Joseph’s home, saying simply that He “came to Nazareth and was obedient to them” (*Lk 2:51*). Both passages tell us that our Lord carried out his plan of salvation by lovingly obeying God the Father and his earthly family. Saint John Paul II points out that “this obedience of Jesus to Mary and Joseph in Nazareth occupies almost all the years that he lived on earth, and is therefore the longest period of this total and uninterrupted obedience ... Thus to the Holy Family belongs an important part of that divine mystery, the fruit of which is the redemption of the world.”[5]

In our own family environment, among the people we see and live with every day, we learn to listen and to obey, within God’s loving plans. When each person sincerely seeks

the good of the others, harmony reigns in the family. In the family we learn how to serve one another, how to listen to others and discover their needs. Obedience is the fruit of love. We can imagine how gently Joseph would have asked Jesus to do things, and how He, the Incarnate Word, would have wanted to understand and carry out, freely and joyfully, what his earthly father asked of Him. “The three members of this family help each other reciprocally to discover God’s plan. They prayed, worked, and communicated with one another.”[6]

During his years in Nazareth, Jesus would often have seen the example of Joseph’s obedient life of faith. The holy patriarch’s obedience “anticipated” the obedience of Jesus, right to the cross. The Holy Family is a school in which we learn that listening to God and associating ourselves with his mission are two

sides of the same coin. Thus we will come to understand that Saint Joseph's faith was "full, trusting, complete. And it expressed itself in an effective dedication to the will of God, in an intelligent obedience."[7]

[1] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, Introduction. The four dreams refer to not being afraid to receive Mary as his wife; fleeing to Egypt to save Jesus' life; returning to Israel; and finally, going to Nazareth to protect the Child from the king of Judea.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 42.

[3] *Ibid.*, no. 54.

[4] Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 18 December 2005.

[5] Saint John Paul II, *Angelus*, 30 December 1979.

[6] Francis, *Angelus*, 29 December 2019.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 42.

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