

March 19: Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Gospel for March 19th, feast of Saint Joseph, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 1:16.18-21.24a*)

Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her

to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, 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.”

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

Commentary

Today's solemnity introduces us in an especially endearing way to God's eternal designs. Although the protagonist of the verses chosen as the Gospel for the Mass is Joseph, Matthew is actually telling us about the origin of Jesus, about his virginal

conception. In doing so, he also reveals to us the identity of Joseph, through whom, thanks to his legal paternity, Jesus is a descendant of David. The passage invites us to consider to what extent God counts on men: on Joseph, whose feast we celebrate today, and also on us.

Joseph is to assume the legal paternity of the One who is going to save God's people from their sins. Before hearing these words from the angel of the Lord, the holy patriarch sensed that he was taking part in a mystery for which he felt unworthy. The closer we come to God, the more evident is our own littleness and the more vertigo we feel. God is not like us, who so often seek to distance ourselves from those who seem imperfect to us.

God is neither "scared" of our littleness nor does He distance himself from it. He knows better

than we do what He has called us to, what He wants to make us capable of. We know very little about Joseph's life, but we can easily imagine that he was not spared sacrifices and worries of all kinds. We see this in the other possible Gospel passage for today's solemnity, that of the Child Jesus lost and found in the temple (cf. *Lk 2:41-51*). Joseph's anguish arose not only from Jesus being lost, but also, on finding Him, from not understanding Jesus' enigmatic response to Mary's question: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Joseph was taking part in such great mysteries, and yet how often he failed to understand so many things!

God entrusted Joseph with what was most precious, Jesus and Mary, because He knew very well what was in his heart. The Church has entrusted herself to him in a very

special way. We see in Joseph a just man, with a heart in love, hardworking and capable of suffering, docile to God's will. Certainly, as Saint Paul says, "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (*Phil* 2:13). But God needs an upright heart. And Joseph had this.

Both the first reading of the Mass (2 *Sam* 7:4-5.12-14.16) and the second (*Rom* 4:13.16-18.22) help us to consider a central aspect of Joseph's life that affects us all. The prophecy in the second book of Samuel says: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom." The text here is referring to the Messiah. But it also makes reference to offspring. The reading from *Romans* says: "The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that

they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith . . .

[Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, ‘So shall your descendants be.’” What does all this have to do with Joseph?

God offered Abraham countless descendants, but this would require a strong faith, “believing against hope.” Abraham’s fatherhood is a complete gift, as is his son Isaac. His universal paternity with respect to believers is also a gift. Joseph too “believed against hope,” in the face of the incomprehensible. Today we are invited in a special way to trust in God in our daily life, with the certainty that many people are called to draw closer to our Lord thanks to our faith expressed in daily deeds.

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