

Homily For the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Year A

St. Peter's 9:30/11:30/5:00 Masses - December 29, 2019

Sirach 3:2-6,12-14 "Who honours his father atones for sin. Who respects his mother lays up treasure."

Psalm 128 "Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways."

Colossians 3:12-21 "Clothe yourselves in love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Matt. 2:13-15,19-23 "Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt."

What's In A Dream?

Dreams.

Dream big, we sometimes hear. Live out your dreams. Find your dream home, your dream job, your dream partner. The image is that dreams are always about some great success or joy. It's your hopes and dreams that matter. Perhaps you remember the first time you let your child watch a scary movie and they had bad dreams for months. That's also the time you said to yourself, don't do that again.

John Allen tells the story of being the commentator for the largest TV event in history, Pope John Paul II's funeral. He travels with popes as a Vatican correspondent. Pacing in his hotel room before the event, he suddenly turned to his wife and said: Did you ever imagine, in your wildest dreams, that I would be a part of the largest TV audience in history? Dear ... honey, she replied, I don't know how to tell you this, but you aren't even *in* my wildest dreams.

Now Joseph really did have some wild dreams. I imagine the conversation between husband and wife. Wake up, dear ... Another dream, Joseph? What did your angel tell you to do this time? For the 4th time, an angel asked Joseph to do something really hard for his wife, Mary, and their child, Jesus: Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Take the child and his mother and go to Egypt. Take the child and his mother and go to Israel. Now go to Nazareth.

The Holy Family.

In each case, Joseph's dreams, which are really visions given to him by God, are reminders that the Holy Family - Mary, Joseph and Jesus - suffered great distress. Even the family of Jesus was not given a free ride through the difficulties of life. Instead, they experienced the greatest of tribulations: Travel in dangerous territory, insecurity, the threat of annihilation and harm to their son.

Through dreams, Mary and Joseph received their tasks, their 'mission impossible'. I can only imagine that it was not on their bucket list to raise the Saviour of the world and to keep him safe against the inevitable attacks by the forces of evil. It required their full cooperation, but it also would have God's direct help, not with armies, but with a path through the dangers and challenges.

Mary and Joseph made space in their hearts and minds to allow God to work through them. The Holy Family was not on some modern day quest to find meaning and happiness in their own lives. But they *were* ready to allow into their lives the meaning that God had already planned for them.

Joseph's obedience.

Today's gospel centres on Joseph's obedience to the incredible responsibility he was given. Believing Mary, with the help of a dream, his responsibility was now to care for and protect a child who was born of the Holy Spirit, and Mary, who was chosen to be the child's mother. No one has ever been given such a task, such a quest. He was ready to go. I can't imagine this. It feels more natural never to be ready to go.

Joseph must have had some high anxiety over all these situations but we witness his silent obedience. Why doesn't he ever say anything? This is not an accident. Joseph is not silent in Sacred Scripture because he can't speak or because the Gospel writers chose to reduce him in some way. Joseph is silent because his obedient response to God IS his speech. His actions speak louder than any words. Of course, he was human and must have been troubled by the dream requests. But he obeyed God and he did what was required to protect his family.

Salvation History.

What we need to be aware of is that Joseph is a key figure in all of history. He is right at the central point in the working out of God's plan of salvation. The first thing we can notice is that Joseph did what Adam did not do. He protected his wife from evil, whereas Adam stood by and failed to protect his wife from the serpent's intimidation.

Next, like Joseph of the Old Testament, who was an interpreter of dreams, both had a father name Jacob, both were persecuted, both went to Egypt, and both saved their families. Thus, Joseph, the husband of Mary took on the mission of saving his family from harm, similar to the Joseph of old.

Herod was a king obsessed only by his own security rather than that of the people he governed. He did every cruel thing he could to put an obstacle in the way of God's plan of salvation. Through Joseph's cooperation, God countered this evil and continued to work out that plan of salvation.

Darkness opposed the light that was Jesus Christ. It was Joseph who led his family in holiness and demonstrated to his adopted Son what it means to confront persecution and trust God without holding back.

Our families.

The Holy Family shows us that family is the foundation stone of salvation and a model for us. All families have challenges and struggles. It is also an important sign and reminder of the need for leaders of families to turn to God when their families are threatened. Joseph did this through absolute obedience.

We recognize that families are very different than they were even a couple of generations ago. The family itself is under threat of being redefined out of existence by laws and certain ways of thinking. There are also the tremendous modern day stresses of the need for two incomes, of addictions and anxiety, competition for time and energy, even from entertainment media and belief in permissive behaviours. The list goes on.

But there are some basic principles that still apply. Paul admonishes children to their parents but also for fathers not to provoke their children, or they may lose heart. Sirach says that whoever honours their father atones for sins. My child, help your father in his old age. Even if his mind fails, be patient with him (hope my son is listening- remember all those things I did for you?) because you have all your faculties.

All of this happens in the family. But God is saying, not just to Joseph and Mary, but to all of us, no matter the circumstances we have had to deal with: I have already given you the mission to become saints. There is no greater quest. There is no greater activity and it is already ours.

Mary and Joseph's Son has already taken care of the hardest part. He has paved the way to heaven with the sacrifice of his own blood and has gone before us to conquer the dragons we face. Our task now - the invitation put out there for us - is to join his family as sons and daughters.

Call To Action

Joseph had to take his family to a foreign land to keep them safe from the king of his own land. We must do whatever is necessary to protect our families, those who are fathers and those doing this traditional role of the father, whether it is a mother or grandparent or friend.

Perhaps we don't have to have the level of holiness of THE Holy Family. Maybe we are not in the running for Holy Family of the Year. But we just have to be obedient to the task that is already in front of us. The grace is there to live that life as well as possible. And if we feel like we have already blown it in some way, it's not too late. In the world, it is sometimes too late to fix things, but in the life of faith it is never too late because the goal is salvation. The goal is heaven. This is God's wildest dream for us. Will we live that dream?