

The Youthful Spirit of St. Joseph

Homily for March 19, 2021

It is important that together we can interrupt the Season of Lent by the Solemnity of St. Joseph. We said the Gloria this morning to affirm that this is a Celebration. Today the Church invites us to consider St. Joseph, the husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus.

The Church affirms that except for Our Lady, there is no greater saint in Heaven than Saint Joseph.

This feast, honouring him originated in the fifteenth century and was then extended to the whole Church in 1621. In 1847 Pope Pius IX named Saint Joseph Patron of the Universal Church. Pope John XXIII had Saint Joseph's name included in the Roman Canon. He has a particular place in the Canadian Church for his is the Parton Saint of Canada. So, let us turn to the readings to better understand this just man so worthy of our veneration and respect.

The readings appointed for today's Mass give rich expression in an indirect way to the importance of St. Joseph. In the reading from 2 Samuel Nathan the Prophet is instructed to say to David on behalf of God:

and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

Now when David was king the borders of Israel and its dominance in the Middle East was greater than it had ever been before and indeed since the 10th century BC. We know because of the incarnation that the house built for God's name would be just that a house, where the holy family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus would reside. This passage therefore helps us to remember that in the world of the news sound bite, and 24/7 news channels, where stories of political power struggles and world shaping events are always on the air, God has a particular concern for houses, that is families, built in his name. These are homes where fathers like Joseph are learning the way of steadfast commitment and devotion to their children and where husbands so honour their wives that like Joseph, they never want to disgrace their beloved but hold them in high esteem.

These are homes where there is also an understanding of the continuity of God's great story of Salvation. It is this story that St. Paul retells in the Romans reading. We heard of his covenant with Abraham, a covenant that was all about the family. This family is one where great importance is given to the righteousness of faith. What is the righteousness of faith? It is choosing to believe and trust in the promises of God as summarized by St Paul:

. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations;

Abraham's faith is a foreshadowing of Joseph's faith. Abraham was the Father of the Jewish Nation. Joseph is the father of many nations, because it was through his Son our Lord Jesus Christ that God's saving purposes were made known and available to all people and from him

that the Roman Catholic Church would be established. Abraham was asked to look up at the night sky of ponder the constellations that danced before his eyes. He was told, as are the number of stars so shall your descendants be. Joseph was told that Mary's pregnancy was the result of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Scripture tells us that Abraham and Joseph both believed what they were told. This is the righteousness of faith. Both men chose to trust God rather than the present circumstances that seemed of contrary to what they had been told. After-all, Abraham had no children at this point and his children would be in number like the star's of heaven. How could Mary's pregnancy be divinely arranged? How was it possible? It was because as Paul says that they lived in

the presence of the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Yes God desires fathers who like Abraham and Joseph live according to the righteousness of faith. These are fathers who like Joseph took to heart the importance the religious festivals of their faith, as the Passover observance referred to in the Gospel made clear. These are fathers who like Joseph helped to form and shape Jesus during the silent years of his life in advance his public ministry. These are fathers who like Joseph are sometimes puzzled by their prepubescent sons and daughters and yet understand that part of the fathers' task is to support their children in discerning their vocation.

We remember Joseph therefore as a man who because he was full of faith, was devoted to his religion as a devout Jewish man. It was out of this devotion that he was able to so love his wife and direct his son and saviour to understand and so live out his vocation as the Messiah.

What does Joseph's example mean to us? How are we inspired by what we see here? Joseph teaches us that fidelity to the Lord is what gives meaning to our lives, no matter what our age or personal circumstances. We know that our earthly happiness depends upon our faith. Saint Joseph had his share of difficulties, but he always relied upon the help of God. He refused to deviate from his vocation.

It is possible that we may not feel God's presence at times, perhaps for a lengthy period. We may not feel drawn to God because we are full of ourselves. In this kind of situation fidelity to God requires interior recollection. Fidelity requires personal effort to overcome egoism and to begin again a life of prayer. God wants us to be full of love, alert, brimming over with initiatives so that the righteousness of faith is ours in abundance.

Today we ask Saint Joseph to give us a share in his youthful spirit. We ask this of him for the sake of those around us who might find thereby a road to Jesus.