

# HOMILY~ December 17/18, 2022

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

There was a parish where the children were doing a Christmas pageant, as many parishes do. There were a number of girls who wanted to be Mary. There were some that wanted to be one of the three kings, or maybe even one of the three queens, we want to be inclusive. Some wanted to be angels, shepherds and sheep; but no one was volunteering to be Joseph. Finally, one of the boys agreed to be Joseph, so the pageant was cast. On the night of the performance, the little boy who was to play Joseph was sick, so they decided to just do the pageant without Joseph. Joseph is normally in our nativity scenes and in our pageants, but he does not have much of a role. No one is singing Christmas carols about Joseph. We have “Mary Did You Know,” “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” and we even sing about “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem,” but no one sings of Joseph. Joseph never speaks in the Gospels. He has no voice. We never even prayed for him in the Eucharistic Prayer until several years ago when he was added. He is always just there in the background.

Joseph did play a very important part in salvation history. He was stable, committed and faithful. In the Gospel Reading, we hear an account of the Annunciation from Joseph’s perspective. First of all, we hear that Mary and Joseph were betrothed but not married. This is the process that led to marriage. First, there was an engagement. Marriages were generally arranged by parents, and sometimes this engagement happened when the individuals were very young. There was no legal commitment at that time. Next comes the betrothal. There was usually an exchange of property, or a dowry, and a legal contract was established. Separation after a betrothal required a legal process. Next came the marriage, and that is when the couple started living together. The marriage could be months or years after the betrothal. After the betrothal but before the marriage, Joseph finds out the Mary is going to have a child. Culturally, Joseph has two options. He could expose Mary, and she would probably be stoned; or he could divorce her quietly, and she would still be a disgrace to herself and to her family. Joseph was a man who kept his commitments. He believed the message that came to him in a dream and decided to stay with Mary and marry her even though it was against cultural norms at that time. In our culture, we see commitment as a loss of freedom. We like to keep our options open. However, maturity can be

defined not by the number of options we leave open but rather by the number of commitments we make and keep. If we never commit to anything, we will never grow up. I think Christmas is a good time to renew our commitments. Joseph was a man of great faith. He believed what was revealed to him in a dream. How many of us would make a difficult decision like this, trusting the message from a dream? I think God reveals things to us in dreams. It is reported all through Sacred Scripture. Messages from God are usually subtle and need our discernment. It required great faith to discern God's will and act on it, especially when it is going to be very difficult, as this would be for Joseph. Joseph was probably ridiculed for his decision. Joseph continued to care for and protect Mary and Jesus when they were in danger. Salvation history would be quite different if Joseph did not cooperate with God's plan and Mary was stoned. We talk a lot about Mary's "yes," but Joseph's "yes" was very important as well.

Joseph was stable, committed and faithful; and he did what he did quietly in the background. He does not generally get a lot of credit or recognition. Think about the people in your life who are stable, committed and faithful. Many of the things they do every day are pretty mundane, but they continue to do them day after day. I see spouses taking care of each other, and parents meeting the needs of their children every day. Caregivers taking care of a sick friend or relative, and grandparents taking care of grandLooe children. They do not receive a great deal of affirmation for what they do. As I look out at the congregation today, I see many men and women who work quietly in the background, making a difference, but they often do not get a lot of credit. Today I want to thank all those who do important ministry that is not always recognized. I think we should take some time during the Christmas season to thank all of the people in our lives that are stable, committed and faithful. Where would we be without the Josephs in our lives?

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim