

On the Eve of the Feast of St. Joseph

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Brothers and sisters you know that tomorrow the Church will celebrate the feast of Saint Joseph. He is not only the Patron Saint of the Universal Church but also the Patron Saint of the Church in Canada and the Church encourages us to look at St. Joseph in many different angles even though he is one of those few persons in the Bible especially in the New Testament that we never hear a word coming from his mouth. He speaks with his actions and you know that actions speak louder than words

We don't encounter him much in the Bible. We encounter him in the beginning of the Conception and also when the angels appear near Bethlehem announcing the Birth of Jesus Christ. We see him when Jesus Christ was 12 years old and they lost him in the Temple. Mary and Joseph, each supposing that Jesus Christ was with the other, went in search for Him. When they did not find Him they had to return to Jerusalem, and after three days they found Him in the Temple. Again, it was not Joseph who spoke, but Mary. Mary opened her mouth and Joseph is there, silent.

The history continues as usual. The mother says to her husband, "Say something to him - you never say anything to him." Always the same thing, it's the mother who does the talking and the father is there and with his looks he tries to speak to his child. The mother wants to hear words and so she begins to fight with her husband. "Tell him." "You are so indifferent." "Talk to him." And I suppose Mary too could have said those same words to Joseph and Joseph is there quietly, and with his look he was speaking to Jesus.

You know how much St. Joseph was dear to our mother, Teresa. In her book of her Life, she mentions how many graces she asked him and he always gave her what she asked of him. She says, "Every Saint in Heaven is assigned a job." Sometimes when we look at St. Cecelia, we say that she is the patron Saint for Musicians. We look at St. Christopher, who is the patron Saint for drivers or carrying people. The same with nurses, the same with bakers - they all have their patron Saints.

So it seems that if you want to acquire a grace, you have to ask the particular Saint who is the patron of that particular area. St. Teresa says that it is not so with St. Joseph. All areas are given in his hands. Whatever grace you ask him, you can go to him and you can be sure that you will not be disappointed. She calls him the Saint of the Impossible. The foundations that she dedicated to him at the beginning, show her love for this great Saint; and any serious work on St. Joseph has to mention the devotion of St. Teresa of Jesus toward this particular Saint. The Pope in his encyclical letter on St. Joseph, "Guardian of the Redeemer", also mentions St. Teresa as being one of those Saints who had a special devotion to St. Joseph.

Today the Church once more presents in front of us this Saint and the Church, in order to help us to enter more into the message that St. Joseph has for us, gives us a Word from the book of Samuel, a Word from the book of the letter of St. Paul to the Romans and a Word from the Gospel according to Matthew.

The Word from the Book of Samuel comes to you and to me as a promise that God is the one who makes the promise and He is always there to fulfill it. St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, "He who began this good work within you, He himself will bring it to completion." Sometimes we think that we are carrying the Word but we forget that it is the Word that carries us. Sometimes we think that we are going to be saved by our efforts, but St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians, "By grace you are saved and this is not your own doing". However, one should not cheat himself or herself thinking that you have only to wait and do nothing, and fall into the trap of quietism, far from it. Contemplation and meditation is not quietism, on the contrary, it is falling in love and love out of its very nature requires action. It requires to be projected outwardly to be seen in

signs and symbols that people can read. And so this love that God has instilled in you and in me, has to be seen on the outside. When we read that we are saved by Grace, St. Paul tells us "With fear and trembling work out your own salvation". It's not that we are going to gain our salvation, but with fear and trembling, work it out - show it to the world. Show it through your way of reasoning, through your way of talking, through your behavior. Show to others that you are a people who are saved. Jesus Christ told us, "Let your light thus shine in front of others, so that seeing your good works, they will give praise to your Father who is in Heaven".

When we look at St. Joseph, the Church tells us that he was one of those people who, like Abraham, continued to hope when there was no hope. The second reading, said that Abraham was "hoping against hope", and so it was with Joseph, who, hoping against hope, looking at this Virgin and hoping against hope that he is not being cheated, because deep down that is what his reasoning is telling him. He did not approach Mary and yet Mary is pregnant and so he "decided quietly to send her out".

It was his intention to send her out - why quietly? To divorce quietly? It is a reaction to the history that has caused him so much pain that he became introvert, entered into this cave, working from this cave and speaking to no one. When you are in a crisis in front of a history that you cannot understand, there is a tendency to become introvert. You enter into this tomb like Lazarus. And the angel came to Joseph in the same way he comes to you and to me and tells us that God is going to use this history that has pushed us into our tomb, only to speak out more clearly to us and get us out of our tomb.

The Gospel that you heard yesterday is extremely beautiful. We heard how Jesus Christ called Lazarus out of the tomb. He calls Mary, Martha, John, you and me out of the tomb. His voice calls us out of the tomb lest we make of the tomb our natural habitat. We are not called to live in a tomb. We are not called to be people to live an introvert life in a cave.

All of us know the experience of the prophet Elijah when he entered the cave in rebellion, for it's only when he comes out of this cave that he can hear the sound of sheer silence. The Word that was spoken in silence can only be heard in silence. It is not a coincidence or by chance that God leads us into the desert, into the wilderness because in the desert, the desert of your life and my life, there are less distractions. It's what Hosea tells us, "I will lead my people to the wilderness and speak tenderly to their heart".

Do you think that Joseph did not have to struggle with this Word that came to him? Of course he did. Do you think it is by chance that the reading here today starts with the words "Jacob was the father of Joseph". As soon as we hear the name Jacob, at least for me, as soon as I hear in my mind the name Jacob, there immediately comes to my mind this man struggling with the angel - All Night! The angel is not outside of us. The angel is not a being with these wings. The angel is the Word of God. The Word of God comes to you and to me with messages that are surprising. They astonish us constantly. Joseph is surprised that Mary is pregnant with the Holy Spirit. "What?" "What is this?" "I have never heard this kind of thing!" The Lord comes to you and to me with the same Word brothers and sisters. It is a Word that surprises. "This sickness is not unto death." That is what Jesus Christ said in yesterday's Gospel. "This sickness is not unto death." Then after a while Lazarus died. Not only had Jesus Christ said, "I am happy that Lazarus died, that I was not there so that you may believe". First He says "the sickness is not unto death". Lazarus dies. And then He says, "I am glad that Lazarus died because of you so that you will believe".

There is a very interesting work by Soren Kierkegaard entitled "Sickness Unto Death" and in his work, he explores the meaning of this phrase "sickness is not unto death". He says, "What kind of sickness then is unto death"? What kind of sickness? Is it the sickness that Lazarus had causing him to die? Jesus Christ is saying that this is not the sickness that leads to death. Then what kind of sickness leads unto death? And Soren

Kierkegaard says it is "quiet despair that leads to death". It is losing our life and continuing to keep it inside of us, sometimes not even knowing that we are losing it. He says that if you lose an arm, it is noticed. If you lose a leg, it is noticed. If you lose five, ten, twenty dollars, it is noticed. For example, a mother who knows that in her wallet she had \$20.. She goes to get it and notices, "It is missing". "I had \$20 here." She immediately notices that it is missing from there. If you lost your wife, you would notice that she is missing. And yet, we are losing our life and most of us, don't even notice that we are losing our very life. We keep trying to hold on, unable to speak out, being depressed, unhappy with the history that the Lord has given us, grumbling only to ourselves, unable to air it with God. No. And by doing so, we die.

The Word of God is coming to you and to me as it went to Joseph telling him not to be afraid, only believe. When Jarius approached Jesus Christ, people said to him "Don't trouble the Master more because your daughter is dead". Jesus Christ turned to Jarius and said to him, "Do not fear, only believe". What Jesus Christ said to Martha, to Mary, to you and to me, he said also to them, "Even if they die, yet they will live and those who believe in Me, they will never die". You begin to wonder what kind of reasoning this is. What kind of reasoning is this? What Jesus Christ is telling us is that the last word is not in the grip of death. That death has not had the last word. When Jesus Christ is present, life is present. He is Life. This is the reason why St. Paul says, "For me to live is Christ". Life equals Christ and if we hold on to Christ, to His Word, the Word that brings life, when we are faced with death, with fear, we are going to be conquerors rather than people who are enslaved, because the Word of God comes to you and to me to liberate us.

The Word went to Joseph, and in his fear, in his confusion, not knowing exactly what to do, he begins to struggle like Jacob, in the night, unable to understand his history, unable to see the hand of God and struggling with this Word. When he was struggling with this Word, the Word came to Joseph in his insecurity, the way it went to Mary and Martha. "Jesus has not yet entered the village", St. John tells us, "and Martha went to meet Him". Then Martha gives this very beautiful message for Mary. She went to Mary and told her privately. That is how God speaks to us individually and privately, because God enters in the life of every individual through a private door.

He enters in Joseph's life through the pregnancy of Mary, a pregnancy that he couldn't understand, because it is a pregnancy that came from the Holy Spirit. He had never heard of such a thing. He surely did not touch Mary. He knew that for sure. And yet this woman in front of him, she is pregnant. Immediately that scene shakes him from his feet, it knocks him down and he finds himself outside of the village. Sometimes bad news in your life, puts you outside of your village, outside of your security. But, if you took at the Word of God, the angel will tell you and me what he said to the disciples, "This Christ that you saw Him going up this way, this same way He will return". The same history that has the tendency to steal Jesus Christ from us, is the same history, that if we learn how to listen properly to the Words of God, then we will discover that, that history brings Jesus Christ closer to us than He was before. Outside of the village Martha is closer to Jesus Christ. Outside of the village, Mary is closer to Jesus Christ. People thought that she was going to go down to the tomb, but Mary was running to meet Jesus Christ.

Joseph, listening to this Word intently, obeyed it. When he awoke, he did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. He took Mary as his wife.

How many times in our life does it happen that even though we know what the Word of God wants from us, we do not put it into action? And this is not like receiving a pregnant woman. Imagine, telling you that this woman is pregnant through the action of the Holy Spirit and you have to accept her as your wife, far from it. The Word that comes to you and to me is not as challenging as it was when it went to Joseph in front of his situation. He had already made up his mind and the Word comes to him and he changes his mind. That is conversion brothers and sisters!

We are living in this season of Lent and it is the Word of God that comes to you and to me, telling us to change our attitude, our attitude to a member in the Community perhaps, or your attitude towards your husband, your wife, your children. Oh no! Oh no! I have been bitten enough. I have had enough from them. Enough! How much is enough? Enough is not in the language of love.. It's not! God does not say to you and to me, "I have loved you enough now and that's it".

It is so beautiful, especially during this time of Lent, that the Church constantly encourages us to look at the Cross. No person, whether he is a Christian or not, whether he is a believer or not, who has approached the Cross, has ever been turned away. No person.

You go to a doctor, a medical doctor, and you say to the doctor, "I would like to take you as my doctor". "I too would like to take you as my patient, but I have so many, I cannot take you, I am sorry. I regret it but I would be doing an injustice to my other patients if I take you because I will not have enough time to spare for them. I cannot take you". - But we go to Jesus Christ, who is The Doctor and He receives any patient, no matter what his lifestyle, no matter what his race, his colour, his gender, his age, state of sanctity any person.

The Church tells us, "Ite ad Joseph". "Go to Joseph". When we go to Joseph, what is Joseph going to tell us in the Old Testament? He is going to tell us, "Go into the barns, there is enough food for you". When we go to Joseph, the husband of Mary, we tell him that we are in need, "Go to my Son, He has an abundance, He has an abundance of food". We go to Joseph, we tell him that we are sick, "Go to my Son, He will not reject you". But He has many patients. "Yes, I know, it is His Joy." "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them". It's like the Gospel that you heard today, of the adulterous woman, "No one condemned you, neither do I". "Go and do not sin again".

Joseph is coming here today as the Word of God for you and for me and in his silence, with his actions he is telling us, "When you hear the Word, no matter how strange that Word may seem, no matter how many strange things it demands from you, do it, do it, because God is not going to cheat you". We see Joseph doing it when he woke up from his dream.

Do you hear the Word of God coming in your dream? Do you hear the Word of God coming to you in your dream telling you that life is not all black and white brothers and sisters but it is in Technicolor? Do we hear the Word of God coming to us in our dreams and perhaps seeing our dreams vanish like dew in front of the sun continue to hold onto this Word? It's extremely beautiful to see this constant struggle - trying to hold on to the Word of God, trying to let it go, and at the same time to arrest it. For sure Joseph was one of those people who like Mary arrested the Word of God. And because he arrested the Word of God, the Word of God broke the chains of the reasoning that Joseph was reasoning. He had already reasoned, "I'll send this woman quietly, quietly so that no one will notice her. I'll send her quietly." He was entangled in his way of reasoning, the way you and I are entangled in our way of reasoning - how we treat our children, how we treat our friends, how I treat my husband, my wife, how I treat my neighbor. We are entangled into the way that we should treat them because this is how they treated me and I have been hurt so many times and now I have learned. You have learned what? That you are in chains? That you are conditioned to their behavior and with their attitude?

And when the Word of God comes to me and to you, what does it do? St. Paul says, "I am here in prison, but the Word of God is not imprisoned". And because the Word of God is not imprisoned, is not tied in chains, the Word of God will enter into the prison. It will find Peter there in chains, it will strike him on his side, the chains will fall down and Peter is able to go out of the prison. The same it is with you and with me. We are imprisoned in our own ideas. The Word of God comes to you and to me and tells us, "My ways are not your ways, My thoughts are not your thoughts". And if we are struck with the Word of God, we too discover that the chains of

our reasoning, the chains of our own opinions, our own attitudes, will break down and we will find ourselves being liberated.

We must learn how to bend our will in parallel with the Will of God. Why did this history not break Joseph? Because he learned how to be flexible to God's direction. He wanted to go in this direction to send her out, the Word of God comes and sends him in the opposite direction and Joseph makes 180 degrees angle change, imagine, he makes 180 degrees in parallel with the Will of God. This is why he is called "JUST" because he learned how to walk in parallel with the Word of God.

Joseph teaches us too to search for Jesus. When he and Mary discovered that Jesus was not with them, they went in search for Him. After three days they found Him. Joseph is the one who tells us, "My son, my daughter, be careful because once I made that mistake too; I supposed that Jesus was with me until I went to look for Him and He was not there".

You suppose that Jesus is with you too because you read the Scriptures, you say the Rosary, you go to Mass, you come here for the meeting but then you may have a grudge against your children, a grudge against your husband, a grudge against your neighbor, you have this grudge. And you think that Jesus Christ is with you when you have this grudge? No brothers and sisters, no. He is not there.

Joseph tells you, "Go search for Him". Perhaps like him, you too will be disappointed that He was not there but this is not the end of the story. Joseph tells us, "Go in search for Him". Those three days are three days of death. After three days they found Him, three days He lied buried in the tomb. This is the symbol of the Resurrection.

There will be moments in your life and in my life too when Jesus Christ seems to be buried. No matter how much we pray and talk to Him, He does not answer us. But the moment will come when we, like Joseph, will find Him and we will be filled with joy because Jesus Christ is the Word of God and Jesus Christ told us, "These things I have said to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy will be complete".