

## **Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary March 20, 2017**

The readings: 2 Sam. 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Rom. 4:13, 16-18, 22; Mt. 1:16, 18-21, 24a; (or Luke. 2:41-51a)

Today we celebrate the solemnity of the feast of St Joseph, husband of Mary. St. Joseph is certainly one of those quiet and silent persons in the Bible about whom we have little information. All the scanty information we have about him comes from the second chapter of Luke and the first two chapters of Matthew. In those brief chapters, Joseph is spoken to a couple of times; but he never utters a word. We are left with a shadowy figure that generally hovers in the background in paintings of the Holy Family, where he stands, anonymous and silent, faithful to his God-given job of protecting Jesus and Mary. Even when Jesus is lost in the Temple Joseph does not utter a word. It is Mary who speaks. According to the Gospel accounts he was a village carpenter and also that he was the descendant of the house of David and hence was from the Royal family. He is presented to us as an obedient person. His obedience to God is seen in his accepting God's direction in his dream and taking Mary as his wife, even though she was pregnant. Consequently, as we know, Joseph took Mary as his wife as he is convinced in the divine intervention and he too is aware of the new role he has to play in the salvific mystery. Later he takes them to Egypt so as to protect the family and finally settles at Nazareth. He takes care of the Holy Family, with dedication, affection and responsibility. Joseph is generally known as the silent, obedient, generous and hard working person and the church has declared him as the patron of the universal church and the world accepts him as the Patron of all workers.

Because the information about Joseph was so sparse and sketchy, it took a while for his popular cult to catch fire. There is evidence that in isolated parts of the Christian East, he may have had a feast day by the early 4th century and one ancient source claims that in a basilica erected in Bethlehem at that period by St. Helena, there was a lovely oratory dedicated to Joseph. His cult in the Western Church, on the other hand, did not emerge in any serious way until nearly 500 years later. In 1621, Pope Gregory XV declared the Feast of St. Joseph as a Feast of obligation. In 1726, Pope Benedict XIII inserted the name of Saint Joseph in the Litanies of the Saints. Today's feast day was established by Pius IX in 1847 and in 1870 he was declared Joseph patron of the universal Church. In 1955, Pope Pius XII established the feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1, apparently in

response to Communist “May Day” celebrations. Pope John Paul II in his homily says: “The extreme discretion with which Joseph carried out the role entrusted to him by God highlights his faith even more, which consisted in always listening to the Lord, seeking to understand his will and obeying it with his whole heart and strength. This is why the Gospel describes him as a ‘just’ man. In fact, the just person is the person who prays, lives by faith, and seeks to do well in every concrete circumstance of life... Faith nourished by prayer...is the most precious treasure that Saint Joseph transmits to us.”

The Gospels tell us that Joseph came from a royal lineage, descended from David, the greatest king of Israel. When the angel who first tells Joseph about Jesus, he greets him "Joseph, son of David," which is a royal title that is later used also for Jesus. We know he was a compassionate, caring person. Joseph the just man was simply, joyfully, whole heartedly obedient to God, in marrying Mary, in naming Jesus, in shepherding the precious pair to Egypt, in bringing them to Nazareth, in the undetermined number of years of quiet faith and courage. He was chosen by the eternal Father as the trustworthy guardian and protector of his greatest treasures, namely, his divine Son and Mary, Joseph's wife. He carried out this vocation with complete fidelity until at last God called him, saying: 'Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord". About St. Joseph's death the Bible is totally silent. There are indications, however, that he died before Jesus began his Public Ministry. His was the most beautiful death that one could have, in the arms of Jesus and Mary. The Church has made St Joseph the patron of the dying because, assuming he died before Jesus' public life, he died with Jesus and Mary close to him, the way we all would like to leave this earth. Humbly and unknown, he passed his years at Nazareth, silent and almost forgotten he remained in the background through centuries of Church history.

We are touched by the call of Joseph. Like any other call in the Old and New Testament, the call of Joseph is special and unique. God chooses those simple and humble to do his work. He gave the call when he decides to observe what the law says. He silently accepts when he is told of his mission and he is willing to cooperate with God in the new mystery. The Scriptures tell us about the way he followed God's will. In Bethlehem, when they went to register, they had no room in the inn and it was Joseph who looks for the secluded place for the child to be born. He is now the protector, saviour and the care taker. He is the silent listener when he takes Mary to Jerusalem to present Jesus to the Lord; he hears what

Simeon had to say about the Child. Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was being said about Him. Then we hear of the trial of Joseph when an angel appeared to him in a dream. Joseph was told to take the Child and His mother and to flee to Egypt and remain there until he was told to leave. He knew that God could have chosen other ways to rescue the child. But he does not question about it at all. He obeying the angel takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt the same night. The last mention of St. Joseph in the Holy Bible is when Jesus was twelve years old and the family made their annual pilgrimage to the Holy City. This is when Jesus stayed behind in the Temple without the knowledge of His parents. For three days, Joseph went through great anxieties. Besides searching he had to support Mary and when they find him he does not ask any question. He takes him back perhaps more vigilant than ever before. The gospels also tell us of the title of Jesus as Son of Joseph and the genealogy also mentions the same.

The readings of today are specially chosen permitting our hearts perceive other wonders about Saint Joseph. In the First Reading Prophet Nathan tells King David that God will establish a kingdom and his rule will last forever. God now wants to build a house for his people and establish his kingdom forever. This house will be established in God's name and he will be the divine Father to all the people and will make everyone his own children. God assures his presence in this kingdom which will be everlasting. The reading tells us that God waits to accept all as his children as he accepted Joseph who was a descendent of David. The Second Reading speaks of our spiritual father Abraham and we exist in God. Faith is the main source of our living in closeness to God. The faith in Jesus makes us come closer to the throne of God. Faith makes us to receive the word in life. Paul tells the Romans that Abraham believed in the presence of the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hence hoping against hope, Abraham believed that he would become the father of many nations and he believed in the promise made by God that his descendants will be numerous.

The Gospel speaks of the end of the lineage of our spiritual fathers, Saint Joseph. Joseph has the special place in the narrative of Matthew when Jesus is born into the world. He is the care taker and the person who takes the responsibility over his family. By marrying the Blessed Virgin Mary and through the adoption of our Lord Jesus as his foster child, Joseph surrendered himself to the divine plan. Through Joseph, Jesus legally became the rightful King of this world, over and

above being the King of the divine Kingdom. Kingdom of God indicates the rule of God in the heart of every individual. It is God who takes control of the person. This kingship is there from the foundation of the world and will be fully realized at the end of time. Joseph has his role to play in the regaining of the kingdom. Under the protection of Joseph, Jesus accomplished His mission on earth to rightfully regain His Kingdom in Heaven. Truly we see him as one who is fully involved in his mission, vision, love and faith.

St Joseph is essentially remembered as the head of the Holy Family. Our Christian families draw the example from the Holy Family of Nazareth. We have the three prominent figures here in the Holy Family: Joseph, Mary and Jesus. The recollection of this earthly trinity on this day makes us aware of our Christian mission of solidarity and love. The observance of the custom of blessing the children as provided in the ritual and where opportune, for the renewal of marriage vows taken by the spouses on their wedding day are strength to our Christian families. Outside of the feast, the faithful have frequent recourse to the Holy Family of Nazareth in many of life's circumstances: taking the Holy Family so as to model their own families. Our frequent prayers to entrust ourselves to the patronage of the Holy Family and to obtain assistance at the hour of death is of prime importance.

To develop a deep appreciation of Joseph, we must set aside some perceptions that stubbornly cling to him that he was elderly, quiet person who always remained in the background. Indeed he was a dynamic, responsible and loving person, the head of a family. We see him as a model, patron and guide. Pope Pius XII said that Joseph showed Jesus, "all the natural love and all the affectionate solicitude that a father's heart can know." No father loved a son as Joseph loved Jesus; no son loved a father as Jesus loved Joseph. When Our Lord took His first steps, Joseph held His hand. Together in the carpenter shop, they talked, worked, laughed, and prayed. The Virgin Mother was never far away. She never is! Visitors to the holy homelike the Shepherds, the Magi, literally breathed in the love that remained through the air. Saint Joseph is our model. He invites us to lead our family's life of faith by following his example. In these days when families are going through strains and difficulties we ought to seek his heavenly help. As Pope Benedict tells us, Joseph's silence speaks volumes. His very presence fills the hose with Joy, for with the Holy Family there is always joy. This joy would always remain with the universal church.

Joseph teaches us today the meaning of gratitude much as St Ignatius teaches us in the Spiritual Exercises, that all the created things of this world, including our loved ones, are given to us as gifts by God to be used or related to insofar as they help us to give God glory. Joseph loves God with all his heart, and he loves Mary selflessly, and then he chooses her. So he can't have a family, he can't have it the way he wanted to. He can't just live in his little house in Nazareth. He has to literally share this woman Mary with God as she was chosen by him. We have a great model in Joseph to show what it means to put God in first place, always and everywhere. He took care of Jesus in the world and expressed his gratitude to him for giving him such responsibility and a special role in the redemption of humankind.

We pray to St Joseph our Patron: "To you, Blessed Joseph, we turn in our struggles and hardships, and having sought the help of your holy Spouse, Mary, we confidently seek your assistance as well. By the loving affection that united you to Mary, the Mother of God; and by the fatherly love with which you embraced the Child Jesus, we humbly ask you to look with a gracious eye on the inheritance of eternal life which Jesus Christ purchased for us by His own Blood, and to help us in our need by your powerful intercession. "Defend, watchful guardian of the Holy Family, those of us whom Jesus has called to be his brothers and his sisters. Keep us, loving father, from all error and corruption. Aid us from on high, valiant defender, in our conflict with the powers of darkness. And as you rescued the Child Jesus when his life was threatened, we ask you now to defend His Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity. Shield us ever under your patronage, so that imitating your example and strengthened by your help, we may live a holy life, die a happy death, and one day join you in sharing the joys of heaven. Amen."

Once there was loving couple traveling in a bus in a mountainous area. They decided to get down at some place. After the couple got down at some place the bus moved on. As the bus moved on, a huge rock fell on the bus from the mountain and crushed the bus to crumbs. Everybody on board was killed. The couple upon seeing that, said, 'We wish we were on that bus' Why do u think they said that? If they had remained on the bus instead of deciding to get down, the resulting time delay could have been avoided and the rock would have fallen after the bus had passed ..!!! Think positive in life always and look for opportunities

when u can help Others. Many times in life, the opposite of Success is not Failure, its Quitting. Winners never quit, quitters never Win.....

Fr. Eugene Lobo S.J. Bangalore, India