

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

St. Matthew 1:18-24

If you try to find any words spoken by St. Joseph in the Bible, you will have a long search, because nothing he ever said was ever written down. But rather than what he said, it is what he did that matters. St. Matthew in his gospel writes simply that St. Joseph was a “just man.” You could say, is that all he said? But the Gospels don’t use words, like we do today, without thinking about what they mean. Every word of the Bible was carefully chosen under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to reveal truth. To say that St. Joseph was a “just man” means so much more than these two words in themselves. It means he was a man who observed all the commandments that relate to God as well as all those that relate to man. And not once, or now and then, but always and throughout his life.

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade said, “We wonder why the Gospel makes so little mention of St. Joseph. But did it not say everything when it taught us that he was the husband of Mary?”

St. Joseph, then, is silent and silence is a manifestation of the divine. Throughout the Mass, there moments of silence. Before each prayer, the rubrics, or the instructions, of the missal tell the priest and the people to be silent for a moment. That is because the words spoken by the priest is not the prayer itself. The prayer is the silence that gave way to the words of the prayer. The Bible, too, in spite of being a book filled with words, uses silence. In the silence of St. Joseph, who he was and what he did is what gives rise to St. Matthew using the words, “just man.” St. Joseph didn’t have to say this about himself—who he was said it.

Today, most people are uncomfortable with silence. Our day is filled with the distractions of television and radio and advertising and even small talk. Our society has lost the sense of silence, and even more than that, lost the value of silence. We are taught that we should have an opinion on everything, that we should rate everything, that we should have a say on everything. We are taught that we should never stop telling others what we think. But if we never stop speaking, then when will we ever have the chance to listen?

The Blessed Virgin Mary conceived of her Son, Our Lord, because she listened to the voice of the Archangel Gabriel. We say this every time we pray the Angelus: “The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Spirit.” If Mary had never listened, if she had had never remained silent, she would never have conceived of the saviour of the world.

St. Joseph, too, was a man who in silence understood the will of God—not his own will or what he wanted to do, but what God wanted. Remember when St. Joseph learns that Mary is going to have a child, St. Matthew says that he “resolved to send her away quietly” (1:19). In other words, he was going call of the marriage. But in the first of the four dreams of St. Joseph, an angel spoke to him and said, “do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (1:20). And “when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (1:24). I think we would be hard pressed to say that St. Joseph understood what being conceived of the Holy Spirit could mean. No one in history had being conceived of the Holy Spirit. But he didn’t argue and he didn’t feel the need to voice up and make his opinion known. Instead, his deep faith in God and his trust meant that the Gospel says simply, “he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.”

So by his example, St. Joseph taught the young boy, Jesus. As a father, by his obedience to the commands of God, St. Joseph taught Jesus to be obedient to his parents (*cf. Lk. 2:51*), in accordance with the God’s command (*cf. Ex. 20:12*). During the hidden years in Nazareth, Our Lord learned at the school of

St. Joseph to do the will of His Father. Even at the most difficult moment of his life, in the agony in the garden the night before his crucifixion, Our Lord chose to do His Father's will rather than his own, becoming "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*Phil. 2:8*). In these ways, St. Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Our Lord by his fatherhood.

In all this, St. Joseph never seeks to make his own opinion known, he never voices up. Instead, as St. Josemaria Escriva said, "In the different circumstances of his life... [St. Joseph] puts his human experience at the service of faith". In these ways, St. Joseph declared his own "fiat", his own "let it be done", just like the Blessed Virgin Mary did at the Annunciation and Our Lord did in the Garden of Gethsemane. This because St. Joseph knew that true human dignity and the fulfilment of our humanity lies not in ourselves but in being part of something greater than ourselves.

Our society, on the other hand, claims we should always have an opinion, whether we know anything about the issue or not, and that we should always rate something thumbs up or thumbs down, that we should always comment and give feedback, that we should always have something to say on everything and on everyone. It deplores silence and praises noise. But without silence, without listening to the voice of God spoken through the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church, without recognising that the way of faith is the way of the Cross, and that our lives should be in service of God and of the salvation of all men and women, then whatever we have to say will be nothing but a mess of confusion with no purpose, no direction, no meaning, and whatever we do, will only ever be selfish and self-entitled.

St. Joseph did not do extraordinary things, but he lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way. In a world that demands that we do what is popular, St. Joseph teaches us to do what is right.