

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

St. John 10:1-10

The 1st of May is commemorated as the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. The Church has always sought to honour St. Joseph, and has always recognised his place in the history of salvation; first Christ, then the Blessed Virgin Mary, and then St. Joseph. We see this in the Litany of the Saints. The Church arranges the order of Saints more or less in the order of their influence. So after God is invoked in the Holy Trinity, we call upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, then the angels, and then, before all others, St. John the Baptist and St. Joseph.

In recent centuries, the Church has sought even more fervently to honour St. Joseph. In 1870 Pope Pius IX solemnly proclaimed St. Joseph the protector of the Universal Church. In 1889, Pope Leo XIII wrote that “No other saint... so nearly approaches that place of dignity which in the Mother of God is far above all created natures.” In 1909, Pope Pius X authorised a litany dedicated to St. Joseph. In 1919, Pope Benedict XV issued a proper preface for the Feast of St. Joseph. In 1937, Pope Pius XI proclaimed St. Joseph the patron against atheistic communism. In 1955, Pope Pius XII instituted the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. In 1962, Pope John XXIII added the name of St. Joseph to the canon of the Mass. And in 2013, Pope Francis, following the work of Pope Benedict XVI, added the name of St. Joseph to all the Eucharistic prayers of the Mass.

But 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.

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. We believe that we have the absolute right to tell others why this or that person is wrong but without ever accepting accountability for ourselves. But then if we never stop speaking, 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 never sought to make his own opinion known, he never complained. 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.

Many people today are obsessed with the idea of power. They long to have power, but usually without the accountability that comes with it. Rather, they want to be able to have authority but without responsibility—to take the credit for themselves but to blame others when things don't work out. They believe that someone else should do this or that but insist that they should receive the credit but without doing any of the work. It is very easy to direct blame and to pull others down without recognising our own duty and the demand for service that we are all obliged to fulfil.

We live in a culture consumed with the idea of "my rights". But rights entail responsibility. Freedom demands sacrifice, authority comes with responsibility.

St. Joseph was a man who could very easily have said that it was his right to divorce the Blessed Virgin Mary, or that it was his right to ignore the government's census which meant he had to travel to Bethlehem, or that it was his right to ignore the messages of the Angel and refuse to leave for Egypt.

But he didn't. Instead, he recognised that the authority he had in the Holy Family came with responsibility, that the power he held came with duty. He recognised that in spite of what he wanted, or what he felt, or what he may have thought was best, that the will of God came before all else. Even if he could not understand why God would ask this of him, or why he would have to lead a life of tremendous suffering, he made of his life a sacrifice, realising that understanding does not always come in an instant, but, as so much of our faith

and the teachings of the Church, requires patient understanding and a surrender to the idea that maybe something or someone knows better.

Our society claims we should always have an opinion, whether we know anything about the issue or not, that we should always comment and give feedback, that we should always have something to say on everything and on everyone. It deplures 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 Holy 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 be only for us.

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.

St. Thomas Aquinas said, ““There are many saints to whom God has given the power to assist us in the necessities of life, but the power given to St. Joseph is unlimited: It extends to all our needs, and all those who invoke him with confidence are sure to be heard.”

So let us take St. Joseph as our example of faith, of discipleship and of service. Let us commend ourselves to him, the Protector of the Church, and ask that he intercede for us so that we may grow in charity and in a life of duty and sacrifice.