

ST. JOSEPH: MODEL OF FREEDOM

FR. LEO AGUSTINA

My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

When someone is canonized in the Catholic Church, we have access, so to speak, to all his or her writings and even letters, personal letters, are made public, at least for people studying the cause of canonization. And in a way, we have access to the interior life of that person, right, and it's beautiful, we learn a lot. Today we are celebrating the feast day of St. Joseph. And in the Gospel, God in his providence, you my Lord, gave us access not to his words - we don't know any word uttered by St. Joseph in the Gospel - nor we have any writing by him, but we have a better deal, we have access to the dreams of St. Joseph. This is pretty awesome to think about it. And the Gospel says in a very simple way, but deep, now is this- 'This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.'

And now, remember the framework is that we are accessing the heart of St. Joseph. Let's enter there with respect. 'Joseph, her husband, since he was righteous man yet unwilling to expose her to the shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream - in a dream - and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home, but it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus.'

In other words, you will have some responsibilities. You will give him a name. You'll have power, authority, because he will save his people from their sins. And then, let's stop here for a second. Remember we're praying right now, I'm talking to you, my Lord, and usually when I pray, I open the Gospel, the best book, in order to learn how to pray. And today, you put in front of me this figure, this instrument, in the history of salvation that is so unique, so special, because he had a vocation that was such a gift, right, to take care of the virginity of Mary, to protect that virginity, to take care of Jesus, your son, the second person of the Blessed Trinity incarnate, and to keep the secret of his conception.

That was the role of St. Joseph, and he was confused and scared as I am sometimes when I am given some responsibilities in the Church, in the history of salvation, just to think about myself - helping you to redeem souls is such an undertaking, is so, so big, so deep, that the first reaction is probably, this is not for me. You made a mistake, Lord, because I'm incapable of doing such a thing. And that's a good reaction, there's a little bit of fear, but is not despair, is- it's just saying, I need help, I cannot do it by myself, and that is when the angel, the Holy Spirit, God, tells us, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid, be just my instrument. Be there,

trying to do your best. And it gives me such a peace, my Lord, to consider that you are choosing me for something in the history of the Church because anything that has to do with salvation of souls is eternal.

So there's no small role for me. I don't know where are you right now listening to this meditation - you may be a dad that just married and had a kid or two or whatever, the vocation of marriage, and you have those souls in your hands. And this is not the small task. Or you may be a woman after many years married, trying to listen to this meditation right now in your kitchen or in the car and some of your kids are bleeding in their nose, or they are just crying or complaining and you're distracted. Or you're maybe a priest, like me, in your parish taking a break or in your car. Or maybe you're in college right now listening to this words of the Gospel while you are commuting in your train.

Wherever you are right now, you need to know something - we need to know something - that God counts on us, on you. You have a role you have received through the Holy Spirit part of the priestly soul of Jesus Christ in this world and you are about to bring them, those souls that you have around you, closer to God through you, through your freedom. And maybe you and I react like St. Joseph at the beginning. We're scared. We feel that this is too big and then what we should do is to dream with St. Joseph. To have the dream of God, to enter into this dialogue with God that gives us peace, security, do not be afraid.

I like to think that all saints were free. Otherwise, it would not be fitting for us to imitate them because it would be absurd. Without freedom I cannot relate to saints. So, the reaction of St. Joseph is what counts, what we should examine today in our prayer. The Gospel very briefly again says that, 'When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.' Joseph needed time to ponder, to meditate, to use her- his freedom. And that's the beautiful thing that we need to copy or to follow in St. Joseph.

I was reading a book about him by Federico Suarez and he says in the book that St. Joseph had three options- options as a Jewish husband regarding the pregnancy of his wife. Option number one was to denounce her as unfaithful as she would have been killed, probably stoned to death. Option number one. Option number two was to kind of a- cancel the marriage. They were sort of engaged and the law allowed people to have relationships during that time in between engagement and the marriage, but the fact that sometimes husbands would abandon their wives before wedding put the wives in the spotlight in a very suspicious and weird situation, meaning there was something wrong in this pregnancy, so you need to be very smart to understand what was going on. And it was- this is what legal option that St. Joseph had at hand. And again, these two first options would damage pretty badly the reputation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So there was a third option, heroic. And it was to take the shame upon yourself and to abandon your pregnant wife. And in the public eye, he would have been seen as you were just giving up your responsibilities and being basically a coward.

And this is what Joseph was thinking about. He wasn't guilty at all. He didn't understand, but he knew something - he knew that Mary was innocent, was pure, was beautiful. And then he thought, I'm not fitting for this. I don't get it. This is too big. I better disappear because she has other plans and God, Yahweh has other plans and I don't know, but the best thing to do is to take the shame on me and to leave and let her

be according to God's plans - heroic reaction. Only men with a generous heart, with interior life, with deep- deep eyes is able to take such a heroic reaction or heroic commitment to something bigger than himself. And the wonderful thing is that he was using his freedom in doing that. Jesus, my Lord, God the Father, Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity, help me to be free, to use my freedom like St. Joseph, responsibly.

Sometimes people come to me asking me what I think about their decisions in spiritual direction and I try to do my best with the grace of the Holy Spirit. But sometimes they say to me, what do you think is the will of God for this, and I'm always- I don't get upset at all, but I'm always a little bit against this approach. And what I try to say in those situations where they put myself on the spot like a- almost forcing me to make a decision, sometimes even in professional matters, my reaction is, you know what's the will of God? The will of God is that you think. That's the will of God, that you take responsibilities, that you use your freedom and your reason and your faith and your prayer to make decisions.

And this is what St. Joseph did. And I apply to myself. Our Lord doesn't want us to be robots, he wants us to think freely because it's the only way to love. Only if I think I can engage with reality, if I just obey blindly like a robot, there's no merit, there's no gain, there's no love because I don't understand and it's irrational. And God doesn't want us to be irrational. God gave you, gave me, the talent to- to think freely and to take responsibilities. Pope Francis, in his wonderful letter for this Year of St. Joseph, *Patris Corde*, in point number four - I highly recommend that you read the letter, it's available online - in the point number four, he talks about this idea of St. Joseph taking responsibilities, acting freely, loving his decisions, praying about them. And he says, 'Often in life things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events, as mysterious as they seemed, and to embrace them.' That's why I like embracing the mystery. And Joseph take- takes responsibility for them. And this is what the Pope says, 'and makes them part of his own history.'

Understanding or not, he tries to get deeper. He tries to take those events that come across to him in his life and then- they are part of his own history. He's not just obeying a blind destiny that comes from God and is absurd. No, no. It's my history. Jesus, my Lord, help me to be like St. Joseph. Help me to take my life seriously, and of course, in dialogue with you always filtering my decisions through- through you, through the Holy Spirit in order to get to Heaven, in order to make the best choice, but freely at the same time.

Speaking about freedom, I remember some years ago I went to this house - a friend of mine asked me to bless his new house with his wife was there and the kids. And then they asked me to go through the whole house, you know, blessing it with holy water. And we end up in the garage. They open the door, and then can you bless this new car, by the way, can you bless this new car that we just bought this week? Sure. And the car, I don't remember - it was a Lamborghini or a Porsche - it was one of those spectacular machines, and- and the wife tossed me the keys- the car keys to open the car and to pour some holy water inside while I was saying the blessing, and I did. And- and then she said something - she frightened her husband because she said, 'Oh Father, do you wanna- do you wanna take the car for a ride? You want to try? This is wonderful, has a powerful engine, whatever.' And I took the keys in my hand because, I mean, she tossed them to me

and I looked at the husband and he was sweating like, oh my gosh, don't do it - it's my car. I mean I couldn't tell if he was really scared or just concerned about me using his new car and maybe, you know, damaging it or whatever. So he was suffering, I could tell that for sure. I was laughing. I squeezed the keys in my hands. And I said, 'Maybe some other time, later.' And then I saw the relief in the husband's eyes and breathe, right? So I give the car keys back to them and we went for dinner and the occasion never came back, right, so I missed that opportunity of driving a Lamborghini or a Porsche - I don't remember.

But what I liked about that experience is to think that God gave you a Lamborghini, Porsche, a Ferrari. When you were created, when I was created, God gave us the possibility to drive. And of course, the destination, the best destination is Heaven, but there are many ways to get there. And God is not asking you just to put the automatic pilot and to have a boring trip to Heaven. The trip to Heaven is exciting and there are obstacles, there are storms, there are nights, and then you use the car that you have with the grace of God, with a prayer - that is maybe your gas - and also with your freedom - stopping when you need to stop, slowing down when you to slow down, taking a detour because there are some roads that are unable to be driven, whatever, and you use your freedom. And this is the adventure of being a saint.

St. Joseph, in the Gospel, is presented as someone excited about his destiny, not just passively obeying. St. Josemaria, in the book *Christ is Passing By*, has a wonderful meditation dedicated to St. Joseph. And he says, 'The Gospel gives us a picture of St. Joseph as a remarkably sound man who was in no way frightened or shy of life. On the contrary, he faced up to problems, dealt with difficult situations, and showed responsibility and initiative in whatever he was asked to do.' That is what makes St. Joseph a model for me, for you. That given all the talents that he had, he put them in action. As St. Josemaria says here, not being frightened or shy or, you know, in a corner just- no, no, no- scared, but engaged, embracing his situations embracing reality. And then we see him going to Egypt, learning a new language, dealing with a new job. When he came back, he said, well, Archelaus, the son of this crazy king is now in this city, I better go to another one. So he moves into this plan of redemption, not just following instructions, but trying to discover what's the best option through love, through freedom.

May you and I learn this from St. Joseph. In every situation, Joseph declared his own *fiat* - let it be done - like Mary. We say it every day when we pray the Angelus, let it be done, *fiat* in Latin. And Joseph declared his own *fiat* many times. I go, yeah, let's do it. But not just, I- I'll obey or, no, no, let's do it together, engaging - that's a beautiful thing. St. Josemaria was so devout to St. Joseph. In every Center, in every Opus Dei house around the world, I don't know if you knew that, but the key of the Tabernacle, the most precious treasure that we have in every Opus Dei house is the Tabernacle and St. Josemaria encouraged us to say *hi* to Jesus, to greet him every time we entered into those Centers, to say the first thing to Jesus, to say, *I love you*. I came here, I want to say *hi* to you, which is very simple, but very deep. Anyway, so he wanted that every key of the Tabernacle had a little metal with the image of St. Joseph and with the words that the Jewish people in the Old Testament repeated during the famine that happened in Israel and the need of food, or grain, or things for survival, they went to Egypt and they will repeat *ite ad Ioseph* - let's go to Joseph. This son that was sold as a slave and later became famous and like the prime minister of Egypt, and the Jewish people would say, let's go to Joseph, *ite ad Ioseph*.

And then, as St. Josemaria wanted to have the same approach in order to get to Jesus, to get to Jesus through St. Joseph, through Mary and through St. Joseph. So today, my Lord, again, I am in this world, I have a tremendous vocation, a beautiful vocation. I have a car - a Lamborghini - which is the dignity of a son of God. I can move in this world freely. I'm able to love and I want to use it more consciously, be aware that I am making decisions with you and for you, but that you are respecting me as you respected Joseph. That's a beautiful thing, the wonderful part. And then I want to be an instrument. I want you Jesus, my Lord, I want you, God the Father, I want you, Holy Spirit, to use me as an instrument. I want to be in tune with you but I don't want to renounce to my personality, I don't want to be shy. I want to be straightforward. I want to be confident. I want to be the protagonist of my own vocation in my part, in my role. Of course, being open to you like St. Joseph even in dreams, or like Mary, but at the same time keeping my- my initiative, right, as you did with St. Joseph, as you did with Jesus Christ - you were used as an instrument to educate Jesus, to guide him.

St. Josemaria continues, 'Jesus must have resembled Joseph.' This is so funny and- and- and mysterious and shocking and wonderful. Jesus resembled Joseph. And how, says, St. Josemaria. 'In his way of working, in the features of his character, in his way of speaking.' For example, 'Jesus' realism, his eye for detail, the way he sat the table and broke the bread, his preference for using everyday situations to give doctrine - all this reflects his childhood and the influence of Joseph.' End of the quote. I can- St. Josemaria is saying, when Jesus later explained the Kingdom of Heaven is like a sower that went to sow and the grain fell on the ground and the birds took it, and whatever - maybe, St. Josemaria is saying, maybe Jesus is remembering something that happened when he was a kid and went with Joseph through the fields and Joseph said, look Jesus, and baby Jesus was seven years old or five years old, and- and Joseph said, look, look, look at the birds, they are taking the grain. That's not fair, that's not fair. And then Jesus will remember. Oh, watch out - you can. And then later, because Joseph opened the eyes of Jesus to see reality, Jesus is able to explain things better, or humanly speaking, in a more understandable way, because of the influence of Joseph. And when Jesus later, you know, explains the parable of the Kingdom of Heaven is like the joy of a woman that lost a coin and then she just puts the whole house upside down until she finds it, maybe it was an experience that Jesus had with Joseph, saying, okay, Mary's in the market - she lost this. Before she comes back, let's clean the house, let's find this coin. They did it together, maybe Jesus was a teenager or whatever, and later he remembered the joy of Mary coming back from the market and Joseph, surprise, your coin was here in this corner or in your purse or whatever, in this box. And then the joy of Mary screaming and laughing. And Jesus, wow, this is Heaven, this is something wonderful.

Getting into Heaven, being saved is like a woman happy after finding her coin. But this is for- because of the influence of St. Joseph. Taking responsibilities, not saying well, he's the Messiah, he should know. Who am I to- to teach the Messiah anything? No, you are the instrument that you with your freedom are asked to do it, do your best, and of course he did. You have the same, I have the same dream in my hands, the Church is in my hands, redemption of souls. And I want to be like St. Joseph, Jesus, my Lord, I want to be like him, always ready to engage reality, excited - not excited emotionally, but excited deeply with my faith.

Like Pope Francis was saying in the letter, right, that- that we- we give meaning, choosing, making decisions, taking responsibility, like St. Josemaria was saying in his homily.

St. Josemaria went to him, to St. Joseph many times. Every time he would pray, he would repeat the introductory prayer - St. Joseph, my father and lord - he would put that key that I told you, that metal on the key for the Tabernacle - go to Joseph, let's go to Joseph. When Opus Dei was approved in 1941, the first Diocesan approval of Opus Dei, pious union, happened on the feast day of St. Joseph. And it was very important for Opus Dei that time because it allowed St. Josemaria to go to other cities in Spain to explain the spirituality of Opus Dei, the way of being a saint in the middle of the world, you needed approval in order to move to other dioceses, and St. Joseph on his feast day gave it to St. Josemaria, and he expanded. And now you are in the U.S. benefiting from Opus Dei and the Church because St. Joseph gave to St. Josemaria that little step in this juridical path of Opus Dei that took so many years, but St. Joseph was there blessing- giving the blessing to do that initiative.

So, there are so many reasons, so many wonderful reasons, why we should be so grateful to St. Joseph, our father and lord, the head of the house at Nazareth, the smiling face, the strong arms of St. Joseph, his interior life, his dreams, protecting the virginity of Mary, guiding Jesus Christ the Son of God, keeping the secret of the Incarnation. All of those things show how God took St. Joseph seriously as a trustee of the most important events in human history. St. Joseph was so attractive, so likable, so manly and so free. He loved because he wanted to love and this is why he is the patron of a good death, because he was surrounded by Mary and Jesus when he died. The tradition says that he was dying in his bed and Mary and Jesus were around him. So, his passing from this world to Heaven was pretty, pretty simple, right, but because he was faithful. So, let's go to him asking him to use our freedom well, to be protagonists, to have initiative, and let's go to Jesus and Mary through St. Joseph.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE



WWW.STJOSEMARIA.ORG

Content may not be published or reprinted without permission.