

Episode: Journey to the Manger with Joseph | The Second Week of Advent

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. 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 beg 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.

It has been said that female novelists of the 19th century swooned over the strong and silent type of man, that man of few words and yet decisive action. We might think of Mr. Darcy from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* from 1813. We think of his integrity, his honor, his steadfastness, he acts decisively and selflessly, especially in his support of Elizabeth Bennett and her family. Or we could think of the figure of Konstantin Levin in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, who also displays moments of quiet- quiet reflective nobility as a land owner, as a thinker. He's like focused on this authentic living. Now, he had lots of disappointments but also really sincere spiritual awakening, spiritual searching. Yet all these figures, of course, they all had their awkward quirks and- and even great weaknesses, but the most quiet and most resolute man, he existed 1000s of years ago. Yeah, that was the figure of St. Joseph of Nazareth, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the foster father of Jesus Christ and the protector of the Holy Family. As we move on now in Advent, we raise in front of our eyes this marvelous, luminous figure of St. Joseph, and for all his greatness, the Bible never actually recorded a single word from him. We only have a few lines that get dedicated to his communications with angels and his actions- his simple presence. He's a kind of an elusive figure, and it took time for him to appear in the devotion of the faithful to him.

In the early Church, there was- there was especially an urgency for Christ's true identity as true God and true man to- to be properly established. And Mary was both virgin and mother, and so by the power of the Holy Spirit, she conceived this child who was perfect God and perfect man. And yet, Joseph stood behind and he played that silent role, the strong, reliable, faithful protector of the Holy Family. In fact, in the earliest iconography of the birth of Jesus, he's not even in the cave where Mary gave birth, he's outside, his eyes are closed, he almost looks sleepy, but he is the guardian of that family, and he shows a characteristic serenity too.

At first, Joseph was bit forgotten, but with time, his figure came more to the fore, and we eventually get many saints showing deep, deep devotion to St. Joseph. Pope Francis wrote an apostolate letter on St. Joseph in 2022. It was called "Patris Corde," "The Heart of a Father." The beautiful title named "The Heart of a Father." And that definition of Joseph can guide us now during this time of Advent of the heart of a

father. As we have recourse to his intercession, trusting in this silent, hidden role that he can play as we slowly move towards the birth of Christ.

But let's try to understand better this fatherhood so we can see how he protects us, but how we can learn from him as well and experience a deep sense of calm, of stability, of confidence in our own life. We will have that selfless figure we can all learn from and see in what way we, too, need to anchor a prayerful and reflective nobility, you could say, in our vocation, in our work and in our family. Now, one of the virtues that dominates in St. Joseph is, I would say, his courage or his solidity, and this kind of sense of reliability that we get as we see the little, short snippets in which he is revealed in the Gospel. "Joseph had the courage," says Pope Francis, "to become the legal father of Jesus, to whom he gave the name revealed by the angel. The angel said, 'You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'." So he was the one who gave the name to Jesus and gave Jesus a kind of human legitimacy. And that holy name, Jesus, it sounded in his ears after the dream in which the holy name of Jesus was revealed. Jesus, it was a name, it was an identity that gave legal standing to Jesus. Well, Joseph gave that name legal standing, and he would have written it down in legal documents, and it wasn't Joseph who really chose it. He was just obeying and following orders from the angel. That name would save his people from their sins, as the angel said. That name established a relationship, as Adam did in the book of Genesis, when he named all the plants and all the animals that God had entrusted to him.

So, Joseph's relationship was now that of a foster father of Jesus, and he took on this responsibility, this task, this mission. Later on, Jesus is described as the son of the carpenter, and Joseph is identified by his profession, by his job or his ability, and even in his responsibility that he must have really nourished, that he must have really nurtured. He left his professional mark in people's plows, in their doors, their door frames, their furniture, all these things that he would have made for them. And his identity was that of a carpenter. You know, I think he should have been identified as the father of Jesus but- but maybe that would have given him more prestige, like more standing to be the father of Jesus. But instead, Jesus is identified as the son of Mary, not the son of Joseph. He's the son of the carpenter, but not strictly the son of Joseph. And there's something endearing to us upon seeing this silence. You know that Joseph never says a word, this kind of hiddenness. It has been said that this silent nature of Joseph is like the extension or the prolongation of that divine logic by which Mary exclaims in her great hymn of praise, the Magnificat, where she says, "God has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly." Joseph did not complain about this mission of his. He was not humiliated by it even though there's not a single word of his recorded in the Gospel. But that does not mean that he went through it like a kind of a submarine going through the Gospel without any effect. And Pope Francis reflected on this figure of Joseph. In particular, he reflected upon it during the global pandemic. And he was trying to really praise and highlight all those hidden people during the pandemic that were hardly ever spoken of in those terrible days, the dark days of the pandemic, where we all had to be hunkered down in our houses and masks on and all those people that died. In that encyclical, I love this passage, it's right from the very beginning of the encyclical letter of Pope Francis. He says this, "Our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked, people who do not appear in newspapers and magazine headlines or on the latest television show. Yet in these very days, they are suddenly shaping the decisive events of our history. Doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests, men and women, religious and so very many others," he says, "They understood that no one is saved alone."

"How many people," the Pope says, "How many people daily exercise patience and offer hope, taking care to spread not panic but shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children in small, everyday ways how to accept and deal with a crisis by adjusting their

routines, looking ahead and encouraging the practice of prayer. How many are praying, making sacrifices and interceding for the good of all?" Well, that was Joseph. He was like interceding for the good of all. Maybe that can be you and me too, interceding for the good of all. Maybe you and I, we can be those hidden workers that nobody praises, nobody interviews, but we're there for the sake of the Church, for the sake of the people of God, doing our work with true rectitude and true desire to serve.

And Joseph, well, he came to understand his role, not by external appearances, not by any evident visions of an angel, but by the very personal dreams that came to him when he was asleep. His vision came to him when he was asleep. In fact, it was not just once that God spoke to him, but four times, four dreams. And these dreams did not leave him like unsure, perplexed or confused. In each case, he showed immediate obedience. Hey, we see this- this great line several times. When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him. He did- he just did it. And so- he did it in four dreams, like first, when he was told to take Mary as his wife and give Jesus his name. That's the first dream. Then the second, to get up and take the child into the distant lands of Egypt. Third dream was when he was told that those who sought to kill the child were now dead, so he could go back home, he could go back to Israel. Fourth, he was told specifically to go to the region of Galilee and settle there in Nazareth, and that's what he did. Each time, he gets up right away. There's a kind of promptness, a readiness in his obedience, and this awareness that he has to move now. He has to go, to reject any kind of procrastination. This is what makes him so kind of reliable. He takes his family with him, and he's gone. Let's go. Let's do it.

Well, Joseph may be the patron of the universal Church, he may be the patron of workers, but sometimes I like to think that he could maybe be the patron of the heroic minute, because he gets up, he does not bottle, does not hesitate. He just gets out of bed and does it. He doesn't worry about the hardships involved. And we can see too, we can see where we- where we might sometimes have to get up. We can learn from this, from the very first moment of the day. We can do that too. We can get up, get out of bed, move on to our mission of that day, offer our day. There's a mission for us, even if we're tired, even if we've slept poorly, even if we're like, still in our nice, toasty bed, but we have to get up.

I'm sure you've read that point of *The Way*, no. 206 by St Josemaria, "The time fixed for getting up without hesitation, a supernatural reflection. And up and up! The heroic minute. Here you have a mortification that strengthens your will and does no harm to your body." That's from *The Way*, 206. Well, now let's think of Joseph, and when we get up we can think of Joseph, and he'll encourage you to get up, get up out of bed, procrastination must not paralyze us. And yet, from all these dreams, meaning, from all these moments in which he was asleep, Joseph rises out of his comfort zone, you know, like getting up when we have to get up early to go to the airport to catch a flight, or just we have to get up early because a new day has come. And he rose and he rejected this apparent need for rest. He pulled himself out, you know, especially when it was this kind of urgent and important situation. You know, it is said that we are in one of the most sleep deprived societies ever. The phone and its attractive lure is taking away from the recuperation that we need in sleep, and we find all kinds of excuses to let the death scroll take over late, yeah, late into the night. There's so many attractive things to look at, funny videos, great movies, stories, cool interviews, all these images that can log into our brain to just sit there simmering, almost like agitating us. Well, during this time of Advent, we too, like Joseph, want to be focused on the essential, the important, not on the secondary, not on the passing things, not on our own interests or all those things simply- stimulate us.

Joseph was humble, so he felt deeply moved at having been chosen to be the protector of the Holy Family and of the Savior. And he did not reject this mission or see it as too difficult or overly complicated, he just embraces it cheerfully, not considering himself worthy of this really great mission. And so, Joseph teaches

us to allow ourselves not to be misled or dissipated by secondary things that can kind of, like, drain us of all our energies and even, like, dampen our spirit of service. We can ask him, St. Joseph, energize me with more- decisive spirit of service. You know, I asked a little girl once, a little child, very young, if she knew what a spirit of service was. And she looked at me, "I don't know. I don't know what a spirit of service is. I don't know." Maybe that phrase sounds a little bit too adult for her, right? I understand. So- I asked her if she could help her mother in cleaning the house, maybe, and doing some dishes. Well, she wasn't sure about that either, but she said she could put things away and tidy her room. That she could do, you know, the idea of putting things away, that made sense to her. And yeah- she could do that. So I told her, very good, very good- now you know that is a wonderful spirit of service, leaving her room in order. Well, that was within her capacity and within her reach, but she did not previously understand that this was a spirit of service for the family. But now she knew what to do, and she did it for Jesus. And indeed this made her very happy, made me happy too, that she understood this, you know, but she felt now like she felt it she had a mission from God to keep her room tidy, and that this would really please Jesus very much.

Now, I'm not sure if she will remember all this, but I think she understood her mission. So, like Joseph, we have to understand our mission just like this child did. And this mission is not exactly the vocation, but it does fit within the realm of our divine vocation. See, mission is what we identify in every moment of our life, where we can get up right away and do what the Lord asks of us. And this mission can be quite specific and quite concrete, and we can indeed identify it, even we could outline it every day, like cleaning our room. But then it can also morph as our situation evolves, as our challenges change. You see, Joseph had four dreams, each dream connected with the next one, and each dream from an angel had a message that underlined this beautiful grace that he received for each mission. Each time he just, well, he just got up without dawdling, without fear, without hesitation, and certainly without procrastination. He just got up. This is my mission.

It was like that Nike ad that you may have seen from the I think it was from the 1980s or so that had that iconic phrase, "Just do it." I think there was a commercial with Michael Jordan saying to us, "just do it" with the swoosh of the Nike brand with him throwing the ball, not hesitating, swoosh and moving forward. We have to do that, move forward, embrace our mission, just do it. Now, Nike came up with other commercials. There was one from 1988 and it showed this 80-year-old man whose name was Walt Stack running over the Golden Gate Bridge. He's jogging, it's very early in the morning. There's this golden sunlight, there's this pleasant music played in the background, and you hear his voice over with his very like doddering old, elderly voice. And he says, I run 17 miles every day, as you can see him shuffling a crop over the bridge, and, you know, waving at the cars passing by. He says, people ask me, how I stop my teeth from chattering during the winter. He says, I just leave them in my locker at home. And then that line appears across the screen, "Just do it". Just do it. Of course, referring to this 80-year-old man who's got the figure to run 17 miles. Just do it. Of course, it is meant to inspire us. It's meant to drive us out of our comfort zone. Another Nike ad was titled, "Find your greatness." Find your greatness. Well, this time, the voice over speaks about our perception of greatness as though it were something reserved for a few chosen athletes that are super unique. But as the ad goes on, it shows that greatness is really suggested to be, like, really in our DNA, that we have it all within, that we just have to, like, awaken it within us and- and you see this image of a chubby 12 year old kid running and breathing hard. He's sweating, and he's on this empty road in the country. And then it cuts to a different, skinnier 12 year old kid who is on the pitcher's mound, and you see him throwing a pitch in slow motion, and we see suddenly catches the ball and- and then suddenly you see that he only has one arm, and yet he manages to throw it, zapping it right there to first base. And it's true, you know, greatness is something that we have to discover. It's part of our mission, part of that grace that God will give us and that we can respond to with the same joy that St. Joseph had. This is what the Gospel says, "Joseph got up and did as the angel asked him to do."

Let's be moved by Joseph's humble acknowledgement that he really had received, you know, a message from an angel with these very specific instructions- When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. How beautiful is his obedience. It made it possible for him to surmount all the difficulties and spare Mary, of course, and the child from hardship. He will intercede for us as we work. He will intercede for us as we move towards the great mystery of the birth of Christ, the incarnation. And maybe we'll do that quietly, but always we want to do it with the promptness and decisiveness of one who wants to serve.

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