

Saint Joseph

Friday 1st May 2020



The last public Mass celebrated at St. Mary's was now over six weeks ago on Thursday 19th March! It was the Solemnity of St. Joseph. His second Feastday, is coming up on Friday 1st May and is known as the 'Feast of St. Joseph the Worker'. I thought it was appropriate then to talk about this wonderful saint who is a gift to us all, given by God Himself.

After Our Lady, St. Joseph is one of *thee* most holiest saints ever! That is a powerful statement but one that the Church confirms by giving him the title of '*Protector of the Holy Church*'. From the millions of saints that have lived only one is trusted enough to protect the Church and that is St Joseph because of his powerful intercession and holiness of life.

St. Joseph protected and saved the lives of Jesus and Mary. He saved their lives! Name another saint who has ever done that? Who else can claim such a thing?

'...The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.' So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt.'

(Mt. 2:13-14b)

As Herod began his murderous act of slaughtering all those innocent ones who were two years of age and under, St. Joseph took the Christ child and Our Lady and brought them safely to Egypt. His actions were instant and selfless. He did not argue with the angel of the Lord saying, 'I can't leave I have a business in Nazareth, I have customers orders to fulfil.' He didn't complain and say, 'Egypt! Is there not a safe place nearer to home, a place with other people of the same religion, the same language and the same culture?' No. When God placed Mary and Jesus into the care of St. Joseph, it was then that his faith shone. It was then that we saw a faith not superficial or conditional but real, heart centred, obedient and revealed in action.



St. Joseph, God's guardian of His most precious treasures, was somebody who was not only full of faith but of life. He was not some feeble, ageing servant as some images portray him, but strong and youthful. Mother Angelica, the famous founder of the Catholic Television Network EWTN, once said: 'Old Men don't walk to Egypt!' Joseph, this strong and healthy husband cared for his wife and the Christ child in that foreign country of Egypt. He protected them, provided for them and most importantly loved them. As God the Father entrusted this man to care for His Son and the Blessed Virgin let us also ask for his intercession and help especially for friends and family at this time. Let's ask St. Joseph to love and protect them as he did for the rest of the Holy Family.

We all know about the Annunciation, we even have a wood carving of it on the reredos of the High Altar at church. It's that moment when the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive and bear God's Son. Our Lady's response is an emphatic 'YES'. But let's not forget the Annunciation of St. Joseph.



'...The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit.' (Mt.1: 20)

To put Joseph's annunciation into context and understand the truths it reveals for us today we have to begin by looking at the marriage customs of first century Judaism. Mary and Joseph were married. Once a couple were betrothed (Mt. 1:18) in this ancient culture they entered into a legal marriage covenant. For the first year of their marriage they would live apart as husband and wife. When Mary's pregnancy was revealed to Joseph he knew that the child was not his. His response was to 'divorce her informally' (Mt 1:19b). This can appear as a weakness in Joseph's character, an understandable flaw, but let's look closer.

The great theologian St. Thomas Aquinas and the mystic St. Bernard of Clairvaux both described the '*reverence*' shown by St. Joseph in this episode of the Gospel. Joseph loved Mary. He knew the purity of her heart, the total devotion of her faith in God, the innocence of her life and therefore he never thought once that she had been adulterous. They were husband and wife, a union blessed by God, and they knew everything about each other. They were in a committed and loving relationship. Joseph knew, through Mary and later confirmed by the angel of the Lord, that the child she carried was God's. Out of unworthiness and humility he decided to follow the Old Mosaic Law and divorce Mary because, in his initial thinking, he regarded himself as having no right even to be in the presence of the Mother of God let alone the soon to be born Messiah. He felt he was disrespecting the Lord if he continued in a marriage with God's chosen woman who was far above him in grace. Who was he but a lowly carpenter from Nazareth. It is at the Annunciation of St. Joseph where this humble saint, like Mary at her Annunciation, is told not to be afraid because God has chosen him to look after Mary and her unborn baby and raise the child as his own.

***'When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home...'* (Mt.1:24)**



Let us ask St. Joseph to help us live a life of genuine humility like he did. It is only when we live humbly, when we come back to earth and are rooted in God that we truly begin to grow both in faith and in our humanity. To walk in the humility of St. Joseph is to see the love and mercy the Almighty has for us; to recognise our need of Him in finding true peace and happiness; to understand the paths and roads he calls us to follow on our earthly pilgrimage, both easy and difficult.

For me personally, this Friday will be the end of a 33 day prayer of consecration to St. Joseph. Part of this time has been asking the Holy Spirit to help me imitate the life and virtues of St. Joseph so that I can be a better man, a better parish Father, a better adorer of Our Lady and a better servant of Jesus Christ. During this global crisis and our present lockdown situation I have found great consolation from the intercession of St. Joseph knowing that as the '*Protector of the Holy Church*' he is also protecting our parish family, which is dedicated to his beloved spouse Mary.

Once church re-opens I intend to place an Icon of St. Joseph in the chapel of Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle in thanksgiving that the doors of God's house have been opened. I also intend (when it is not a solemnity, feastday, memoria or funeral) to celebrate a votive Mass for St. Joseph each Wednesday, the traditional day given to him in the Roman Catholic Church. We say Mass every Saturday morning at the Lady Altar honouring our Blessed Mother, I think it is only right to honour her most chaste spouse and guardian – the carpenter of Nazareth, our spiritual father and protector.

The Memorare of St. Joseph

Remember, O Most Chaste Spouse of the Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly to you, my spiritual father, and beg your protection.

O Foster Father of the Redeemer, despise not my petitions, but in your goodness hear and answer me. Amen.

God Bless and keep praying.

St. Joseph, our spiritual father and protector, pray for us.

Fr. O'Brien