

22. December 2019

“To learn from St. Joseph”

*Mt 1,18-24*

*This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him 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. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: Look! The virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.*

Today in the text we meet St. Joseph in very characteristic situations which say a lot about this saint who is venerated by not few Christians.

On the one hand, Saint Joseph is described as just, which is a high distinction. This righteousness also encouraged him not to expose Mary when he could not explain the circumstances of her pregnancy! He did not yet know anything about the mystery of God between her and the Lord! But he did not follow a suspicion that could easily arise in such a situation, but sought a solution that would not hurt Mary or cause a stir.

This is an attitude that is unfortunately less and less to be found today. It is not uncommon to speak very thoughtlessly about sexual sins, for example, and to pass on things from this sphere, which one may only know from hearsay and whose exact circumstances one does not know at all. I also say this in relation to the painful process in the church, for example the abuse scandals of clergymen.

Surely it is right to be very vigilant here, to detect misconduct and to deal with it accordingly. But be careful with suspicions, because innocent people can easily be accused. This stain is then difficult to remove in public and can destroy a priest's

life! Here one should go to school with St. Joseph and let God show one the right way!

Joseph himself is addressed by God and enlightened about the plan of salvation, just as Mary received the proclamation of the angel in Nazareth. While Mary expressed her consent in her unforgettable Yes, Joseph shows it with his obedience. He no longer asks questions, but acts according to the instruction he has received!

So we see the example of two holy people who both listen directly to God in situations which they could not overlook but could only accept in faith!

This gives us a great teaching. It cannot be in the following of the Lord that we exclusively follow the knowledge of our intellect. This is merely a natural light, which does not recognize supernatural processes by itself. Faith, on the other hand, opens itself to supernatural instructions from God! It is in itself a divine virtue!

Faith is both: a grace which we receive and which we strive for with our own will and which we can attain by opening ourselves to this grace. Then this light enlightens the mind and we can act in faith and involve all the natural elements. This is an important process because there can be two gross misleadings: One can put the mind in the place of the supernatural light; one then tries with the mind to understand things that need another light and it remains so closed to us. Or else we no longer use reason in things of faith, and then the behaviour becomes unreasonable!

In Saint Joseph, who behaved so pure toward Mary, we probably face a pure heart. He certainly knew Mary's purity, and he did not want to defile the inexplicable. We do not know how many prayers he sent to God and what inner struggles it may have cost him to resist dark thoughts!

But we know the result: God led him through this trial and he proved worthy to take the virgin bride and become the head of the Holy Family! This says so much about him and even more about God's love for Saint Joseph!