

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Year C: Bar 5:1-9; Ps 126; Phil 1:4-6, 8-11; Lk 3:1-6
December 5, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

This coming Wednesday, December 8th, is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, a holy day of obligation to attend Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It's also the end of the Year of St. Joseph in the Church. A year ago, Pope Francis invited the whole Church to focus on St. Joseph for a year, and to learn from his example about virtue and the spiritual life. During this past year, many people throughout the Church prayed to St. Joseph, and the 33-day consecration to St. Joseph became very popular. But, just because the Year of St. Joseph is coming to an end doesn't mean that our prayers to him need to end. In fact, the purpose of this past year was to help everyone in the Church develop a devotion to St. Joseph and a deeper appreciation of his role in salvation history.

St. Joseph is also an important figure for us to keep in mind during this season of Advent. Together with Mary, he knew who her Child was – that He was the Son of God –, and he understood the significance of His birth. In a dream, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said, “*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For 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, because he will save his people from their sins*” (Mt 1:20-21). Together with Mary, Joseph knew that the Child whose birth they awaited was the Messiah who would redeem the world. And so, we can imagine the anticipation he shared with Mary to see this Child who would be born for our salvation.

Two thousand years later, St. Joseph is well-known throughout the world and throughout history. But at the time he lived, he was *not* well known – he was just a simple, modest man who received no recognition or fanfare or special attention. And yet, he was cooperating with God to bring about the redemption of the world. St. Joseph understood that the world did not yet realize the great events that were taking place in his lifetime. And he also understood that it was not his place to announce these great events. His place was to play a quiet role of support and protection of the Savior.

There are so many important spiritual lessons we can learn from St. Joseph, but one of them for us to consider as part of our Advent preparation for Christmas is the importance of silent meditation and dedication to the interior life. Since it was not St. Joseph's place to announce what was about to happen in the world, he

must have spent much time meditating on what he knew, in addition to speaking about it all with Mary. As Pope St. John Paul II pointed out, “[t]he Gospels do not record any word ever spoken by Joseph But the silence of Joseph,” he said, “has its own special eloquence” (*Redemptoris Custos*, 17). The silence of St. Joseph “reveals in a special way the inner portrait of the man. The Gospels speak exclusively of what Joseph ‘did.’ Still, they allow us to discover in his ‘actions’ – shrouded in silence as they are – an aura of deep contemplation. Joseph was in daily contact with the mystery ‘hidden from ages past,’ and which ‘dwelt’ under his roof” (*Redemptoris Custos*, 25).

Because St. Joseph had daily contact with Christ, he must have spent much time observing and reflecting on the Divine Person who lived with him and Mary. His silence in the Gospels tells us that he was dedicated to the interior life, and his dedication to prayer and reflection must have sustained him as he faced and overcame challenges. “It was from this interior life,” Pope St. Paul VI explained, “that ‘... consolations came, bringing him also the logic and strength that belong to simple and clear souls, and giving him the power of making great decisions – such as the decision to put his liberty immediately at the disposition of the divine designs ...’” (*Redemptoris Custos*, 26, quoting Discourse of Paul VI). In this way, St. Joseph also gives us the example of *quiet cooperation with God*.

You see, when we are dedicated to contemplation and the interior life, we are led to focus on what really matters in life, and ultimately on our relationship with God. When we spend time reflecting and praying, we are less distracted by what is only temporary and superficial. Some people don’t like to focus on the interior life. It makes them nervous, because it challenges them to face and address matters with authenticity and genuineness. In the interior life with God, there are no shows and no performances, there is no need to impress anyone or to justify ourselves. There’s only the truth about our lives that God already knows and waits for us to realize and acknowledge with honesty. And this is why we should welcome the silence of prayer and contemplation in which we can receive clarity and consolations from God, and then make good resolutions to follow God more faithfully.

By meditating on Christ and the secret of His divine mission, St. Joseph developed a “love of the truth – that pure contemplative love of the divine Truth which radiated from the humanity of Christ” (*Redemptoris Custos*, 27). This, and dedication to prayer and reflection and the interior life, is one of the great lessons we can learn from St. Joseph, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ as Christmas.