December 18, 2022—Fourth Sunday of Advent

The last two Sundays have given us the words and life of John the Baptist as a guide to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus this Christmas; the Fourth Sunday of Advent presents St. Joseph as our model. Unlike St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph doesn’t have a recorded word, but his role was just as indispensable for God’s plan for our salvation.

Joseph had to be physically strong since his work as a carpenter would be very demanding. At the same time, he was a man who prayed and thought through things. For the most part, he was in the background in the Gospel events; I like the phrase “Masterly Inactivity” to describe him. This is not inactivity in the sense of laziness but expresses the idea of someone who takes the time to think, reflect and go more deeply into the questions of life. St. Joseph practiced this kind of Masterly Inactivity or deep reflection and came to a profound understanding of God’s plan for his life and that of his family.

Joseph and Mary were officially married when the contract was agreed upon, but often the husband had to prepare a house for them to live in, so it was common for time to pass before they had the marriage celebration and began to live together as husband and wife. This was the case of Joseph and Mary. The Gospel told us that Joseph was presented with a dilemma. On one hand, he knew the kind of woman Mary was—virtuous and good; she was admired by everyone as a holy, young woman. On the other hand, it became obvious that she was going to have a baby and he knew he wasn’t the father. We don’t know if Mary tried to explain the unexplainable or not, but we do know Joseph had to find a solution that was right and just.

The least painful for Mary would be to divorce her quietly. He would look like the bad guy who deserted his pregnant wife, but it would prevent her from suffering the full consequences of the Law of Moses. God didn’t reveal His full plan, all at once to Joseph, as He did to Mary at the Annunciation. Joseph had to struggle interiorly before God’s plan became clear to him.

We are in the same situation in life. God has a plan for each one of us, but we don’t know what it is at the beginning. We must develop our talents, pray, receive the Sacraments, deal with various good and bad events and interact with people in order to come to an understanding of God’s plan. Even when we get a clear idea of our vocation, there is still more growth that is needed and refinement of our understanding of God’s plan. I am still trying to uncover it further in my own life.

Joseph trusted in the Lord and at the right moment God sent the message in a dream. The angel told him, “**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**.” At long last, it was made clear to Joseph, and he joyfully fulfilled the will of God.

This event has another lesson that goes back to the Old Testament and the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah came to King Ahaz with a fantastic promise. Ask anything of God, “**be it as deep as the netherworld or high as the sky**” and God would give it to him. However, Ahab was a faithless king and didn’t believe in God, so he pretended to be humble and dared not ask the Lord. Isaiah saw through it and was angry, so he prophesied the fulfillment of something impossible: “**the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel**”.

Matthew applied this prophecy to the conception and birth of Jesus. The impossible became possible through the power of God. Joseph’s dilemma in this Gospel points to the fact that he knew he was not the father of Jesus. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity who took on our flesh to be Emmanuel, meaning God is with us.

When Joseph gave the Baby Jesus His name, it was at that moment that he adopted Him as his Son and Jesus inherited everything that the First-born Son deserved. Joseph became His true father here on earth. We can only imagine the graces that Joseph received to carry out this role as the earthly father of the Son of God.

Just a few words about the upcoming Parish Appreciation Dinner on the eve of the Epiphany. With this dinner, I want you to know how much I appreciate you.  
When this parish was founded 16 years ago, many of you who are sitting in these pews took a risk to join me in founding this parish. The rest of you who have come along later also joined in what I think of as a holy and great adventure. To begin something new is never easy but you have brought your unique gifts and talents to St. Gianna Parish and have made it into a parish family, a true faith community. You have made many sacrifices and I have relied upon you and found strength in your support all along the way, but especially now. Our holy patron, St. Gianna has set the standard for what it means to love and respect the family and the dignity of each human life.

As you know, we are going through some difficult times in the Archdiocese and many of you have poured out your hearts to me as I have to you. I have found my

strength from you and from the sacraments. The fear of the unknown causes many deep emotions but we need to keep our gaze on Jesus and treat one another with the utmost love, even those we perceive as our enemies. We must fight against discouragement and anger, with a holy optimism and a desire to do good to all. Jesus is more powerful than any problem or enemy and only asks that we put our trust in Him.

I want this Appreciation Dinner to be time of joy and celebration and gratitude to God for all He has done for us. If you haven’t yet registered, please do so and let’s rejoice as a parish family in the birth of Jesus our Savior!