

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 18th 2015

Once again despite my good intentions, rather than being a contemplative time my Advent is filled with many activities: care packages for my college girls getting ready for their finals, time with my mother in assisted living, finishing projects at work, preparing to have my family room painted and carpeted (I can't recall why I thought December would be a good time for this project). While all of the busyness is the fabric life, there has not been much time for prayer and reflection. Therefore I thought it would be good to pray with today's readings right before going to sleep reasoning that would help prepare me to write this reflection in the morning.

Imagine my delight when I read about Joseph using a similar strategy as he was grappling with his heartache on how to respectfully end his engagement to Mary once he learned she was pregnant. He came up with a plan and then went to sleep. But as Matthew tells us, something amazing happened when Joseph was sleeping. An angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph assuring him: "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." And as we know, Joseph listened to the message sent to him from God.

This inspired me to reflect upon times I have heard the voice of God in my dreams or when I am daydreaming. Mark Thibodeaux SJ has written that "good discernment consists of prayerfully pondering the great desires that well up in my daydreams....It will not feel as though you are making a decision but rather are acknowledging a decision that has already been agreed upon by God and your heart." Joseph with peace and grace models this for me today.

Advent is the perfect time to appreciate the wonder of what Thibodeaux calls praydreaming. My world can be so outcome oriented filled with expectations to use my time efficiently and to make decisions quickly. Advent invites us to slow down and to listen to God. I am grateful for the multiple opportunities to slow down and live my desire to praise, reverence and serve God. This frame is so helpful when grappling with a decision.

Here is a current example from my life. I received an urgent sounding message from a family member about needing to book lake cabins for 2017... a year and a half from now. The question of the cabins has been reimagined for me from one more distracting task to a chance for me to pray about how best to engage with the extended family and how to help all to feel included. My response to the message was "this sounds like a wonderful Advent reflection" and happily my family member agreed whole-heartedly. I now have a better understanding why I always wish my daughters "sweet dreams."

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