

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Mar 19th 2016

Solemnity of Saint Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Today is the solemnity of Saint Joseph, the husband of Mary and the earthly father of Jesus. Joseph was the man that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had chosen to spend the rest of her life with, and he, in turn, had chosen her. They were betrothed but not living together yet when Mary received a visit from the angel of God asking her if she would accept God's invitation to be the mother of the Messiah becoming pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary accepted God's invitation without trying to make sense of it. Now she had to tell Joseph. How would he make sense of that? I don't imagine Joseph getting mad or confrontational. I just imagine him becoming overwhelmed with sadness and needing to leave her sight for a while.

The Gospel tells us Joseph was a righteous man. He was compelled to do what was right according to the Law, yet, he loved Mary. I imagined he prayed about this for a while, I can see him being mad at God, asking God "Why this? We had such a wonderful relationship, we had so many dreams together..." And God listened to Joseph. Joseph decided he was not going to expose Mary publicly, but he was going to leave her quietly. He risked being blamed by people around them for being faithless and inconsiderate: "Why would he leave her? What got into him?" He did not care what people thought. He was not going to shame Mary, or worse, expose her to being stoned. I imagine this was a very hard decision for Joseph and he put a lot of prayer and reflection into it. He really loved Mary and was probably devastated to have to leave her, but this was what the God given Law demanded. I imagine he was still troubled by this decision when God talked to him in a dream. God's angel said to Joseph: "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." (vv. 20-21) The next day Joseph took Mary into his house as the angel had said. What a tremendous act of faith!

Joseph had cultivated a deep relationship with God throughout his life and was open to receive God's gift of being the person who would help educate Jesus, the Messiah. In this relationship, Joseph was not in control and this was fine because he trusted the One in control. He knew the Law given by God to God's people, he was faithful to it, yet he was open to God's surprise. The law was not a god for Joseph, just a means to God. Only God was God. His heart was open. He trusted in God's faithfulness and held on tight to the angel's words: "Don't be afraid."

During this remaining Lent season and the coming Easter season, let's pray for an open and trusting heart. Let's pray for the courage to receive God's gifts openheartedly and with gratitude the way Joseph did.

Mariana Miller/Creighton University's Campus Ministry