

Fourth Sunday of Advent (B)
December 21, 2014.

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it done to me according to your word' (Lk.1:38).

On this fourth and last Sunday of Advent, as the Solemn Feast of Christmas draws nearer, the Sacred Liturgy invites us to be one with the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, our Lord's Foster Father; that we may learn from them how to approach and how to serve the Mystery of God made Man, the Word Made Flesh. The Immaculate Virgin Mary is the chosen Daughter of Israel, the Mother of the Messiah, the Redeemer. St. Joseph is the Chaste Guardian of both the Virgin and of the Redeemer. Like our Lady, St. Joseph also receives a unique task in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. *His vocation is to be the visible fatherhood of God on earth, to serve the Son of God and His Mother selflessly; and such service is reward enough in itself* (Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy Heart of the Word*, p. 72).

Our Catholic Faith has always venerated the Blessed Virgin Mary; and in the development of doctrine that defines a deeper understanding of the Mysteries of God revealed to humanity so long ago, we have also come to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the role of St. Joseph in the Mystery of Salvation. In Canada we venerate him as Patron of our Nation and with the Church throughout the world we also regard him as the Church's Universal Patron. It is eminently appropriate that he, to whom was entrusted the care of both the Son of God and His most holy Mother, should now continue to exercise a provident fatherhood for us, the children of the Heavenly Father as the Mystery of Salvation unfolds in the reality of our own times and our own individual lives.

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it done to me according to your word' (Lk.1:38). These words which we recall three times daily in the recitation of the Angelus are no less descriptive of the manner in which the Mystery of Salvation was served by St. Joseph. In St. Matthew's account of our Lord's Nativity an angel is also sent by God to St. Joseph and in a dream he is told, *Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'....When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home (Mt. 1: 20-21, 24).* In receiving the pregnant Mary as his wife, St. Joseph also receives the whole ineffable mystery of God-made-Man in her. It is also St. Joseph's task to give the Child the name that contains the secret of His life and mission. *And you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21).* The name Jesus (*Jeshua*) means 'GOD is salvation'. *Concealed within the name of Jesus is the tetragrammaton, the mysterious name from Mount Horeb, here expanded into the statement: God saves...The God who is, is the saving God* (Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, the Infancy Narratives*, p. 30). With such a public proclamation of Jesus' identity, St. Joseph becomes the first evangelist, and in a liturgical context. Before all peoples, during the rite of circumcision, St. Joseph becomes the living symbol of the divine Father who sends His Son on His mission of salvation by giving Him the name that expresses who and what He is. *He will save his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21).*

In the unfolding of the Mystery of the Incarnation the role of our Lady as Mother of the Saviour cannot be overstated. The Saviour's task was also revealed to St. Joseph, and so we venerate our Lady and St. Joseph with a particular honour and devotion. The Church honours St. Joseph with what is known as *protodulia*. The veneration that we give him is higher than any given to angels and saints, except for our Lady who receives the special veneration called *hyperdulia*. There is irrefutable evidence that God's power shines forth most frequently where His Mother is honoured and venerated. We see this in both the events that we will recall in our Christmas celebrations and likewise wherever our Lady is honoured and venerated in her shrines and churches dedicated to her. Often, at these shrines that mark our Lady's appearance, such as Lourdes and Fatima or Rue du Bac in Paris, there is the revelation of a secret design that cannot be humanly understood at once. In time, these secrets however become transparent; accessible to all who have received and fostered that evangelical virtue so loved by the saints and so evident in the life of our Lady and St. Joseph. That virtue is the simplicity that gives a true sight of God. It is the virtue that enlightens our intellect to seek and strive for the essential.

Simplicity is a virtue like no other in helping us to achieve clarity of thought and singularity of purpose. Our Lady's response was a simple *yes*. St. Joseph likewise simply obeyed. *When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home (Mt. 1:24)*. This is the obedience of faith that takes God at His word. This is simplicity. St. Joseph is a sublime icon of manliness; especially needed in an age like ours that is so confused about the nature and purpose of masculinity. His courage and willingness to build his life according to the designs of God now revealed to him should be a source of strength for all of us as we endeavour to serve the Mystery of Christ at work in and through us in our world.

St. Joseph has much to teach us. Let us learn from him simply to take God at His word; to obey and to serve the God of Salvation. Sadness and confusion, presented to God, invite His coming. From our Lady and St. Joseph we can learn how to do this. He who *was placed as guardian over God the Father's most precious treasures, (Paternal vices, May 1, 2013, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments)* can teach us to cherish Jesus Christ who comes to us not as a Child but in His Eucharistic poverty; and in the poor and suffering whom you have so generously helped. May we learn from St. Joseph how to cherish the Blessed Sacrament, for the Eucharist is Jesus; Emmanuel, truly God with us. *Love Saint Joseph a lot. Love him with all your soul, because he, together with Jesus, is the person who has most loved our Blessed Lady and been closest to God. He is the person who has most loved God, after our Mother. He deserves your affection, and it will do you good to get to know him, because he is the Master of the interior life, and has great power before the Lord and before the Mother of God (St. Josemaria Escriva, The Forge, 554).*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eunOJOewlkk>

