

ADVENT MISSION

PART III: ST. JOSEPH: A MAN OF QUIET HOPE

Brothers and sisters,

As we come to the final night of our Advent Mission, I want to return to someone who has already captured our hearts this season — St. Joseph.

At the beginning of Advent, many of you and staff and families from our parish schools came together for our Advent Family Mass, where I offered that evening, a reflection on the importance of St. Joseph as a model and mentor for us through Advent, as we prepare for the Coming of the Lord. He is that model and guide as a man of dignity, courage, and trust.

So tonight, I want to stay with St. Joseph, and maybe to go a little deeper, because if Advent is about hope, then St. Joseph may be one of the greatest teachers of hope we have.

St. Joseph never speaks a single word that we hear of in Scripture and while he might not have said anything we need to remember, his life and his actions DO OFFER US SOMETHING TO REMEMBER.

His life preaches. It preaches hope — not loudly or dramatically — but consistently and faithfully. — He is a model of enduring hope. St. Joseph teaches us that hope is not always expressed in words but very much expressed in the decisions that we make.

St. Matthew tells us that St. Joseph was a *righteous man, in other words a good man*, and that goodness is tested immediately. St. Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant — before they live together, before the story makes any sense to him. Try to imagine that moment. Try to imagine the shock, the confusion, the hurt maybe even the anger — a sense that everything you thought you knew has suddenly collapsed and disappeared and the woman you love and imagined you'd spend your life with has betrayed you.

Friends, it's very human and very natural for us to go there first before we reason further. Most of us, in that moment, would have a strong reaction — wouldn't we?

We would react out of anger, maybe wounded pride or all the other natural emotions I've just listed. Surely, it's Joseph's faith that keeps him from reacting, as our faith should help us in the darkest and most confusing

moments of our life too. Even Joseph's decision to "dismiss" or "release" Mary from her betrothal shows a love and consideration for Mary over his own desires.

St. Joseph responds versus reacting. To react is to let the moment control us. To respond is to entrust the moment to God.

We can only imagine – this man who, just as Mary was chosen by God, is chosen for this mission. Is chosen because he is a man of prayer – which doesn't make him a man with all the answers; but a man capable of surrendering to God, to bring as many of the decisions, especially the most important ones, to God.

And so, we find him responding rather than reacting and he chooses compassion over condemnation.

And in that pause — that quiet, interior space, hope is born through St. Joseph.

St. Joseph resolves to divorce Mary quietly not as a moment of weakness but with strength shaped by faith. In a world where reputation was everything, St. Joseph chooses love over his own image or how he will appear and mercy over any sense of needing to justify himself.

He teaches us something essential for Advent, but also for the Jubilee Year:

True dignity doesn't come from what others think of us. It comes from knowing who we are before God. And that is worth repeating

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St. Joseph knows his worth is not up for negotiation. And because of that, he can act with integrity even when his world is shaky and unstable.

Hope always flows from our identity and how we see ourselves before God – do we see ourselves as worthless, as sinners doomed or as sinners striving to be saints or beloved children of God? When we know who we are in God's eyes, we don't need to panic when life surprises us, such as it did for St. Joseph and such as we are likely to meet surprises in our life.

And then, God speaks. – not in a crowd or publicly, but in a dream.

“St. Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.”

How often God says that to us and we should be hearing Him say that to each of us:

Don't be afraid to trust God, to love Him and others, to begin again and start over, to say yes to something we did not plan.

St. Joseph learns what Mary learned before him:

- **That God has a plan.**
- **And that plan is bigger than St. Joseph's expectations**
- **And that plan will cost him something as all good plans do**
- **And that plan will require him to surrender control.**

And St. Joseph says yes.

Not because he understands everything — **but because he trusts the One who understands everything.**

This is the heart of what Christian hope is about. Hope is not synonymous with clarity, hope does mean we must trust.

We rightly celebrate Mary's "yes" at the Annunciation. But St. Joseph also had his own annunciation. His yes was no less costly.

- St. Joseph says yes to becoming a father to a child who is not his by blood.
- Yes, to a future that no longer belongs to him.
- Yes, to protecting a family that will place him in danger.
- Yes, to poverty.
- Yes, to exile.
- Yes, to a life of not knowing what God has in store next.
- Yes, to always taking second place.

For these reasons among many others St. Joseph is a powerful witness for us. Because we celebrate that he doesn't become smaller by taking a step back — he is great!

In the Kingdom of God, greatness looks different than it does in the rest of the world, and while we may at times be mocked for this — we remind ourselves that holiness is not found in being recognized, but in being faithful. Not in being seen, but in serving. Not in being first, but in putting others first and loving to the best of our ability with the greatest love.

St. Joseph's hope is not ambitious, instead it's obedient. And that obedience holds heaven and earth together.

We celebrate –

- That St. Joseph protects Mary and protects Jesus.
- St. Joseph is a model provider
- St. Joseph is a good listener
- And like God whom we call the Unmoved mover – St. Joseph moves as God tells him to move.

And all the while, he does not know how the story will end.

St. Joseph lives one faithful step at a time; he lives each day in faith.

And this is the kind of hope most of us are called to live each day. Not the hope of having everything figured out, but the hope of trusting God **today**.

This is why St. Joseph is so relevant for our families.

When we look closely at the Holy Family, we can see what St. Joseph and Mary gave up:

- They gave up their own personal security
- They gave up their reputation or the name they might make of themselves
- They gave up their comforts in life
- And they gave up their plans.

But we can also see what they were given:

- a purpose that was greater than themselves,
- a home shaped by love which despite its ups and downs is a model for us
- And they were given an important role, a share in salvation history.

And here is the important truth:

God desires the same for us, the same for our families yet we need to have faith and trust in this in order to play our part.

God doesn't desire perfect families, he desires faithful families, families where love is practiced, given and learned.

He desires families that demonstrate and give witness to sacrifice and forgiveness, in this way and other ways faith is passed on quietly day in and day out.

As I've mentioned before, I'm ashamed to admit that when I was a kid, but not alone in thinking this way – that I wanted a different family. I saw the flaws before I saw the gifts. Many of us do. It's easy to idealize the Holy Family and make presumptions about them that make them seem unrelatable. We can also overlook the holiness growing quietly in our own homes.

But when we step back, we begin to see something beautiful.

- Most parents I know put their children before themselves in many things and many ways
- Most parents I know make sacrifices no one applauds and joyfully do so
- Most parents I know protect their families with courage and strength, even if they feel weak
- Most parents I know love without counting the cost of doing so.

In a way, that is the way St. Joseph and his legacy lives on today.

And when parents and grandparents strive to raise children with faith, integrity, and love, they are living the same hope St. Joseph lived.

Advent, especially in this Jubilee Year, is a time to **renew hope** – to renew our sense of hope. Not by demanding certainty, but by choosing trust and choosing to surrender ourselves to that faith and trust.

St. Joseph teaches us to pause and to listen and to act by faith rather than in fear. He teaches us that God often speaks in silence and that when we stop reacting to things and begin listening, God really will reveal the next step. Not the whole path — just the next step.

And that is enough.

Friends, as we prepare for Christmas, St. Joseph stands before us and asks a gentle question:

Will you trust God with what you cannot control?

Will you choose faithfulness over fear?

Will you protect what God has entrusted to you?

Will you take one faithful step forward?

Because that is how hope is lived.

Quietly. Faithfully. One day at a time.

And if we do that — in our homes, in our parish, in our daily lives — we will discover what St. Joseph discovered:

God really is guiding every moment.

Amen.

Father Chris' Homilies