

Lessons that Joseph must have given Jesus – 18 June 2021 (Year of St Joseph) –2

The heading of this presentation is: lessons that Joseph must have given Jesus.

SHOW PICTURE OF KNOCK APPARITION??

At 8.00pm, on 21 August 1879, strange things began to happen in Knock, which is a small rural village in the west of Ireland. The evening was wet and windy. Yet, 15 people quickly gathered to look at the gable wall of their local church.¹ They stood in pouring rain for more than 2 hours. They recited the rosary. What they saw enthralled them. The Eucharist, as the risen Lord, was visible as the Lamb of God on the altar. To the right of the altar stood St John the Evangelist, and then Our Lady, with her eyes raised in prayer. Finally, there stood St Joseph.

No words are spoken. St Joseph with head bowed, and hands joined, leans forward towards the Eucharist, Mary and St John. It is also worth noting that this was a time of immense poverty, starvation and of evictions from homes and farms in Ireland and especially in the surroundings of Knock.

On the 19th March last, the feast of St Joseph, Pope Francis named the shrine at Knock as an International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine. This announcement makes us more aware of Knock. In particular it shows St Joseph having a specific role in the story of salvation. It also focuses awareness on the power of intercessory prayer to him, especially during times of hardship.

The first thing that Jesus must have learned from Joseph is to trust God's plan for his life. Joseph lived with the conviction that God had called him to specific tasks. He let God's loving plan guide him. He walked by faith. Jesus would have seen this in his actions and words. In the words of Pope Francis: 'Joseph teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture' (Patris Corde, 2). Joseph accepts the divine love and plan for his life, even though he did not always understand its deepest meanings and where it might lead him. In Luke, for example, we read: 'but they did not understand what he meant' as the response of Joseph and Mary to the words of Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:50). Yet, Joseph trusted in God and let himself be led.

Jesus would certainly have picked up Joseph's openness to the mystery and power of the Father's call. It would have influenced and encouraged him during his life. It is easy to imagine that he had the memory of Joseph in mind when he said: 'my food is to do the will of one who sent me and to complete his work' (John 4:35); and later when he cried out: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani", that is 'my God, my God, why have thou forsaken me' (Matthew 27:46) when he knew that a painful death lay ahead.

Learning within his Family

In observing Joseph within his family, Jesus learns about being a servant. Joseph lived out his love of God and of the tradition in the concrete events of daily life as a family man, neighbour and carpenter. This was his oikos, his primary relationships.

¹ *In our Gaelic language Knock is known as Cnoc Mhuire ie. Hill of Mary*

Observing his attentiveness to people and readiness to help taught Jesus about service, and prepared him to give his life that others may live.

In Luke we read, 'Jesus then went down with them to Nazareth and lived under their authority. ... And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people' (Lk 3:51-52). In other words, through his parents' influence, he gradually learned to make wise decisions, to become mature, grow in his love of God, and be a positive influence within his community, his oikos.

Jesus knew the scriptures. Yet, there is no evidence that he was part of any rabbinical school, nor learned as a Pharisee or as a scribe. Joseph with Mary must then have taught him so that his life became rooted in the scriptures, Jewish practices and traditions. For them, for example, time was not first of all about production and performance. Rather, according to their scriptures, it was more about celebrating the gifts of God. There was time to pray, play, forgive, sit by the campfire, converse and enjoy the company of family and friends. Jesus was shaped by this rhythm. He lived it. We read of his intense engagements and ministry in the scriptures, balanced by times of finding wisdom, comfort and wisdom in quiet places with his Father or with a few companions. In this we have much to learn, and to reclaim about rhythm and balance in life of work and play; prayer and action.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus at Nazareth tell us much about the reality of the domestic church. They lived the Jewish rhythm of life. At the same time, they had many questions, which caused them great anxieties and feelings of inadequacy. No doubt, these concerns were part of their daily prayer and conversations. In this way, they learned a deepening trust in God's providence. Pope Francis states, 'even through Joseph's fears, God's will, his history and his plan were at work, Joseph then teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses (PC, 2).

Jesus grew up and developed in this environment. It greatly shaped him, thanks to the influence of Joseph and Mary. It can also teach us today about family as the domestic church and about its central role in the renewal of God's people.

Accompanying another

Joseph lived for Jesus and Mary. He knew the anxieties of being a parent. He learned from experience that he did not possess his son. Rather, he knew his task was to accompany Jesus to take on the freedom of loving the Father and abandon his life to him. This meant walking with him step by step amid the disruptions and tensions of family life. It involved listening, hearing his sons deepest needs, answering questions, opening up the scriptures, explaining, enjoying his efforts, celebrating his successes, giving meaning to his disappointments and tears. In summary, for Joseph, it meant a life of accompanying Jesus in loving attentiveness.

This may explain why Jesus in the gospels gives so much time to various individuals. He had learned from Joseph the importance of one to one encounters, friendships, and being present to another in love. For him, such meetings were opportunities to reveal for another the presence of God amid the disruptions and joys of life.

It is interesting to know that Pope Francis highlighted this need of accompanying another towards the acceptance of Christ, so as (I quote) ‘to introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery’ (EG, 171).

St Joseph then confirms an emphasis on one to one and ‘step by step’ evangelization. In this our disruptions as well as our trust in God are visible. This too can serve another. If we are seen to be perfect, we can easily turn people away because they know they can’t be like us, or don’t wish to be like us.

Evangelization then is a sacred joy and responsibility. It is accompanying another at the mysterious moments of openness to the Holy Spirit. This space is therefore sacred. Here you stand with another where the experience of faith interrelates with the story of everyday relationships.

Some Conclusions

Joseph had a central role in revealing God’s saving presence in the world. In doing so he helped shaped the attitudes and life of Jesus.

Today, he continues to reveal the human face of God, and is forever a mediator of God’s mercy and love to all people.

As cell people, we too have our part of play in the story of salvation. We are called to love God and give him a welcoming and birthing place in our own lives and in our world. Like Joseph, we will not always understand what we sense God is calling us to do or to say. At such times, we can look to him for encouragement.

As in Knock, Joseph comes to the help of people during times of poverty and need. May we learn to call upon him as a companion, and especially as cell evangelists.

St Joseph, pray for us. Amen.