

Second Topic: Saint Joseph accepting Mary and Jesus in God's way

As leaders and potential leaders of the Parish Evangelisation Cells, we look at *four distinctive features* that specify the identity and mission of Saint Joseph in order to draw some ideas about our own identity and the way we are called to exercise the fatherly ministry towards our cell members entrusted to us.

Docile to God's will

Firstly, Saint Joseph teaches us the art of responsibly embracing fatherhood and motherhood, namely of accepting and welcoming these roles. In fact, after overcoming his "*disappointment*" and "*rebellion*" and setting aside his legitimate personal plans, he loved and welcomed Mary and Jesus, a wife and son who were very different from the vision of family life that he could have wished for, but for this reason he cherished and loved them even more. In other words, Joseph did not seek explanations for the surprising and mysterious reality he found himself facing, but embraced it with faith, accepting it lovingly just as it was, "*part of his own history*".

How would we respond and react if our *plans, expectations* and *wishes* failed to come to fruition?

Humble author of prodigious undertakings

Secondly, Saint Joseph reveals to us what leadership attitude we ought to adopt in different circumstances, namely in front to open the way, in the midst to encourage, behind to gather the last. This is what we are called to do in our relationship with the cell members entrusted to us, that is to say, to be attentive guardians, swift to change according to what the situation requires; not to be rigid, but responsive to current needs of the cell. When we love and know our cell members, we do not put ourselves and our own ideas at the centre, but their wellbeing we are called to care for, avoiding the opposite temptations of authoritarianism and negligence.

In every situation, Joseph, like Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, accepted God's will and responded immediately.

Creative Servant

Thirdly, Saint Joseph is a father who dreams, namely a man who knows how to look beyond what he sees, capable of recognising God's plan where others see nothing, and thus of having a clear goal towards which to strive. In fact, he was able to see in Mary and Jesus not only a young bride and a child, but he always saw in them God's action and presence.

By looking after the fragility of Mary and her child, he therefore looked beyond his duties as a father of a family and, preferring to believe in God rather than in his own doubts, offered himself to him as an instrument for the realisation of a greater plan, in service rendered latently, magnanimously and unstintingly.

Similarly, it is imperative to us in leadership role to know how to dream of the cell that we love, so as not to limit ourselves to wanting to preserve what exists, but we must be ready to start from the concrete history of our cell members in order to promote conversion and renewal, and to make our cell growing, made up of missionary disciples led by the Spirit and controlled and compelled by God's love.

Faithful Servant

Joseph's call in a dream and his big-hearted response to it has been achieved with faithfulness on a daily basis. Being a "*righteous man*" empowered him to walk and follow God by constantly serving him and fulfilling his plans.¹⁰ At a particularly critical moment in his life, he thoughtfully considered what to do, but did not let himself to act rashly by acting instinctively.¹¹ Instead, he "*chewed over*" it. His decision of embracing Mary and her child was carried out with exemplary fidelity. It is indeed through perseverance

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century English Baptist preacher, known as the "Prince of Preachers"

that every call is brought to maturity, and this was reflected in Joseph’s faithfulness in plying his trade quietly as a craftsman,¹² which has inspired the daily lives of countless leaders, fathers and artisans ever since.

Such faithfulness is nurtured by God’s own faithfulness. The first words that Joseph heard in his momentous dream were an invitation not to be afraid, because God is ever so faithful to his promises: “*Joseph... do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife*”.¹³ These assuring words by the Lord are also addressed to us whenever we feel, amid uncertainty, hesitation, trials and misunderstandings, to follow his will every day; these are evocative words we will hear at every step of our call, as we return to our first love; they are truly a repeated line accompanying all those who, like Joseph, say yes to God with their lives, through their daily faithfulness which is the secret of joy.

In an age characterised by transient happiness, anchored in ephemeral choices, that brings no enduring joy, it is verily a strong testimony that we have made Jesus the *dream* of our lives, *serv*ing him *faithfully* in our brothers and sisters in the Parish Evangelisation Cells.

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¹⁰ Matthew 1:18

¹¹ Matthew 1:19

¹² The term “*carpenter*” (in Greek, τέκτων) occurs in the New Testament only in two parallel passages, which report the rejection by the people of Nazareth of Jesus as “*the carpenter*” (Mark 6:3) and “*the carpenter’s son*” (Matthew 13:55).

This word in 1st century Israel refers to a general craftsman who worked with stone, wood, and sometimes metal in large and small building projects. In a land of omnipresent stone and few trees, a craftsman worked primarily in stone, and much less in wood or metal. Such a craftsman is called a “builder,” and he worked on all the structures mentioned by Jesus in his parables as well as wine-presses, millstones, olive press stones, tomb stones, cisterns, farm terraces, vineyards, watch towers, house extensions, etc.

¹³ Matthew 1:20

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century English Baptist preacher, known as the “Prince of Preachers”