

St. Joseph's creative courage

Introduction

This teaching is like a continuation of the previous one about the challenges and difficulties that St. Joseph had to face and overcome. Now we want to focus on the courage and creativity that St. Joseph has shown, because that was what led him not to be paralyzed by the challenges but find innovative solutions that led him to pursue his path.

In the mission of the Church, especially for those in leadership roles, it is very important to think about St. Joseph's creative courage, because every leader experiences situations in which he has to go through obstacles that require the same attitude. Courage, which comes from the determination of the will, is a gift of the Spirit to make us strong in the midst of difficulties. St. Paul writes to Timothy reminding him that "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit power and love and self-control." (2 Tim, 1:7). However, although being fundamental, courage is not enough, for one can use it, disoriented, blindly, and without knowing where to go. But God, who gives us the spirit of power, also grants us a gift of discernment that opens us to creativity, that is, the ability to find new paths in difficult situations.

In the gospels we often see Jesus "rewarding" and praising people who had shown creative courage. When Pope Francis speaks of St. Joseph's creative courage, he refers to those four men who wanted to bring a paralytic to Jesus so that He healed him, but they couldn't because of the crowd that surrounded Him. So they were creative enough to make a hole on the roof and lower the man down right in front of Jesus. On seeing the faith of those men, which led them to such a creative gesture, Jesus healed the paralytic. We could still talk about Jesus' praise of the dishonest steward's creativity to find friends to help him when he was fired, so that he didn't have to beg. Jesus regrets the children of this world are more creative in achieving their own interests, than the children of light for the things of the Kingdom of God. (Lc 16,1-12)

Some examples of St. Joseph's creative courage

In all the difficulties that St. Joseph went through, he showed creative courage. It should be remembered that, in the culture of the time, it was always up to man, husband and father, to make the decisions, within and outside the family. Therefore, without diminishing in any way the unique vocation of Virgin Mary, mother of the Savior, chosen by God and preserved from the stain of sin, the Holy Scripture recognizes Joseph as being protagonist in fundamental decisions, whenever it is necessary to overcome difficulties and find new paths.

St. Joseph's creative courage is shown when he is able to find out another way, different from the one that is proposed and demanded by the religious traditions of his people. We can see it when he decides neither denounce Mary, his wife, that so could be stoned, nor abandon her. On the contrary, he courageously decided to take care of her, protecting and supporting her throughout his entire life, thus becoming the true father of Jesus, before the law and society.

We can also see St. Joseph's creative courage in the solution he found to get a place for the Saviour's birth. There is no place in any inn for Mary to give birth in the smallest required conditions. But the Child is going to be born and quick decisions have to be made.

Joseph makes the decision in a courageous and creative way. Since God had chosen a humble servant in Israel to conceive in her womb the King of nations and a poor carpenter to be his father and protector, perhaps it is also his will He is born in extremely humble and poor conditions.

Scriptures also reveal us St. Joseph's creative courage in the sight of King Herod's threat, to search for the Boy to kill him. Courageously, without thinking of the difficulties of the journey, he made the decision to go to Egypt looking for safety for his wife and to the Son that God has given him to care for. How will he find a roof over their heads, how will he support his family? There were so many questions for which he had no answer, but faith gave him courage and confidence and, above all, it was necessary to do everything to protect the family that God had given him.

When we so often see boats arriving in Europe full loaded with immigrants from Africa and other latitudes bringing nothing with them but the clothes they wear, we can imagine that before leaving their homeland and finding the money to pay those who promised to bring them safely, they may wonder, "Where am I going to live?" "How will the travel be?" In the news, they have already heard that there are dangers and that many die on the way. How do they still have the courage to put their lives at risk?

Just like Joseph runs courageously away to Egypt, to save the life of the Son and the mother that God has entrusted to him, thus these brothers get away from war violence and famine and hopelessness towards future.

So they risk everything. They want to be hopeful because not doing so means to be dead.

On his return from Egypt we still see the same St Joseph's creativity when he decides to choose in Nazareth rather than in Judea, where Archelaus reigned, in order to protect his Son from the arrogance of the latter.

Like St Joseph, God asks us to be protectors and guardians, whether of our children when we are parents, or of the members of a cell if we are leaders, or of the poor and the defenseless, if we are in charge of a social home or other institution of which we are caretakers. Pope Francis also reminds us that God has entrusted us with the protection of all creation as our common home and we must protect it with the same creative courage with which St Joseph protected his Son and his wife.

Joseph is aware that God has entrusted him with a mission that is not only to protect his wife and his Son, but also to collaborate in the plan of salvation that the Lord has for the liberation of his people and of all the peoples on earth. This is why Joseph takes it upon himself with such courage and dedication.

According to the Scriptures, in the history of Israel, St Joseph had many examples of situations in which God had opened up new paths for his people. This was what happened, for example, when He allowed another Joseph to be made a slave, and then become the first man after the Pharaoh, in order to save his people later, calling them out of Egypt (Hos 11:1) and leading them to the land he had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Or even when God sent Samuel to Jesse to call his youngest son David, the most unlikely among all his seven brothers, to succeed Saul as king of Israel, as this one's disobedience had displeased the Lord. It was to David that God had promised that from his offspring the Messiah would come. And Joseph belonged to his descent.

We could also refer to the capture of Jericho and the fall of its walls (Jos 6:1-21) and many other biblical accounts.

This trust in God who called him to collaborate in his plan and who said to him: "Joseph, son of David, fear nothing" gave him the courage not to give in to fear and also the creativity to open up new horizons of possibilities.

Nowadays we much need Saint Joseph's courage and creativity!

Today's world is in a state of continuous change. Everyday people have to face new problems that demand courageous and inspired decisions from leaders. Our temptation can be to depend too much on our human possibilities and get into a sterile pessimism that shows no way out. The response must be trust and faith that lead to transformative action.

On inviting the Church to a new evangelization, S. John Paul II explained that it had to be "new in its enthusiasm, methods and expressions". He was aware of the difficulties of evangelization in today's world in which the Church has lost relevance and whose message is one among so many others that propose to make man happy. But the recent Popes have not ceased to remind us that the protagonist of evangelization is the Holy Spirit, who never ceases instilling courage and creativity in those who do not let themselves be overcome by the difficulties and challenges.

Covid 19 pandemic times have been difficult times in which we have faced the unknown, but they have also created courageous creativity in the ecclesial community that has found new paths of evangelization. In Portugal we started to have Alpha courses online and people from all over the country signed up, some even living abroad in countries where the Portuguese language is spoken. When Alpha was over, a great many of them accepted to make part of cells of evangelization. So, now we have online cells, spread all over the country and which we follow closely, while until now we only had cells in one city of the same diocese.

When a group, a community, a cell, seems to be aging and losing its dynamism, enthusiasm and is not able to evangelize, we must ask the Holy Spirit to show us new ways and what needs to be changed internally and externally.

May St Joseph's creative courage help us to be creative and daring leaders, because in God everything can always be renewed and there are not any no-way-out situations.

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