

Good evening dear brothers and sisters,

it is good to know that you are here this evening to share in the joy of belonging to the Lord and the desire to serve him with love.

Today too, thanks to this School of St Joseph, we have the opportunity to get to know more closely the figure of St Joseph as a working father and to learn from him how to become disciples of Jesus.

Personally, I have been devoted to this saint for many years. In fact, I had a great-aunt who was a nun and very devoted to him, who always taught us, through St Joseph, to trust in Providence. She had a statue of the Saint to which she had tied a small bag in which she put all the intentions of us family members so that they would be in close contact with the Saint and benefit from his intercession. It was a simple way of explaining to us the concept of trust in Providence, but we have never doubted the power of St Joseph's intercession, and on all occasions of difficulty throughout our lives we have always turned to him thanks to this teaching.

And so today I find myself looking to him as an example of a man who put himself at the complete disposal of God's work. But how can we find in St Joseph a guide to become good disciples?

I would like to analyse with you some of the saint's virtues to take them as a starting point in our journey of faith and discipleship.

First of all, St Joseph was an obedient man: whatever God asked of him through dreams or angels, he did it. He never put his common sense or his view of the facts before God's requests. He acted in obedience and that was all. He was a righteous man. This obedience was linked to a strong capacity to listen to the will of God, but whenever the will was revealed to him he always followed it, even at the cost of making himself ridiculous or unpopular.

We too are called, following his example, to first of all listen to the will of the Lord. This happens through assiduous approach to the sacraments, adoration, reading of his Word. Then we are called to action according to what is asked of us, without putting obstacles in our way.

In our journey in the cell we are privileged because we always have someone above us who is called to guide our way.

For the cells it is the leader, for the leader it is the division leader, then the area leader and finally the parish priest. In this way we are given the opportunity to walk in obedience trusting the one whom the Lord has placed above us to guard us and to show us the way.

In obedience we learn to put aside our own self, trusting that God also speaks through the brother or sister who has been given to us as a guide.

In my long experience of walking in the cells - I have been a member since the age of 15 - I can testify that on those occasions when I have been asked to do something that I thought was beyond my strength and I have made myself available out of obedience, the Lord has put me in a position to do it. I am thinking, for example, of when Paoletta asked me to speak at the International Cell Seminar. How could I think of speaking in front of all those people without having any training or theological studies behind me? And yet, the Lord used my simple testimony to reach the hearts of those people who were looking for an example of concrete life lived in faith through the cell journey.

When on certain occasions it seems absurd to obey, let us think of St Joseph: he obeyed to keep a pregnant woman as a wife, he obeyed to give birth to a child in precarious conditions, he who was descended from David! He obeyed in fleeing to Egypt with the newborn child and then returning to Nazareth shortly afterwards. These are all situations that our practical sense would have considered absurd, but Joseph obeyed, he acted according to God's instructions, and it is thanks to his obedience that God was able to manifest himself to mankind.

Another virtue that St Joseph can teach us is that of Perseverance.

In fact, this man not only did what he was asked to do but always remained in the role he was given. He did not just do what he was asked to do and then follow his aptitudes and aspirations for the rest, but he structured his whole life around Mary and the child Jesus. He was an exemplary father and husband, supporting his family with his work and accompanying them with total dedication.

He fathered a child who was not his own, and as soon as he could he left his carpenter's workshop to do "the things of my Father". He was devoted to a woman who fathered a child that was not his. Can you imagine how the eyes of the world might view such a man? He would be seen as a madman or as a man without a will of his own who allows himself to be trampled underfoot. Instead, his perseverance, his always staying in the role he was given, all this allowed God to do his work.

In my own small way I can testify that in many years of being a cell leader I have found myself many times having to do the cell meeting in two or sometimes alone, perhaps even after a very tiring day with small children. But in spite of this I never gave up, I didn't think it was reasonable to stop. The Lord was calling me to persevere, to STAY. And in that staying, without apparent meaning, God made his plans and carried them out. The cell continued to exist and then to multiply. Praise God.

The last aspect I would like to analyse of this extraordinary saint is the fact that he was a dreamer. St Joseph always believed in his dreams and realised them with determination. God revealed himself to him many times through dreams, and Joseph believed that in the words revealed in his dreams there would be the fulfilment of his happiness. He did not think to cast away the words of the Angel and to give up his dreams and plant his feet firmly on the ground. He decided in his heart to follow the revelation, he believed in it and brought it to fulfilment.

We too are called to dream, to allow ourselves the taste of savouring the things of God and living them in our lives at the cost of seeming crazy. We in particular, who are part of the cells, have always had a dream, the one we find in Mark 16:15: *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"*.

So this is my prayer for all of us, that we may learn to follow the example of St Joseph in obedience, perseverance and the fulfilment of dreams. May the Lord bless us and lead us with a strong and loving hand as he led our beloved St Joseph. Amen