

HOW TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL LIKE ST JOSEPH

I INTRODUCTION - A) BE SILENT

1. Introduction

Dear sisters and brothers, last week, on the 8th December, the Year of St Joseph came to an end. A year that was inaugurated on the 8th December of last year, on the occasion of the 150 Anniversary of the proclamation of St Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church by Blessed Pius IX, in 1870.

This year was a great blessing for us.

Personally, I have discovered St Joseph in my personal spiritual life. At baptism I was given four names. The second one, after Paul, I was given the name of Joseph for my father. My father was very devout to St Joseph, he always carried His image in his wallet. After his death, someone drew my attention to the great blessing he has received in dying on the 19th of the month and on a Wednesday, both are traditionally linked to St Joseph. In fact, we celebrate the feast of St Joseph on the 19 of March. On that day, we started this journey that we are concluding today. The 19 March this year fell on a Friday, the third Friday of the month, and therefore we kept this appointment of the third Friday of the month, skipping only May and August, because of the International Seminar and the summer holidays.

On that day, I took a statute of St Joseph sleeping, like the one Pope Francis has brought with Him from Argentina and which He has made it so popular. I took His advice and wrote a particular need that the International Organism was having after the death of Don PiGi and the loss of his apartment which used to host so many guests and Promoters and Referents of Nations. I wrote: *“St Joseph, find us an apartment and provide us with the money we need to finance it.”* Today, I am so glad to give you the great news that on the 12th October we signed the contract for renting an apartment few meters away from our Offices in Sant'Eustorgio!

However, I am sure that this School of St Joseph has been of a greater blessing for all our International Organism at the Service of the Parish Cells of Evangelisation. This School of St Joseph brought together 20 Promoters and Referents from 12 countries representing three continents. St Joseph has brought us together in a moment when God is calling us precisely to do this: to come together, to walk together, to discern together, to take decisions together and to act together for the evangelisation of so many human beings who are lost, and for our parish communities to become missionaries.

Thanks to St Joseph, the Lord has prepared us for the great and unique idea launched by Pope Francis for the XVI Synod of Bishops in 2023 about the synodality in the

Church. The Lord has prepared us to think and feel with the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, what St Ignatius of Loyola used to say: “*sentire cum ecclesia*”.

St Joseph’s School of Discernment

We thought and planned to conclude the School of St Joseph with a fundamental lesson we need to receive from this great Saint, namely how to discern the Will of God in His own style, in His own impressive and particular way. Usually, when we speak of discernment our mind goes to the great master of discernment, St Ignatius of Loyola, and his rules for discernment and for the way he guided communal discernment that saw the foundation of the Society of Jesus that gave us so many great saints and missionaries and in our days Pope Francis.

During all the teachings we had during this year, inspired by the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis *Patris Corde*, we reflected so much on the way St Joseph has fulfilled the unique mission God had for him in the plan of Salvation. The way he was guided to discover what God was asking from him during his sleep and through dreams was a continuous point of reference.

Today we want to go deeper into what seems to be a strange way of coming to know the Will of God. It seems that the method used by St Joseph in discerning the Will of God is so different from the method taught by St Ignatius. Or maybe there are some similarities and some differences. However, all this confirms the common understanding that discernment is an art, the art of discernment.

Five steps

We can distinguish five steps taken by St Joseph in his process of discernment. Let us see them one by one, starting with the first important rule: Be silent.

a) Be silent

One of the most remarkable things about St. Joseph is that he doesn’t speak a single word anywhere in the New Testament. But didn’t Jesus talk... a lot? Sure he did. But we also see him going off alone for quiet and solitude. What did Jesus learn from Joseph’s silence? Attentive listening for God’s voice.

Pope Francis qualifies St Joseph’s silence. He tells us that the silence of St Joseph was patient and eloquent.

*“Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His **patient silence** was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust.” (7)*

“Jesus told us: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”

*(Mt 11:29). The lives of the saints too are examples to be imitated. Saint Paul explicitly says this: “Be imitators of me!” (1 Cor 4:16). By his **eloquent silence**, Saint Joseph says the same.” (Conclusion)*

Therefore, the silence that leads to the right discernment must be a patient silence, because we need to trust God, Who is more eager than us to reveal His Will to us, but only He knows the right moment and the right way when and how to do it. Temporary silence is no silence at all. Silence needs to be constant and continuous, at least until we listen to what God wants to tell us.

The silence of St Joseph is very eloquent. His silence speaks loud! I know brothers and sisters, who were so impressed by these teachings, especially by the repeated reference and reflection on the deep sleep of St Joseph, that they got the habit of praying to God to speak to them during their sleep and their dreams, as He did with St Joseph. You see, St Joseph’s example is so strong; his silence speaks. Really, he tells us: *“If you want to listen to God speaking to you, be imitate me, be as silent as when you sleep!”*

The silence we are speaking about is not just exterior silence but even, and especially, interior silence. Of course, there cannot be an interior silence if there is not first and foremost exterior silence. The first great challenge that we have, in seeking to really listen to what God has to say to us, is to create or seek a place where we can be quiet, without any interruption of any noise whatsoever. Try to do it, to see how next to impossible it has become for us to find such a space of complete exterior silence. Try to switch off your mobile phone or hook off your fixed line; try to switch off the television and the radio; try to close the computer; maybe even the door bell.... just for half an hour, or even a quarter of an hour! Today, not even in Church we are able to do this; many are not even capable not to look at their mobile phone during Mass or adoration! They turn their cellular silent, but they cannot resist the curiosity of looking at some message that arrives!

You see! If creating exterior silence around you is that difficult, imagine what it is when it comes to the interior silence. Very often, the greatest challenge for exterior silence is the frightening idea of having to face the emptiness and the hurts that our hearts are full of the moment we left by ourselves. Dear sisters and brothers, we need to face all the cries and fears that are shouting within us and we are so afraid to listen to. We need to go through a process of inner healing to quiet and set asleep the child all of us is carrying within herself or himself. We need to have great courage to face our nothingness, or emptiness, our incapacity, our total dependence on the Divinity. It is only then that we reach that state of what St Ignatius of Loyola calls *“indiferencia”*, or indifference. When St Joseph went to sleep, faced with the great problem of his beloved turning out to be pregnant by someone else, the options he thought of were, to accuse her and be stoned or to leave her by send her away quietly. Yet, he was totally open for the incredible third option that did not occur his mind. He could listen to the third incredible divine option because he went to sleep, he

created exterior and interior silence. Because, let us be clear, which man can ever go to sleep, not even for one hour, in that situation!!

This deep and concrete silence of St Joseph, exterior and interior silence, gave him the disposition to listen with amazement! This is how Pope Francis describes the way Joseph's and Mary's listening:

“In the Temple, forty days after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary offered their child to the Lord and listened with amazement to Simeon's prophecy concerning Jesus and his Mother (cf. Lk 2:22-35).” (Introduction)

If you really believe in a personal God, in a Triune God, a God Who is in a perfect Communion of Love; if you really believe in a God Who has an Eternal Word, by the power of Whom He created the universe; if you really believe in the Holy Trinity that created man in His own image and likeness, not only that the man and woman may enter into a similar communion of love, but also that the human being may enter into a loving dialogue with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; if you really believe that God has something beautiful, something great, something good to tell you.... then it is worth listening, and it is essential and important for you to keep quiet, to hold your silence that you may listen to Him!