

Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A

Today in the readings we have two men from the line of David: Ahaz and Joseph. Both are being challenged in their line of action and one alters his course and the other follows his course.

In the First Reading, Ahaz, the King of Judah, is being attacked and he is scared, as everyone is scared. But he has a plan, he will hire mercenaries and that is how he plans to save the city. God comes to him and tells Ahaz he must trust in God if he wants to save the city. Now Ahaz he sounds pious, but he does not want to trust God.

Next, in the Gospel, we have the character of Joseph, an amazing soul. It is he who should be the king of Israel and what is he? A carpenter. He has this question of does he marry Mary and raise up the son of God or does he flee? No one would blame him. I have heard many say that Joseph thought Mary was unfaithful to him and that is why he dismissed her, however, I don't buy that, though I see why it is said. The problem is the text does not support that. It says Joseph being a righteous man wished to dismiss her quietly. That is not what righteous people do if they believed adultery was involved. A righteous person followed the Law. If Mary was thought by Joseph to be an adulteress, then the righteous thing to do would be to stone her and find the man and stone him, too. Why was that righteous? Because they were called to wipe out sin in their land and someone committing sins of adultery defiled the community. Since there was no way to have the sin forgiven then to be righteous meant to remove the person from your society. That is why I don't think the solution to the text is he suspected adultery.

We also have to think that though Joseph could have sinned, he had to be an extraordinary character. This was the man God chose to protect Mary and be a foster father to His Son. This is the man who would be the first example of God to the baby Jesus. Scott Hahn proposes the reverential fear that Joseph has. It even says in the text she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. The angel affirms that in the dream. I love the call of Joseph. *Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Who would not be afraid to take Mary as his wife, and then to find out that she has a child by the Holy Spirit? Earth open and swallow me up. Lord, I am a mere mortal. I am to be the husband and protector of the Immaculate Virgin and the foster father of God.* But Joseph trusts and does what the angel tells him to do. What humble obedience. He knew he was not up to the task yet trusted in God.

I love the character of Joseph, a working man skilled in fashioning things and now he is called to look after Mary and God's son. He must have thought, "I will build them a place to the best of my skill," which was probably incredible. But no, God gets him to take his pregnant wife and the only thing he can provide for her was a stable. The only crib he can provide is a feeding trough. This is what the greatest carpenter gets to provide for his wife and his son, how humbling. Joseph is never known to say a word yet he heard and obeyed God when he was called to go. No wonder St Theresa said if you need a saint who can do anything it is St Joseph, he is the handy man saint.

St Joseph is a model man because most of us don't feel up to the task of leading our families in holiness and prayer. Yet this man was the family priest for the Holy Family. His wife was the Immaculate Conception and his son the Incarnate Word of God. If any man would not feel up to

the task, it would have been Joseph and yet he led the Holy Family. So for all of us who do not feel up to the challenge of our life and what we are called to, we can say, “St Joseph, help me,” and he will say, “Do not be afraid.” What I see Joseph learned was not to have confidence in his own flesh but in the flesh of the Son of God. Isn't this why Jesus came down to earth, so that we don't have to rely on our own flesh but can rely on the God who took on our weakness? Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Do not be afraid of your weakness. God who has come is more powerful than your weakness. St Joseph, pray for us that we can lose our confidence in our own flesh and have that confidence back in the God who took on our weak human nature.