

Meditations: Sixth Sunday of Saint Joseph

Sixth reflection for the seven Sundays of Saint Joseph. The topics are: difficulties and creativity in Joseph's life; responding to the problems of an ordinary family; welcoming God's light in ordinary things.

- Difficulties and creativity in St. Joseph's life
- Responding to the problems of an ordinary family
- Welcoming God's light in ordinary things

THE LIFE OF St. Joseph was not free of difficulties, great or small. In fact, the custom of living with greater devotion the seven Sundays leading up to his feast was born of a desire to contemplate his seven joys and also his seven sorrows. These sorrows include, for example, when Jesus at the age of twelve stayed behind in the Temple in Jerusalem without his parents' knowledge. On finding him three days later, Mary exclaimed, "Son, why have you done this to us? Behold, your father and I were in anguish looking for you" (*Lk 2:48*). Scripture is clear: St. Joseph had spent many hours in distress, experiencing the anguish of having lost what he held most dear. We see another of his sorrows when the angel tells him: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for

the child, to destroy him” (*Mt 2:13*). These are strong, frightening words, especially when heard in the darkness of the night.

Why did such a righteous man have to go through these and other difficult times? Why is it that people who try to do things lovingly and honestly sometimes seem to experience even more difficulties than others? When we contemplate the problems St. Joseph confronted, like finding a place for the Holy Family to stay, or having to live as a refugee, we may often wonder “why God did not act in a more direct and clear way. Yet God acts through events and people. Joseph was the man chosen by God to guide the beginnings of the history of redemption. He was the true 'miracle' by which God saves the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph's creative courage.”[1]

St. Joseph knew that difficulties are not foreign to God's plans, and can be opportunities for growing in intimacy with Him and for personal growth in many areas. Although naturally we do not seek them out, difficulties inevitably come to us. And then the holy patriarch can be both a model and an intercessor; he can teach us courage and creativity so that we give our lives and our hearts ever more fully to God. Our Lord has a special mission for us in times of trouble, even if we do not fully understand it.

THE PROBLEMS of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were also like those of any other family, like those we have in our own families: traveling from city to city, moving to a new house, job loss, threats, doubts... In many ways, St. Joseph's life was very normal, and

this makes him very approachable for us. “The Gospel does not tell us how long Mary, Joseph and the child remained in Egypt. Yet they certainly needed to eat, to find a home and employment. It does not take much imagination to fill in those details. The Holy Family had to face concrete problems like every other family.” [2] While it is true that God can resolve many of these conflicts directly, both then and now, in his divine wisdom he leaves their resolution to us. “With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding” (*Jb* 12:13). The miracles he works are in the abilities he gives each of us, enriched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

St. Josemaría also experienced difficulties and suffering as he carried out his mission of being a father and guide of saints: the successive deaths of three younger sisters, the humiliation of the

bankruptcy of his family's business, misunderstandings of some close relatives, his father's death just before his priestly ordination... But at the same time, God blessed him with human and supernatural resilience to bring to life the project He had entrusted to him. This is how our Lord works with his own. We too, in greater or lesser degree, have gifts at our disposal to “strengthen peace and harmony in souls and in society: tolerance, understanding, friendship and love.”[3]

We have a wonderful example in St. Joseph, who was courageous, proactive, attentive, and always ready to carry out the *ordinary miracles* God asked of him. And we can also look at St. Josemaría's life: though he never lacked problems, his deep life of faith enabled him to see God's hand in everything.

ST. JOSEMARÍA TAUGHT that ordinary life can be an occasion for encountering God, because there is “something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”[4] Hence each one's life is imbued with divine meaning; we draw close to God through the *miracle of the ordinary*. God wants to hide himself discreetly in the ordinary things of our day, without imposing himself, in order to leave us truly free to seek him. And the little difficulties of each day are part of ordinary life: things that don't go as planned, relationships that fall short, unexpected complications at work, etc. “In the face of difficulty, we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even think we had.”[5]

These circumstances can also be an opportunity to ask God for more

light. They offer us the possibility of strengthening our dialogue and intimacy with him so we can carry out his plan of love in our own circumstances. Just as Joseph always received the word he needed in order to face his difficulties and care for the Holy Family, we too can experience God's closeness and hear his voice encouraging us to offer understanding, peace, strength and encouragement to those who need it. "From Joseph we must learn the same care and responsibility: to love the Child and his mother; to love the sacraments and charity; to love the Church and the poor. In each of these realities there is always the Child and his mother." [6]

[1] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, n. 5.

[2] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 5.

[3] St. Josemaría, Letter No. 3, no. 38.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 114.

[5] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 5.

[6] *Ibid.*