



4th Week of Advent: 20th and 21st December 2020

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“You are my Father.”

Last Sunday I focused my Reflection on Mary as the Magnificat, her song of praise, was the Psalm for Gadete Sunday. This week I was moved to think of St Joseph as Christmas approaches and Pope Francis announced a special Year of St Joseph on the occasion of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, 8 December. I am sure you will have noticed St Joseph, the Foster Father of Our Lord is always there of course, but not much is said about him! I am sure Pope Francis will remedy that with his writing and reflections in this coming year. He has given the title “With a Father’s Heart” to the Apostolic letter announcing the Year saying “that is how Joseph loved Jesus, whom all four Gospels refer to as “the Son of Joseph”.

We of course try to see life as Jesus does and to cultivate His Way in our prayer and action. We also try to imitate and learn from Mary as we strive to be like her, the woman who said “yes” to God. In the Year of St Joseph, the Church will encourage us to reflect on his life and his wonderful response to God’s call.

In searching for suitable images to use in the weekly VLOG Burning Bush, which includes this Reflection, one that came up is of a stained glass image from St Alban’s Cathedral by the artist Christopher Webb, entitled “Christ learning from St Joseph”. It is a scene where Joseph the Carpenter is teaching Jesus, who in Scripture is spoken of as “Son of Joseph the Carpenter”. Just in the background is Mary looking on. It is a lovely image and an important dimension of St Joseph’s parental role. Many dads and mums will be more conscious in these COVID times of their role in teaching their children, given the challenges they have and are facing with schooling at home. But, that parenting role in a broader sense, so vital, and yet so important in formation of the young, is often taken for granted.

The Year of St Joseph, starting so close to Christmas, gives us an opportunity to reflect on his vital role, so much hidden in a few chapters of the Gospels and yet on reflection, in the Liturgy and through the Devotion so many of the Faithful have to him, a crucial figure at the crossroads of the Old and New Testaments; a figure who speaks to so many parents and others who are in the background, but are the lifeblood of families and communities.

Pope St Paul VI in a Homily on St Joseph back in 1969 speaks of him as “The model of those humble ones that Christianity raises to great destinies and [he says] he is the proof that in order to be good and genuine followers of Christ there is no need of “great things”; it is enough to have the common, simple, human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic”. He speaks of Joseph as a “committed” man. In the Gospel passage for the Fourth Sunday of Advent Year B not much is said about Joseph. Much more is

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said in Year A where we have the account of Joseph being told by an Angel that the child the Virgin Mary will conceive is to be named Jesus, and how he is to take Mary to his home. Joseph trusts in God “the Father who wanted to show how much he loved us by sending Jesus as a human being” as Archbishop Longley said this week in a message to children for Christmas. Joseph obeys God’s messenger, as Our Lady does in the Gospel for this Sunday.

We are preparing now with Mary and Joseph for the Birth of Jesus. In faith and trust in our Loving Father God, they were making their way to Bethlehem and we journey with them, waiting for the wonder of Incarnation; God’s Son coming among us as a child born in poverty and simplicity to bring us light, love and hope.

We continue to look to Mary and Joseph as guides to following Christ’s footsteps in what is sometimes a “giddy world” as St Paul VI says. And in a special way this Christmas we turn to St Joseph Protector of the Holy Family and Protector of the Church, to be our own Protector too, caring for us as we prepare for our Christmas celebration, perhaps in a more simple way this year, but no less spiritual for that.

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