

A Coffee with Alessio



AMDG

Saint Joseph – Patron Saint of people who are non-verbal

I am interrupting my reflection on the Stations of the Cross this week with a column about Saint Joseph, since we celebrate his feast day today. We are also in the Year of Saint Joseph, which began on December 8 last year and will finish on December 8 this year.

Saint Joseph was the husband of Mary and the Foster Father of Jesus and is the Patron of the Catholic Church, artisans (who honourably do good work with the gifts God has given them), and workers in general as well those who are in their moment of death.

Saint Joseph offers us a model of listening. In the Scriptures we hear about him and what he did, but we don't hear him speak. He was what we might say in today's language – non-verbal. I will say more about that later on. (So make sure you read the whole column!) We might be thinking that Joseph was a doormat. On the contrary, he put His whole life in God's hands, knowing that God would not lead him astray. There is a difference between being shy and a doormat, and being a good listener and taking action on what you have heard. Saint Joseph was definitely the latter.

In the Bible we hear about Saint Joseph (and his response to what happened in his life) in the following passages:

- We know that he was a carpenter (cf. Saint Matthew 13:55).
- He was betrothed to Mary (cf. Saint Matthew 1:18; Saint Luke 1:27).
- He was a "just man" (cf. Saint Matthew 1:19), ever ready to carry out God's will as revealed to him in the Law (cf. Saint Luke 2:22, 27, 29) and through four dreams (cf. Saint Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22).
- We hear of him on the first Christmas night when there was no room in the inn (cf. Saint Luke 2:7). He was a witness to the shepherds (cf. Saint Luke 2:8-20)

and the Magi (cf. Saint Matthew 2:1-12), who represented the people of Israel and the pagan peoples or the gentiles – that is us.

- Joseph had the courage to become the legal father of Jesus, to whom he gave the name revealed by the angel: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (cf. Saint Matthew 1:21).
- When Jesus was presented in the Temple, forty days after his birth, Joseph and Mary offered their child to the Lord and listened with amazement to Simeon’s prophecy about Jesus and Mary (cf. Saint Luke 2:22-35).
- To protect Jesus from Herod, Joseph dwelt as a foreigner in Egypt (cf. Saint Matthew 2:13-18). After returning to his own country, Saint Joseph led a hidden life in the tiny and obscure village of Nazareth.
- When they were on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary lost Jesus and spent three days looking for him. Notice it was Mary who spoke here when she said: “Your father and I were looking for you.” (cf. Saint Luke 2:48). It was not Joseph who spoke. He did not say: “Your mother and I were looking for you.” He just quietly looked for Jesus with Mary.
- We know that after Joseph and Mary found Jesus he went to live under their authority (cf. Saint Luke 2:51). Some time after this episode and Jesus beginning his public ministry, we assume that Saint Joseph died, because we hear no more about him.

In all of these Scripture references where we hear about Joseph we see a man who stood by Mary in good times and in bad. We see a man who cared for Mary and Jesus in good times and in bad, just as God had asked him to. There are several instances where Joseph could have run away because it was too hard or it was too inconvenient or he wanted to do something different that day. Yet, when there was no room at the inn he went with Mary to the stable to help her with the birth of Jesus. When Herod was after Jesus he went with Mary to Egypt and stayed there until it was safe to come back. He didn’t take off and leave Mary and Jesus behind. His trust in God never wavered, and we must follow his example. I think Saint Joseph’s approach to everything he did is summed up by what I have referred to as so many times – pastoral care. No pastoral care deed is a waste of time and Saint Joseph truly shows that to us. The topic of Pastoral care will be coming up in a column after Easter, so I’ll say more about that topic then. Thank you though to those people who check in on me with their pastoral care – I am very thankful to you indeed!

I mentioned at the start of this week's column that Saint Joseph could be thought of as non-verbal. That thought came into my head after hearing a homily this week. In light of that, I would suggest that Saint Joseph could be the unofficial patron saint of those people with special needs who are non-verbal, their parents and siblings and those who care for them – their medical professionals, their teachers and their Education Assistants. As I said earlier in the Scriptures Saint Joseph says nothing, but he did a lot. He expressed his faith and his living by his listening and by the kind and caring deeds he enacted. Likewise, with these people whom we encounter who are non-verbal, they too cannot express themselves by words, but they can by their listening and the kind deeds they do. So if you are caring for someone who is non-verbal, pray to Saint Joseph for his care and guidance and that God give you the grace to persevere in what are very challenging circumstances. Even if you think what you are doing is a waste of time and you are making no positive impact on that person's life, please think again. If you didn't care for that person how would they know God's love and concern for them if you weren't present in their life. God sees the wonderful work you do and smiles upon it and you. Keep up your great work! Like Saint Joseph, we must keep going even in our trials.

A prayer to Saint Joseph for us all this week can be:

Saint Joseph,
you show us how to listen and not to speak.
You show us how to act kindly after listening.
Help me to know when to act by listening and when to act by speaking.

I pray through your intercession that God gives me the grace to help those people who are not able to speak.
Please help me to be patient, compassionate and understanding with those who cannot speak,
that through me they may see the love God our Father has for this person,
and that I may be a living witness of the Gospel.

Amen.

Yes, this is the third draft of this column. It has gone in a different direction than what I intended. Sometimes though we have 'lightbulb' moments when we least expect them and that can mean re-writing something or doing something in a different way. There are many other things I could have said about Saint Joseph, but I will save those for another time. Since this year is dedicated to him, let us turn to him in our trials and tribulations. His in-box is nowhere as full as Mary's or some of the other saints. So, he is definitely one for us to turn to in prayer. While we're on the topic of praying to Saint Joseph, let us commend to him those people who are misguided and/or giving us a hard time - they need our prayers too!

Today is a solemnity, so we can lessen our Lenten penances. A cake to accompany my coffee today seems the way to go. Something simple like a slice of carrot cake with a flat-white will help me to celebrate this wonderful feast day of Saint Joseph.

Next week my series on the Stations of the Cross resumes with the thirteenth Station – Jesus is taken down from the Cross. That will be the final column in that series for 2021.

I hope and pray you have a wonderful feast of Saint Joseph. May God's blessings go with you wherever you go today.

Till next week – enjoy your coffee and cake!
Saint Joseph, pray for us.

Alessio Loiacono
Music Field Officer

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References:

Universalis App: 19 March 2021

With a Father's Heart: Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* of the Holy Father Francis