

Solemnity of Saint Joseph “Family First”

Fr. Frank Schuster

I want to thank all of you who are here and with us online who participated in the St. Joseph novena here at Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish. Pope Francis declared this past year as the year for St. Joseph. I can't think of a better saint to contemplate during this year marked by one crises after another than a man who navigated one crises after another. The intention for this Mass is to not only celebrate Saint Joseph, but to also celebrate the beginning of the Year of the Family. I can't think of a better way to begin a Year of the Family than beginning with Joseph who was called by God to watch over and protect his only Son and Blessed Mother.

For me, the most remarkable thing about Saint Joseph is that the bible doesn't record anything that he actually said. In the drama of our Salvation, Jesus obviously has speaking lines, Mary has speaking lines...Joseph doesn't say a word. Joseph was a man who literally let his actions speak for themselves. As an extrovert, I find this fact a little hard to swallow because I am a guy who likes to use a lot of words throughout the day. Joseph was a quiet man who didn't need words to become one of the world's greatest historical figures. Does anyone on the planet not know who Joseph was? His greatness was in the example he set for all of us in how to be a just person, to be someone who is both a good husband and father, to be someone who is not only a hard worker but also someone who puts the will of God and the needs of family first.

Joseph is described as a carpenter in the bible. The Greek here is tekton, and this means more than just a carpenter. A tekton was someone who had a number of different skills in the area of building things. You can see the word tekton in the word architect. Joseph was a jack of all trades. This is not a trivial point because this reminds us that there is value in a wide variety of human work. Anybody who works an honest job can look up to Joseph for inspiration.

However, I read something this morning about this feast day that was a little cheeky. The author said that, although Joseph is sometimes best known as a hard worker, his best work was when he was lying down asleep. There is wisdom in that statement because it was only when St. Joseph was asleep that he could hear an angel telling him the will of God. And if you summarized what the angel told him, every time the message was, “Family first!” Family first. Why was Saint Joseph a hard worker? He was a hard worker because he put family first. For anyone who works for a living, this is an important message, especially for those who are tempted to put career over family. In my experience as a pastor, it never ends well for people who put work over family. This is also why I believe it is fitting that Pope Francis invites us to begin a year of the family after reflecting on the powerful witness of Saint Joseph.

And so, it is fitting that we conclude with the novena prayer we have been praying together. “Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.”