St. Joseph (1st Century) March 19

St. Joseph is sometimes called "the man of dreams." That's because, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, St. Joseph receives messages from God in four dreams. When Mary is found to be pregnant, an angel tells Joseph, in a dream, that her pregnancy has been accomplished through the power of God and that he should take Mary into his house as his wife.

Later, after Jesus' birth, when King Herod resolves to kill Jesus, an angel in another dream tells Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to the land of Egypt. After King Herod dies, Joseph again receives the message in a dream to return to Israel. Back in Israel, however, Joseph discovers that the son of King Herod is now on the throne. In his sleep, Joseph is warned once again to flee, this time to Nazareth in the north, where the new king will be unable to harm Jesus.

Because God chose Joseph to be the protector of Jesus and Mary, he is known today as the protector of the universal Church. The Gospels tell us very little more about St. Joseph's life. We know from St. Luke that Joseph was still alive when Jesus was 12. That was the time when Jesus stayed behind at the Jerusalem Temple at Passover, and Joseph and Mary had to retrace their steps to find him and take him back to Nazareth with them. Most scholars agree that Joseph died before Jesus began his public life. Because Joseph probably died with both Jesus and Mary by his side, he is known today as the patron of a happy death.

Because of his work as a carpenter, St. Joseph is also known as the patron of carpenters. And in more recent years he has become the patron of successful real estate transactions. He may have earned this title because of the story of St. Andre Bessette, a Holy Cross brother. Brother Andre buried medals of St. Joseph on Mount Royal (in Montreal, Canada) in an effort to acquire the site for a huge basilica that would honor St. Joseph. Perhaps that was also the beginning of the practice of burying an image of St. Joseph to sell a property.

St. Joseph has a second feast day—May 1, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. Pope Pius XII established this feast in 1955 to give Christian meaning to May Day, when European Communists traditionally celebrated workers' movements.