

A Change of Plans

4th Sunday in Advent

December 22, 2019

Fr. Tony Davis

Perhaps you've had the experience of planning really hard for something, only to have a last minute change of plans. This can be devastating, as all of our well laid out plans come to nothing. The initial disappointment can be enough to ruin our day and make us want to cancel the whole thing.

In today's Gospel, Joseph had a plan in place. Due to the unlawful nature of a pregnancy before of marriage and living together, Joseph was going to divorce Mary quietly. While this may sound unchristian to us today, by keeping the divorce quiet, Joseph was both obeying the religious law and showing compassion to Mary; such was his intention. But then he had a dream in which an angel from God said to him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home." In this dream, God gave him another plan. While most of us would stubbornly want to stick to our original plan, the passage concludes, "when Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home."

I like this passage about Joseph because when we think of God's plan for us we tend to think of right and wrong. God's plan is good and holy; our plan is evil and sinful. While that might initially be the case in our conversion, that is not how our spiritual life should progress. In the spiritual life, God isn't just calling us from bad to good, but also from good to better. Joseph's original plan was good. There was nothing wrong with it. He could have pursued it and been right in line with the religious law. But then the angel of God gave him an even better plan: why don't you be

the foster father of Jesus. The significance of Joseph is that he could let go of something good for the sake of something better. He could adapt to God's will.

In our own lives, we often refuse to let go of something good and refuse to adapt. Once we find what we like, we attach ourselves to it in an addictive way. Being asked to let go of something good makes us nervous and defensive. But for those who have faith and trust in God, like Joseph, we know that letting go can also be the way to move ahead and better understand God's ultimate plan for us.

Going back to the experience I started with, sometimes when our plans have fallen through and after we had our tantrum, things actually turn out much better than they ever could according to our original plans.

God's plan doesn't take us just from bad to good, but also from good to better.

Am I afraid of adapting to a better plan that God has for me?

As we prepare ourselves for Christmas this week, let us pay special attention to the Josephs in our nativity scenes. While we might focus more on Mary and the child, let us notice him. He was a good and righteous man who had a plan. Yet, he was willing to risk that plan by letting go of it. As it turns out, God had something better in mind for him...to father his only begotten Son of his behalf.