

Merry Christmas! In many ways, this past year has been challenging. When we gathered for Christmas last year, probably none of us could have predicted how 2020 would go. Yet by God's grace, we have made it through to today.

In a sense, that is what Christmas is all about. Out of great love, God sent His Son, Jesus, to be born in the midst of our darkness and fears, our temptations and our struggles. Jesus was born to be with us, as Emmanuel, amidst these challenges, and to save us from them. This little Child, born in Bethlehem twenty centuries ago, is the Messiah we have waited for. He has already won the victory over sin, evil, and even death itself. Though we still have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death in this world, we know that we are not alone. We know that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, walks at our side. This is possible because of what happened on the night of the first Christmas.

On this Christmas, I would like to briefly consider one of the figures in the Christmas story to whom we don't always pay enough attention: St. Joseph, the spouse of the Virgin Mary and the foster father of Jesus. Compared to Jesus and Mary, Joseph seems to recede into the background, almost like an extra, or a background character. But that's a shame because St. Joseph is the figure in the Holy Family whom we can most closely relate to. Pope Francis has actually proclaimed that this coming year will be a year dedicated to St. Joseph, and he recently wrote a letter about Joseph that is well worth reading.

St. Joseph was an ordinary man, who lived a life of extraordinary holiness. Unlike Jesus and Mary, who never sinned, Joseph would have still had to struggle with sin and temptation just like us. Yet he was a righteous man (not self-righteous, but just and holy in a quiet, humble way). Joseph was attentive to God, listening to Him in his dreams, and always obeying what God asked, and trusting in God. This gave him the courage to protect Jesus and Mary, and to take them to Egypt when Jesus was threatened by King Herod. He worked hard for many years as a carpenter, a humble laborer, with Jesus at his side. No matter how ordinary our lives may seem, we can still invite Jesus to be at our side throughout all our labors. And at the first Christmas, Joseph was privileged to witness the birth of Jesus, our Savior.

This Christmas, let's pay a little more attention to Joseph, and strive to imitate his example of humble, steadfast holiness.