



Homily for 1/3/2021

Epiphany, Holy Name

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St. Joseph on Epiphany

Today in the Ordinary Form, we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. This feast is traditionally held on January 6th throughout the world, but for pastoral reasons, here in the United States it is transferred to Sunday. Epiphany commemorates the adoration done by the Wise Men from the East who came to pay homage to the Christ Child with gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. In the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, this Sunday is the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, being that just a few days prior, on the Octave Day of Christmas, the Christ-Child was formally named Jesus at his circumcision.

In both the Epiphany and the naming of Jesus, there is a hidden figure that stands behind both, namely St. Joseph. On the Octave Day of Christmas, we rightly honor Mary under the title of the Mother of God because in giving birth Jesus Christ, both God and man, she is rightly called the “Theotokos”, the “God-bearer”. But she did not do it alone. It was under St. Joseph’s guardianship that she found refuge and embrace. It was at his prompting and under his leadership and care that the Holy Family found its way to Bethlehem in obedience to the civil authorities of his day. Here was a strong and righteous man by her side who supported and sustained her in this tender time of pregnancy and childbirth. At the same time that we honor the three wise men who came to adore this new-born King, we recognize that entry to this divine scene was more than likely guarded by St. Joseph who was the gateway to Mary, the gate of heaven, and Jesus, heaven itself. It was at St. Joseph’s prompting, as the one who claimed earthly paternity over him, that the child was named Jesus. Just as God had given to Adam to name the animals, so now it was for St. Joseph to name the very Son of God. And yet, despite these awesome realities that surrounded him, St. Joseph was a quiet man. In fact, there are no words recorded of St. Joseph in the whole of the Sacred Scriptures. We only know about his actions. But from his actions we know enough to honor and venerate him. St. Joseph was a righteous man who followed the law of God. He would have put away Mary for what he thought was infidelity in accordance with the Jewish law, had it not been for the angel who appeared to him in a dream to reveal to him that it was by God that she was with child. But not only was he obedient to God, but he also obeyed the just and reasonable laws of man. He obediently went to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the census at the command of the Roman authorities. He was courageous and resourceful and provided for the Holy Family. He sought refuge in Egypt at the angel’s command when Herod threatened his holy family. He finally settled the Holy Family in Nazareth at the prompting of the same angel and there raised Jesus with Mary in fidelity to the faith of his ancestors. Along with being a righteous man he was also, therefore, vigilant, courageous, and a hard worker who promptly did the will of God when he heard God speak.

It is no wonder then, that we, the followers of Jesus Christ have a special devotion to him. Pope Francis, on December 8th last year issued an apostolic letter entitled, “*Patris Cordé*”, “With a Father’s Heart”. He wrote the letter in order to “increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal.” In that letter he says, “After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph her Spouse.” St. Joseph has been given the title, “Guardian of the Redeemer”, “Patron of the Catholic Church”, and “Patron of Workers”.

The pope goes on to say that “At the end of every account in which Joseph plays a role, the Gospel tells us that he gets up, takes the child and his mother, and does what God commanded him.” What a beautiful summary of what the Christian life is supposed to be. Would that we would always be open to the prompting of Grace in our lives and when God speaks, embrace Jesus in the Sacraments and stay close to and guard our mother the Church. Pope Francis says, “We should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping. The Son of the Almighty came into our world in a state of great vulnerability. He needed to be defended, protected, cared for and raised by Joseph. . . In his continued protection of the Church, St. Joseph continues to protect the child and his mother, and we too, by our



love for the Church, continue to love the child and his mother. That child would go on to say: ‘As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it for me.’ Consequently, every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is ‘the child’ whom Joseph continues to protect.”

The Pope rightly points out that “A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person.” He goes on to say, “Our world today needs fathers! It has no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs. It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction.”

For these reasons [Pope Francis has called for a Year of St. Joseph](#), “in which all faithful, after his example, may daily reinforce their own life of faith in complete fulfillment of God’s will.” Through the Apostolic Penitentiary the Holy Father has extended a series of [plenary indulgences centered around devotion to St. Joseph](#), which I will post on our parish website and social media. I encourage you, either individually or as a family, to take up this call to grow closer to Jesus and the Church through devotion to St. Joseph. Pray the Rosary as a family; pray the Litany of St. Joseph; entrust your life to the protection of the protector of the Holy Family. The Holy Father then asks us to join him in prayer, and so we pray:

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you 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.*