

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE A

Isaiah 7: 10-14 + Psalm 24: 1-5 + Romans 1: 1-7 + Matthew 1: 18-24

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: December 22, 2019

The story of Joseph, a direct descendant of King David, reveals how God's ways are not our ways, nor are God's thoughts our thoughts. As Joseph surrenders to the will of God, he chooses a family and a destiny greater than his small dreams.

As Joseph works through in faith the conundrum in which he finds himself, he discovers the following.

God's plans are not my plans.

I never planned on Mary being pregnant with a child not my own, nor the scandal and shame this could cause.

God's worldview is not my worldview.

I only see a small sliver of the total picture, whereas God sees all and knows all.

My dreams are too small, my hope too limited, my vision too narrow.

God's dreams are grander, God's hope for me is limitless,

God's vision for my life is much more expansive.

Things are not as they appear at first glance.

There is something more here than meets the eye.

There is need for me to take a longer look, a deeper look,

to look at my life from God's perspective.

What Joseph teaches us, this just man who was very attentive to God's will and faithfully obedient to that will, is that we must go beyond being so quick to judge a person or a situation.

God works in the colorful space between black and white—

God works in the arena of faith.

Joseph would teach us that being quick to judgment is a dead end.
We need to pay attention to the way our mind is constantly judging,
and we need to clear a space to stop the mind from judging.
Whenever things seem simple and obvious, and the mind is feasting
on certainty and outrage, go slow.
There is more there than you think, only it has not appeared yet.
Judgment stops the appearance of the more.
It cuts down people and situations to the little you know.
It closes possibilities.

Joseph, the just man, the one who knew the Law of God's people (the Torah) inside out,
teaches us that to fulfill the Law means going beyond it.
The letter of the Law required him to publicly shame Mary for becoming pregnant
with a child not his and then have her stoned to death.
But Joseph reveals that the Law is to be used with compassion,
not as a weapon to destroy others.
This is one of the many truths Jesus learned from Joseph.
Make the Law work for love, and you will find your way into the heart of God.

Love is the sun; Law is love's furthest and often weakest ray.
When you love the person through the Law,
you shape the Law to the reality that is always more than you know.
This gives life a chance to breathe and people a chance to change.
And the deepest change will not be in other people, but in yourself.
Love takes the beam out of your own eye.
It does not focus on the splinters in the eyes of others.

We can imagine Joseph in his carpentry shop sharing with Jesus what he had learned.
"Once something happened, and I was tempted to judge and punish.
But I held back and waited and a deeper door opened—the door that is hard to find.
I was led into a room of sun, a home for the Spirit.
Your mother and you were there—and a presence of light who talked to my fear.
It was a dream, but it was not sleep.
The dream awakened me.
It took the beam out of my eye."

The invitation Joseph gives us is to see everything twice.
To go beyond the first seeing of appearances by the physical eye,
to the second seeing of the spiritual eye, which is the seeing of reality.
Contrary to what our secular culture proposes, what is most real goes beyond
the material--what is seeable by the physical eye--to a deeper reality--the spiritual.

To see everything twice and thus see where the Spirit of God is at work in our lives
and in our world, means taking a step back with Joseph to marvel at the big picture.
With our quick to judge mentality, we only see what is front of our nose
and miss the bigger picture of the beauty of God's presence
and the mysterious working of the Spirit.

It's like looking at a painting by Monet or any one of the Impressionist artists.
If we were to stand only inches away from such a work of art,
all we would see would be blobs of dried paint.
But when we step back, the painting comes into focus as something beautiful
and rich in meaning.

We step back to take in the big picture, to see things from God's perspective,
by entering into a regular habit of prayer.
If we want to see how the Spirit is at work, we need to rest in the Spirit of God in prayer.
If we want to be able to see the presence of Emmanuel, God with us,
then we need to listen to Him speak to us in silence through his Holy Word.
If we want to know the power of Jesus to save us from our sins,
we need to ask him to reveal our life to us as it is, the good and the bad.

What are the promises which sleep deep within us?
We can awaken to these promises by welcoming Emmanuel, God-with-us.
For God becomes human in Jesus not only to reveal God's self to humanity,
but also to reveal man to himself, to reveal us to ourselves.
God reveals man to himself in all his hidden possibilities.

We are bearers of the mighty mystery of God, each one of us,
for all things are possible with God!
When we join Joseph and Mary in making a home for the Spirit to breathe
and move in our lives, then we enter into an endless adventure of love.