
“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

have we taken back some parts of our promises attached to our ordination, for example, the promise of celibacy (cf. Mt 5:28; Lk 18:29), or the promise of “the complete and fervent celebration of the liturgy of the hours (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 18; C.I.C. cann. 246 §2; 276 §2, 3; John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis* 26; 72) ‘on a daily basis’ (cf. C.I.C. can. 1174 § 1)” (*Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 1994, # 39)?

Let’s realize: How God came to the aid of St. Joseph through the mission of the angels, so too does God know our natural human limitations and wishes to help us too through His angels. Let us consider and contemplate this critical moment in the life of St. Joseph and learn from it the greatness of our mission, the confidence God places in our love for Him, the watchful presence of God at every moment, day and night, and His readiness to send us His angels and with them, all we need in our limitations.

4. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

The Church tells us: “With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they ‘always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven’ they are the ‘mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word’ (Mt 18:10; Ps 103:20)” (CCC 329). In accordance with the example of St. Joseph, men, and particularly we priests, should grow together and communicate more frequent and intensely with the holy angels. We are called to form one army of God for the salvation of souls.

Fr. Titus Kieninger ORC

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ASSOCIATION OF PRIESTS IN THE WORK OF THE HOLY ANGELS®

13800 Gratiot Ave. Detroit, MI 48205 USA www.opusangelorum.org

Tel (313) 527-1739 Fax (313) 527-1729 frtitus@opusangelorum.org

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Director: Father Wolfgang Seitz, ORC ©2011 Order of the Holy Cross

CHRIST’S PRIESTS UNITED WITH THE HOLY ANGELS IN THE CHURCH

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Association of Priests In Opus Angelorum®

St. Joseph’s call and mission (cf. Mt 2:13)

Vol. XVIII, April 2012

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

The actuality of the Word of God surprises us time and again, if we just read it in the proper spirit. “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail, the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63).

We reflected in the last meditation about the visit of the three holy Kings who came from afar. They followed a miraculous star. As it disappeared before Jerusalem they were forced to ask there for the newborn King of the Jews and met the King Herod. However, they did not return to him, as he duplicitously besought them. The failure of his murderous scheme precipitated the slaughter of all the holy Innocents around Bethlehem. At a moment’s notice, – warned by the angel – St. Joseph had to flee to Egypt in order to save the Child’s life. How did this come about, and what does it tell us?

1. The call of St. Joseph

With respect to the mystery of the Incarnation, St. Matthew relates especially about St. Joseph’s calling, while St. Luke focuses on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

a) St. Joseph’s call

From the gospel, we know St. Joseph to be a man of interior silence with a strong interior attraction to God. Other trustworthy ancient sources and mystical traditions furthermore depict him as a pious man who sought after God more than men.

- His piety caused him to move away from his family and native town Bethlehem to Jerusalem and the temple.

- There, he was called by the High Priest to marry the Virgin Mary. To this end a divine sign, namely, the blossoming of his rod, indicated him as called to be the spouse of the Virgin Mary.

- At a third moment he was illumined by the Angel of the Lord and introduced into Divine Plan concerning the virginal Conception of Jesus and instructed about his fatherly responsibility towards the Son of God whom he was to name Jesus.

b) ... like any priestly call

It is not difficult to empathize and compassionate St. Joseph in the trials that arose in his interior on account of these extraordinary events. Indeed, there is a certain parallel to a priestly vocation.

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- In the beginning, we felt drawn towards God and preoccupied about the well-being of souls;

- Following this call through the years of formation we reached the moment, when the Bishop called us out from among the common faithful into God’s exclusive service. The bishop imposed his hands upon our head and, calling down the Holy Spirit upon us, ordained us to a share in his priesthood and therewith to a share in his spousal relationship to the Church, the bride of Jesus.

- Then follows the third step, namely our growth into the fatherly responsibility, into the practical understanding of our call as “father”. This requires time. There may appear some dark moments, days or weeks as it happened to St. Joseph. However, the more we pray as St. Joseph did, and try to be close to God in interior personal prayer, the easier it is for the angel to bring us the necessary guiding light, as he brought it to St. Joseph.

2. The mission of St. Joseph

It happened that “being warned in a dream,” by angelic orientation, “not to return to Herod, they [the Magi] departed to their own country by another way” (Mt 2:12). St. Joseph, finally aided by the gifts of the kings from the immediate burden of nourishing his family, laid down for an innocent and peaceful sleep.

However, when the kings did not return to Herod, the latter had no grace-filled insights, but rather deepened his fear and stirred up his anger, to the extent that he gave orders to kill all male children in that region:

“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men” (Mt 2:16).

This made another angelic intervention necessary: “Now when (the kings) had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him’.” (Mt 2:13).

a) The passing joy

What we first realize, – and we should not oversee it –, is the passing character of the joys in this life. How short was the relief and joy of St. Joseph thanks to the visit and gifts of the Magi. Nothing in this life seems to be lasting. It is difficult to find something on which we can build hope and a stable future. The situations change like the weather, sunshine followed by rain and rain by sunshine. The only thing that is permanent is God and His kingdom, and to this we are always underway in this life. It is important to see this, because then we do not take too seriously the vicissitudes this life presents to us, nor become attached to the transitory good things we encounter in life. “No reason to get nervous”, a priest used to say, “you don’t know how long or short this is going to last.” And, as an angel brought St. Joseph the order to flee, so too will an angel indicate to him the moment when he could return – and true enough, that is what is written: “When

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Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Rise,... and go to the land of Israel’.” (Mt 2:19-20)

b) The angelic help

The message of the angel came abruptly during the night, “in a dream” and was short: “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you,” still adding the reason with one more phrase.

It seems that the holy angels are always short and, though they act timely, this intervention is often in the last moment: Why is it so?

Is it just the way, in which the angels generally communicate, short and clear?

Is it, because they want to provoke our virtues?

Do they expect that we think things out first for ourselves and they enlighten us only when we are “blind”?

Or is it the imminent danger who requested such telegraphic style of strict order?

Is it tactical to come in at the last moment so that the enemy has not much chance to discover GOD’s plan and can less easily destroy it?

Besides having communicated just “in a dream” like the first time (cf. Mt 1:20), it seems that there was left no doubt for St. Joseph. As he reacted obediently to the first angelic light, so too did he here. It reminds us of the order given to Moses: “Behold, I send an angel before you,... Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him, ... for my name is in him” (Ex 23:20-21). God asked for such response to an angelic order without referring to any content! Should the angel always manifest himself in such a way that man is moved to obey? It would not be difficult to illustrate this with examples from former times (cf. e.g. Gen 16:9 and 15; 22:10-13; Jos 5:15; Tob 6:16 and 8:1-4). Often the manifestation of an angel irradiates calm and some heavenly peace which induces or encourages man to obey.

3. A punctual obedience

Nevertheless, the angel’s order consisted in four clear points. We will now reflect on them explicitly.

a) St. Joseph’s obedience

For the moment let’s look at the exactitude with which St. Joseph’s obedience is described. So sharp as the order was, so accurate was its fulfillment: “Rise, take, and flee, and remain... And he *rose* and *took* ... *departed*..., and *remained*” (Mt 2:14-15). The danger did not allow him to loose a single minute. Was it that the evangelist wanted to point out to Joseph’s virtue? Joseph’s intentions were already deeply purified before the first manifestation of the angel (cf. Mt 1:18ff). Since then, all his love and attention is directed to the Mother of God and their Divine Son. This is here manifested in his prompt obedience towards the angel.

b) The priest’s fidelity to his promises

The responsibility of St. Joseph is a great example for our priestly love with which we surrendered our “self” to God at ordination and pronounced our “Adsum”. His obedience is a challenge: are we still unconditionally generous or