

4th Sunday of Advent, 18 December 2022

Scriptures:

Homily: Fr. Ken

A careful and reflective reading of Mathew's Gospel reveals Joseph to be a man of deep faith who listened attentively to the voice of God.

As we heard in the narrative, Joseph struggled to make some sense of the message that Mary had given him.

Sometimes, Joseph heard God speak to him through his dreams, at other times in a moment of quiet prayer, sometimes at the end of the day when he reflected on the events of work, relationships, and family.

Joseph knew that God is a God of mercy, and that in history, God had always called people to take risks and live with the unpredictable nature of life.

Abraham, for example, had left his home and then found out that Sarah his wife, in her old age, conceived a son mysteriously through the power of God. The prophets too were often given surprising choices by God.

Joseph wondered why God was testing his faith. He thought that the easiest thing would be to abandon Mary and start again. However, he loved her and knew that she was honest, true, and had great integrity. In the turmoil of his mind, he wondered what God wanted him to do. He asked himself why life was so complicated, just when all had seemed so good as he prepared to wed Mary. He struggled with God in prayer during the night and eventually went to sleep. Next morning, he awoke from his dream and understood the words the angel had spoken concerning Mary: God had conceived in her through the power of the Holy

Spirit. Joseph needed to accept this fact, care for Mary and support her at this strange but wonderful time. How mysterious are the ways of God, Joseph wondered.

In our own lives, we often face difficult situations in our relationships with other people, and in the family. Maybe an unmarried daughter becomes pregnant. Maybe a child is born with a disability. Maybe a son brings home a boyfriend. Maybe a parent develops dementia, or maybe cancer. These, and so many other events in family life can disturb and disrupt the familiar patterns of life.

We ask God why these things happen to us. Sometimes our very faith in God is questioned.

The example of Joseph teaches us that it is in these times that we are called to pray more fervently and seek the power of the Holy Spirit to help us trust more deeply in God. Like Joseph, we are asked to accompany people in their struggles and support them with love and care; a loving and strong parish community can be a real help to those who face difficulties in their domestic and family life. It was not easy for Joseph; it is never easy. However, we can be confident that if our hearts are open to God, God will help us to shoulder the burden and carry the cross.

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