



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Catechesis on Saint Joseph: 9. *Saint Joseph, a man who "dreams"*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to focus on the figure of Saint Joseph as a *man who dreams*.

In the Bible, as in the cultures of ancient peoples, dreams were considered a means by which God revealed himself. The dream symbolises the spiritual life of each of us, that inner space that each of us is called to cultivate and guard, where God manifests himself and often speaks to us (Cf. *Gen* 20:3; 28:12; 31:11,24; 40:8; 41:1-32; *Nm* 12:6; 1 *Sam* 3:3-10; *Dn* 2; 4; *Gb* 33:15). But we must also say that within each of us there is not only the voice of God: there are many other voices. For example, the voices of our fears, the voices of past experiences, the voices of hopes; and there is also the voice of the evil one who wants to deceive and confuse us. It is therefore important to be able to recognise the voice of God in the midst of other voices. Joseph demonstrates that he knows how to cultivate the necessary silence and, above all, how to make the right decisions before the Word that the Lord addresses to him inwardly. Today, it will be good for us to take up the four dreams in the Gospel which have him as protagonist, in order to understand how to place ourselves before God's revelation. The Gospel tells us of the four dreams of Joseph.

In the first dream (cf. *Mt* 1:18-25), the angel helps Joseph resolve the distress that assails him

when he learns of Mary's pregnancy: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (vv. 20-21). And his response was immediate: "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (v. 24). Life often puts us in situations that we do not understand and that seem to have no solution. Praying in these moments means letting the Lord show us the right thing to do. Indeed, very often it is prayer that gives us the intuition of the way out, of how to solve that situation. Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord never allows a problem to arise without also giving us the help we need to deal with it. He does not cast us alone into the fire. He does not cast us among the beasts. No. When the Lord shows us a problem, or reveals a problem, he always gives us the intuition, the help, his presence, to get out of it, to resolve it.

And the second revealing dream of Joseph comes when the life of the child Jesus is in danger. The message is clear: "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). Joseph obeyed without hesitation: "He rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod" (vv. 14-15). In life we all experience dangers that threaten our existence or the existence of those we love. In these situations, praying means listening to the voice that can give us the same courage as Joseph, to face difficulties without succumbing.

In Egypt, Joseph waited for a sign from God that he could return home, and this is the content of the third dream. The angel reveals to him that those who wanted to kill the child are dead and orders him to leave with Mary and Jesus and return to the homeland (cf. *Mt* 2:19-20). Joseph "rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel" (v. 21). But on the return journey, "when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there" (v. 22). Here then is the fourth revelation: "Being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth" (vv. 22-23). Fear is also part of life and it too needs our prayer. God does not promise us that we will never have fear, but that, with his help, it will not be the criterion for our decisions. Joseph experiences fear, but God guides him through it. The power of prayer brings light to dark situations.

At this moment I am thinking of so many people who are crushed by the weight of life and can no longer hope or pray. May Saint Joseph help them to open themselves to dialogue with God so that they may find light, strength, and peace. And I am thinking, too, of parents who are facing their children's problems: children with many illnesses, children who are sick, even with permanent illnesses. — how much pain is there! — parents who see different sexual orientations in their children; how to deal with this and accompany their children and not hide in an attitude of condemnation. Parents who see their children leave, who die because of an illness, and also — even sadder, we read about it every day in the newspapers — teenagers who get into childish mischief and end up in car accidents. Parents who see their children not progressing in school and do not know what to do.... So many parental problems. Let us think about how to help them. And

to these parents I say: do not be afraid. Yes, there is pain. A lot. But think about how Joseph solved problems and ask Joseph to help you. Never condemn a child.

It fills me with compassion — it did in Buenos Aires — when I used to ride the bus and it passed in front of the prison. There was a queue of people who had to go in to visit the prisoners. And there were the mothers there who deeply moved me: faced with the problem of a son or a daughter who made a mistake and was in prison, they did not leave them alone, they stood up for them and accompanied them. This courage; the courage of a father and mother who always, always accompany their children. Let us ask the Lord to give this courage he gave to Joseph to all fathers and mothers. And pray that the Lord will help us in these moments.

Prayer, however, is never an abstract or purely internal gesture, like these spiritualist movements that are more gnostic than Christian want to do. No, it is not that. Prayer is always inextricably linked to charity. It is only when we combine prayer with love, the love for children in the cases I just mentioned, or the love for our neighbour, that we are able to understand the Lord's messages. Joseph prayed, worked, and loved — three beautiful things for parents: to pray, to work, and to love — and because of this, he always received what he needed to face life's trials. Let us entrust ourselves to him and to his intercession.

Saint Joseph, you are the man who dreams,
 teach us to recover the spiritual life
 as the inner place where God manifests himself and saves us.
 Remove from us the thought that praying is useless;
 help each one of us to correspond to what the Lord shows us.
 May our reasoning be illuminated by the light of the Spirit,
 our hearts encouraged by his strength
 and our fears saved by his mercy. Amen.

APPEAL

Tomorrow is *International Holocaust Remembrance Day*. It is necessary to remember the extermination of millions of Jews, and people of different nationalities and religious faiths. This unspeakable cruelty must never be repeated. I appeal to everyone, especially educators and families, to foster in the new generations an awareness of the horror of this black page of history. It must not be forgotten, so that we can build a future where human dignity is no longer trampled underfoot.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from the United States of America. Today, I especially ask you to join in praying for peace in Ukraine. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds*. Today the liturgy recalls Saints Timothy and Titus who, formed by the Apostle Paul, proclaimed the Gospel with tireless ardour. May their example encourage you to live your Christian vocation coherently, finding in the Lord the strength to face life's difficulties.

Allow me to explain that today I will not be able to come among you to greet you because I have a problem with my right leg: a ligament in my knee has become inflamed. But I will come down and greet you there and you can come by to greet me. It is a temporary thing. They say that this only happens to elderly people and I don't know why it happened to me...

I offer my blessing to all of you.

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I ask you to pray the Our Father for peace in Ukraine, now and throughout this Day. Let us ask the Lord to grant that the country may grow in the spirit of brotherhood, and that all hurts, fears and divisions will be overcome. We have spoken about the Holocaust. But let us think too that [in Ukraine] millions of people were killed [1932-1933]. They are a people who have suffered; they have suffered from hunger, suffered from much brutality and they deserve peace. May the prayers and supplications that today rise up to heaven touch the minds and hearts of world leaders, so that dialogue may prevail and the common good be placed ahead of partisan interests. Please, no more war.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our continuing catechesis on Saint Joseph, we now consider the four dreams by which God spoke to Joseph and revealed his will to him. Joseph's ready response to the Lord can serve as a model for our own efforts to hear God's voice in our daily lives. In the first dream, Joseph is helped to overcome his distress at learning that Mary was with child, and he responds immediately by taking Mary as his wife. In the second dream, Joseph is told to flee with the Holy Family to Egypt to escape King Herod's wrath. While in Egypt, Joseph learns in a third dream that they can safely return to their homeland. During the journey, he is told in a fourth

dream to settle in Nazareth. Joseph's example of interior openness to the Lord's voice can help us to find wisdom in responding to the uncertainties in our lives, courage in facing threatening situations, and confidence in entrusting even our fears to God's providential care. May Saint Joseph's intercession assist all those who find it difficult to pray, and encourage us to cultivate an interior life that draws us ever closer to the Lord, makes us ever more docile to his will and ever more open to the needs of our brothers and sisters.