



Rome, December 18th, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Advent

## REFLECTION

Isaiah 7:10-14; Romans 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24

# Motherhood and Fatherhood

**p. Luis CASASUS**

**President of the Idente Missionaries**



It is remarkable that Christ, on the Cross, cried out the words of Psalm 22 as an anguished prayer: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* .... He said "God", but at that moment He did not use the word "Father".

This is no coincidence. We can feel in our heart the impression of God's abandonment, of a distant way of being, but when we turn our eyes to Him as our Father, we find ourselves with His gaze, with His overflowing presence, bigger than our heart, with His hand that gathers all our weeping, all things, friends and enemies.

St. Joseph, whose person the Gospel recalls today, was able to be an exceptional husband and father because he had the experience of receiving the same exceptional care from God. The angel confirmed to him that the compassion he felt for Mary, seeking that she not be executed after her apparent unfaithfulness, was a compassion that God placed in his heart. And so, that compassion was transformed into true mercy, with the light and strength necessary to carry out a mission that was far from easy.

There was a retreat master who was one day addressing a group of fathers and he proposed St. Joseph as a perfect model for them as head of their families. At that, one of them said, "*Joseph's situation was totally different from mine. He was a saint. His wife was sinless. And his child was the son of God. I am no saint. My wife is not sinless and my child isn't the son of God.*" Without batting an eyelid, the retreat master responded, "*Did your son, when he was 12, leave home for three days and you didn't know where he was? Were you ever awakened in the middle of the night and urged to flee from the imminent threat of your innocent child's assassination? Have you ever walked for several days and miles to go to another country with your family so your son would be free from harm?*"

Saint Joseph's life was definitely not easy, but because of his unwavering faith in God he was able to do a seemingly impossible task. St Joseph followed God's way during a family crisis. And God, through His words in the Sacred Scriptures, is telling us to do the same. Saint Joseph could have just disregarded the message of the angel... after all it was only a dream. But he was a man of faith. He must have already seen God's hand at work in his life and in the life of people around him, causing him to trust God's message. He believed that God is with us.

God's messengers need not be as dramatic as Joseph's nighttime visitor in order to speak authentically. In fact, as the first reading teaches, we can actively resist a clear message that God offers. God will send it anyway. We will know the messenger's arrival when we hear, or rather feel: "*Do not be afraid.*" These can be words from a friend or a stranger, a profoundly moving encounter with beauty or a subtle but deep change of heart. When we hear that message, we hear Christ inviting us to serve his mission in some new way.

Saint Joseph's faith is indeed a model for us all, because the dreams that are related in his life represent his permanent attention, day and night, to the signs of Providence. These are usually very subtle, for God respects our freedom, but the Gospel, the example of other people, the hunger for love of so many human beings, the good we have received from other people (however small) and, above all, the life of Jesus, are confirmations that the Divine Persons are at our side.

St. Joseph represents, above all, the model of fatherhood, beyond his efforts at work and his discreet, silent and prudent way of acting. His fatherhood is mystical and moral.

As our Father Founder says, the suffering of St. Joseph, like that of Mary, is mystically associated with that of Christ. However extraordinary his case may be, we must not forget that he is a model for us: **we have enough grace to make our neighbor fulfill his true mission in this world, to develop to the maximum his natural compassion, however meager it may seem.** I cannot forget that this depends on me, on my modest witness. As it happened to St. Joseph, this seems to us an impossible mission, beyond our little faith. This is to be co-redeemers with Christ.

---ooOoo---

We always speak of St. Joseph as a man of faith, but his life gives us an opportunity to remember that **obedience is faith put into practice.** When I realize that God tells me to do something, God expects me to do it now. Not think about it. Without action, our faith is not real. We need to obey quickly, even when we do not fully understand why, because we have seen God's love on display for us in Jesus, and we have seen the protection that God provides for us when we obey Him: *I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments.* (Psalm 119:60). God is interested in our faith and obedience – not just our good intentions. **Obedience is faith in action.**

Many religious men and women (perhaps I am one of them) are incapable of understanding that God manifests himself through his superiors. These superiors may at times be insensitive or not particularly intelligent, but sometimes we simply observe these deficiencies and do not reflect on what the Holy Spirit wants to tell us by putting us next to that person who gives us an indication.

However, looking deeper, we see that generally disobedience originates in attachment to our judgments and our desires, but it is difficult for us to recognize this. Only souls who are truly grateful to God and to others, and who are ready to open themselves to the truth (please re-read **the two conditions**), are able to obey and to put faith into practice, into activity. Do we remember the parable of the two sons whom the father asks to go and work in the fields (Mt 21:28-32)?

Here is a real story of a saintly king, a model of obedience, in the style of St. Joseph:

On one occasion, King Henry III of Bavaria, who lived in the eleventh century. At one point in his life, he became tired of his kingly duties and responsibilities, and he felt that he was being called by

God to live a simpler and more spiritual life. So he made an application to a well-known Abbot to enter his monastery, hoping to become a contemplative monk. His wish was to be finally free of all worldly distractions and to focus on God and his spiritual life.

The Abbot of the monastery said to him, "*Your majesty, do you understand that one of the vows here is that of obedience? That will be hard for you because you have been a king and you are used to giving and not receiving orders.*" King Henry answered, "*I do understand, and I promise that for the rest of my life I will be obedient to you as Christ leads you.*" The Abbot responded, "*Well then, I will tell you what to do. Go back to your throne and serve faithfully and generously in the place where God has put you.*" And King Henry III became a very good and holy king. He is the patron saint of the childless, of Dukes, of the handicapped and those rejected by Religious Orders.

---ooOoo---

When we speak of motherhood and fatherhood, especially in the case of Mary and Joseph, but also in the life of the true apostle, **we are literally referring to giving one's life**. It is not simply a matter of affectionate appellations; the mystical life, the intimate relationship with the divine persons, requires an incarnate origin in a person; indeed, in our spiritual life we are born again several, many times, and it is always with the direct or indirect intervention of souls who exercise authentic paternity and maternity with us.

If our Father Founder calls Mary Mother of the Mystical Life, it is because her intervention in our spiritual journey is to give us the consolation that perhaps we do not deserve and the confidence that only a mother or a father can give to a child. Truly, when we contemplate her patience, her tenderness and her obedience to God through the Child Jesus, they make us be reborn, to consider our whole spiritual life and to lose the fear of being innocent, humble, trusting.

I was at a friend's house one time and he was holding his daughter upside down by her ankles (safely) and smiling at her. From the outside looking in, one might imagine that the baby should be freaking out. This new orientation and the strange feeling of gravity reversed must be terrifying. But looking into her eyes, I could see how calm she was. In Christ's teachings children represent a model of openness and trust. I am never going to forget the face that that little baby was making being hung upside down like, '*Yeah, I'm in my dad's arms and everything is perfectly okay*'.

The love of a good father, of a good mother, whether we speak of natural fatherhood and motherhood, but above all spiritual, has a great virtue: it impels us to be ourselves fathers or mothers. It is a true contagion, a desire difficult to avoid, even if we would like to repress it, to be fathers or mothers.

It can happen, of course, that if we meet an excellent doctor when we are young, we feel the desire to follow this profession, and it can even become a way of life. But only motherhood or fatherhood are able to make us unfold and release all the love that God has put in us, all the unconditional forgiveness that gushes out like lava from a volcano.

Moreover, only those who live the love of a father or a mother are capable of directing their affection and tenderness to ANY human being, which may seem a paradox. Indeed, one might think that the father and mother love their children in an unrepeatable way, but for some good reason he calls God Father and recognizes that the most insignificant of his children is called to receive a love such as He Himself received. Christ has a real need to share his joy, his joy of being a son: *I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly* (Jn 10:10).

Your brother in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph,

p. Luis CASASUS

President