

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 21, 2021

In case you missed it, there was a day this past week on which you were released from your Lenten fasting and obligations. For those of you of Irish decent or those of you who aren't Irish and you add an O to your name once a year and wear green . . . it was not the feast day of St. Patrick . . . It was Friday, the Solemnity of St. Joseph. And according to canon law, certain penitential practices are suspended on solemnities – even when they fall on a Friday. Sorry if you missed the chance to celebrate on Friday in honor of St. Joseph and if you are Irish, there are no mulligans.

As you've heard and read, Pope Francis has proclaimed this the year of St. Joseph and since Friday was the solemnity of St. Joseph, I thought we could spend a few minutes reflecting on him.

Very little is known about St. Joseph. He is silent in the gospels so we have to let his actions speak for him. We are able to piece together some limited information about him with just a few quotes from the gospels. For example the gospel at Christmas eve lists the genealogy of Jesus and we hear: “. . . Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary . . .” We know that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus for scripture tells us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. So, Joseph was the foster father of Jesus.

We can gather that Joseph was a caring and righteous man. When he was betrothed to Mary then learned that she was with child, he considered divorcing her quietly. But after listening to the voice of God's angel in a dream, he had a change of heart and took Mary as his wife.

Joseph was mindful of his religious and civil obligations. When the decree of Caesar Augustus announced a census, Joseph and Mary returned to his home town to be counted.

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple several times to fulfill the law of Moses and the family yearly spent Passover in Jerusalem. And although Mary and Joseph seemed to be excellent parents – they were not perfect as they lost their son

when he was 12. And at the end of chapter 2 in Luke there is this sentence: “And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.” (Lk 2:52) which is a strong statement the parenting of Jesus.

The last thing we can learn about Joseph is his occupation. In chapter 13 of Matthew Jesus returns to his home in Nazareth (Mt 13:55) and people asked: “Is he not the carpenter’s son?”

We can only wonder if Joseph ever witnessed Jesus in his public ministry . . . as scripture scholars have noted the significance of Joseph not being mentioned at the wedding feast at Cana. Had Joseph died by this time? Surely if he was still alive, he would have attended with his family. In the Gospel, Jesus uses the image of the grain of wheat to reflect on his own death and resurrection to provide new life.

Perhaps St. Joseph fits well the image of the grain of wheat in how he lived a humble life to serve God, his family and the community. Like St. Joseph, if we choose to follow God’s law and live the gospel of Jesus, we can be like a grain of wheat planted in the warm soil by letting God wrap us in His love and then shed our exterior ego and self-centeredness . . . that we may grow into a life of loving service to others.

As we enter the final weeks of Lent, we pray that St. Joseph will inspire us to open our hearts to God’s words, to strive for peace and justice, to strengthen the bonds of our families, faithfully fulfill our duties, and humbly serve the needs of others. **St. Joseph, pray for us.**