

**Homily for the Solemnity of Saint Joseph**  
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*2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16*  
*Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29*  
*Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22 2*  
*Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a*

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis—for whose health and recovery we continue to pray—observed in his apostolic letter *Patris Corde* that “[a]fter Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse”.

The Church as a whole also turns continuously to Saint Joseph, looking to his example of faith, of justice, of righteousness. He is honored as the last of the Patriarchs and as the Patron of the Universal Church, he is invoked at every celebration of the holy sacrifice, and he is held up as the protector of so many personages, causes, realms and communities that no two lists are the same and, quite possibly, possibly no list is complete.

The wealth of both ecclesiastical pronouncements and expressions of popular piety focused on Saint Joseph, like the Marian treasury of the Church, makes a comprehensive exposition of this beloved saint most challenging.

Allow me instead to dwell on one striking trait of Saint Joseph: his silence. I do so both as his silence is worthy of meditation and imitation, and as it speaks—in my humble opinion—to qualities that in a particular way should guide ecclesiastics in this present age.

The holy Gospels make plain the silence of Saint Joseph as not a single word is attributed to him. He is placed before us as a silent man, a man of contemplation and a quiet faith. This silence of Saint Joseph is, however, not a failure to speak or the absence of speech. It is clear that he spoke, such as when he espoused himself to the Virgin or when he—giving voice to the angelic proclamation—announced the name of Jesus. So, what exactly characterizes his silence? What exactly does his example place before us? I believe the silence of Saint Joseph, the reserved quite of the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, points to three specific characteristics.

First, his reserved silence speaks of a man who listened readily and continuously to God. Saint Joseph allowed God to speak, to speak the Law, to speak truth, to speak into his life that unique and glorious mission that God had set out for him. Rather than being focused on his own words and his own speech, Saint Joseph was silent to hear God and, thereby, to do the will of God and to do so faithfully and in justice.

The ordained ministry begins not with us, but with the word of God speaking to us and speaking us into service. This comes to the fore in the very rite of ordination, where the candidate is called forth. He does not on his own stand up and state “Adsum.”

Second, the silence of Saint Joseph speaks of a man who carefully and prudently avoided constant or meaningless speech. Notice that sharp contrast between Saint Joseph on the one hand, and the Apostles on the other. How often in the Gospels do the disciples rush to words, rush to opine or comment? Our Lord himself warns against empty words, against speaking and speaking, all devoid of purpose or actual content. How many ecclesiastics speak much, yet bring none to penance or fasting, convert not a single soul. Contrast such incessant speaking with the immensely powerful final words of so many of the martyrs. They often said little more than “Jesus and Mary” as the deadly blow drew nigh. Their words are remembered, however, through the centuries.

Third and finally, the silence of Saint Joseph speaks of a man who tempered his words until they were needed. When Saint Joseph pointed to Egypt and called the Holy Family to make haste there in the night, his words were required. And when spoken, they had impact and effect, and there was no questioning them.

One who neither allows time to listen to God in prayer or simply fills every possible moment with his own words, will seldom be the origin of a clarion call to act that will move hearts and minds. It is striking how the Church constantly invites her ministers to see their very life, their example of the Christian life, as the most powerful weapon in their arsenal when leading the faithful. Not words upon words, but the witness of the theological and human virtues, the witness of being a priest who can in truth say, “it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me” (*Gal* 2.20). Such a deacon or priest, indeed such a bishop, will when he does speak, be heard and set the world ablaze.

In conclusion: Saint Joseph lays out an example of silence, and example that points to the need to place God first, to remain quiet when quiet is called for, and to speak with a voice of authenticity and integrity when words are needed. Let us all, as Pope Francis closes his letter on Saint Joseph, strive to “imitate his virtues and his zeal”.