

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - YEAR A

(Is 7:10-14; Rm 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24)

Excerpts of Pope Francis – ANGELUS - 18 December 2022

Father Charles Fillion

21 December 2025

Brothers and sisters, today, the fourth and final Sunday of Advent, the Gospel presents the figure of Saint Joseph to us (cf. *Mt* 1:18-24). He is a just man who is about to get married. We can imagine what his dreams for the future are — a beautiful family, with an affectionate wife and many wonderful children, and a dignified job — simple and good dreams, the dreams of simple and good people. Suddenly however, these dreams shatter against a disconcerting discovery. Mary, his fiancée, is expecting a child, and the child is not his! What would Joseph have felt? Shock, pain, confusion, perhaps even irritation and disappointment....

He experienced his world was falling apart all around him! And what could he do? The Law gives him two options. The first is to *accuse* Mary and make her pay the price for her alleged infidelity. The second is to secretly annul their engagement without exposing Mary to scandal and to harsh consequences, taking upon himself, however, the burden of shame. Joseph chooses this second option, *the way of mercy*. And behold, at the height of his crisis, right when he is thinking and evaluating all this, God lights a new light in his heart. He declares to him in a dream that Mary's motherhood did not come about because of a betrayal, but was the work of the Holy Spirit, and that the baby to be born will be the Saviour (cf. vv. 20-21). Mary will be the Mother of the Messiah, and he will be His guardian.

On waking up, Joseph understands that the greatest dream of every devout Israelite — to be the father of the Messiah — is being fulfilled for him in a completely *unexpected* way. Indeed, in order to fulfil this, it would not be enough to belong to David's lineage and be a faithful observer of the law, but he will have to entrust himself above and beyond all else to God, welcome Mary and her son in a completely different way than he had expected, different from the way things had always been done. In other words, Joseph will have to renounce all reassuring certainties, his perfect plans, his legitimate expectations, and open himself to a future that was completely to be discovered. And before God, who disrupts his plans and asks that he trust Him, Joseph says "yes". Joseph's courage is heroic and is exercised in silence — his courage is to trust, he welcomes, he is willing, he asks for no further guarantees.

Brothers and sisters, what does Joseph say to us today? We too have our dreams, and perhaps we think of them more, we talk about them together at Christmas. Perhaps we long for some dreams that were shattered and we see that our best expectations must face with the unexpected, disconcerting situations.

And when this happens, Joseph shows us the way. We should not give in to negative feelings, like anger or isolation — this is the wrong way! Instead, we have to attentively welcome surprises, life's surprises, even the crises. When we find ourselves in crisis, we should not make decisions quickly based on instinct, but rather sift through them like Joseph did, who “considered everything” (cf. v. 20), and base it on the fundamental criterion: God's mercy.

When one experiences a crisis without giving in to isolation, anger, and fear, but keeping the door open to God, He can intervene. He is an expert in transforming crises into dreams — yes, *God opens crises into new horizons* we never would have imagined before, perhaps not as we would expect, but in the way he knows how. And these are God's horizons — surprising — but infinitely broader and more beautiful than ours!

Brothers and sisters, I hope that your journey during this last stage of Advent may go well. May the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph help us to live and be open to God's surprises.