

**“Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.”**

***Mt 11:9***

We have seen how Isaiah’s words take up just over sixty chapters in the Old Testament, and that John the Baptist’s words number roughly sixty in the New Testament. Today, we consider the third great figure of Advent, St Joseph, not one of whose words is recorded in Sacred Scripture. It is, as we have said, as if the closer we draw to Our Lord the more we should fall silent: what value our words when we are in the presence of the Word of God Himself!

St John the Baptist bestrides the Old and the New Testaments being, as he is, the last of the prophets. He embodies the work of all the great prophetic figures of the past, sums up their various messages, and points to the Lamb of God Himself who is now come amongst His people. When John sends his disciples to ask Our Lord whether He is the One who is to come, it is not because he doubts but because he wishes his own disciples to hear from the lips of the Messiah Himself that the Anointed One is now come among them. Right up to the point of his own martyrdom, John the Baptist continues to do what he was sent to do: to point to the long-awaited Redeemer of mankind, saying: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (Jn 3:30).

St Joseph also bestrides both Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the great patriarchal figures of the Bible: those who stand as father-figures and guardians of God’s people throughout salvation history. He stands in the same spiritual line of descent as Noah, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as Moses and Aaron, and as King David. Along with John the Baptist, St Joseph helps to usher in the era of the Messiah. But Joseph also stands high in the company of those who receive dreams from God. Dreams are mentioned many times in the

Bible but the contents of only twenty-one dreams are recorded in Sacred Scripture, fifteen in the Old Testament (including those of Abimelech, Jacob, Joseph, Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel), and six in the New Testament, five of which cluster around the Birth of Christ and one given to the wife of Pontius Pilate at the time of Our Lord's death.

Far from suspecting the Blessed Virgin Mary of being unfaithful, St Joseph – as both St Jerome and St Bernard of Clairvaux point out – considered himself unworthy of the great task that was being laid upon his shoulders: that of serving as Guardian to the Incarnate Son of God and His Mother. Who would not take fright at such a responsibility? But the Angel Gabriel revealed to St Joseph in a dream that this was indeed the will of God. And as soon as he woke, St Joseph took the Ever Virgin Mary to be his wife.

In patience and stillness, with a collected composure and with forbearance, and above all with a most profound faith in the supernatural reality of the events in which he now found himself caught up, St Joseph set about fulfilling the will of God in all that was asked of him. He did not understand everything that was happening, but he never doubted the goodness of God or that all things were being ordered to the glory of God. He faced long and difficult journeys; he heard that the king was trying to kill the Child in his care; he had to deal with emergencies whilst coping with poverty, and minimal resources with which to meet those crises; he had to flee into exile with his family, into a strange land; and even upon his return he could not settle once more in his own town of Bethlehem but had to return to his wife's home of Nazareth, where he lived a quiet and unassuming life – uncomprehending when Our Lord spent three days in the Temple at the age of twelve – until he, St Joseph, eventually died in obscurity a few years later. But what a death! Comforted by the presence of the Mother of God herself, and consoled by the hand of none other than the Son of God Incarnate. No wonder he is the patron saint of the dying!

And what is the fruit of this hidden life? This righteous man – this man who stood as a just man before the face of Almighty God and gave to Him all that he, St Joseph, was duty bound to give Him – this man was a key figure in bringing the wilderness and the dry land of a sinful world to rejoice, in bringing blossoms to the desert of our lifelessness. He nurtured the bringing forth of the glory of Lebanon and the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. He helped to ensure that the glory of the Lord would shine into the darkness of our lives, and through his prayers today he still strengthens the weak hands, and makes firm the feeble knees, of those of us who have a more fragile faith than he had.

*Ite ad Ioseph*, ‘Go to Joseph,’ Pharaoh tells his people in the hour of their most desperate need (Gen 41:55).

St Joseph’s calm and profound faith, his righteousness and his strength, will help you to lift up your eyes to heaven and keep you in hope even in the winter days of your trials and tribulations.

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