

St. Joseph--2015

(2 Sam 7:4....16; Rom 4:13....22; Mt 1:16....24)

I was really in trouble this time, the evening of March 18th, and I was clueless as to what to say in my homily today. Reluctant as I was, I called on St. Joseph for help. He replied promptly but was not in a helpful mood. "You've been doing this enough years that you should be able to do it by yourself." "I said, please have a heart. I'm recovering from spinal surgery, I'm troubled with almost constant itching, and I'm just getting over the flu." He=s really a very compassionate person, so he relented. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you in on something only I experienced on Christmas night. This is the first time this story has been told"

He went on to explain: "The Infant Jesus was lying safely in the manger, the ass and the ox sleeping quietly. It had been a long and difficult day, especially for Mary, and she had quickly fallen asleep. I crept out to take one last look at the wonder Infant before retiring, when I beheld a figure come out of the shadows." He went to the manger and with an air of quiet propriety, took the Divine Infant in his arms. I recognized him as the prophet Isaiah. He said to me, 'This, at last, is the Baby I spoke of when, seven hundred years ago, I said, 'Behold, the young women shall be with child and shall call his name Immanuel, because 'Truly, God is now here with us. He will be all I said he would be: wonder counselor, Father forever, Prince of Peace. He shall sit upon the throne of David. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and

understanding. He shall judge the poor with justice, he shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth. Like a shepherd he shall feed his flock, carrying them in his bosom. God's Spirit shall rest upon him and he shall bring forth justice to the nations. A bruised reed he shall not break, a dimly burning wick he will not quench. The Lord shall make Him a light to the nations, and his salvation shall reach to the ends of the earth.'

This was all very beautiful and all very true, and I think he could have gone on much longer, but now from the shadows emerged another figure, much more aggressive and looking a little impatient. He started out (addressing Isaiah), 'Well, I foretold the whole promise business three hundred before you did. What would all your fine words about the 'throne of David' mean without my prophecy? Remember, Israel did not rank with Egypt, the Hittites, or Assyria ever; it was just a postage stamp on the face of the earth; David, in the eyes of the great ones of the earth was a nobody. I had the faith to tell David, in the name of the Lord, 'your house and your kingdom are firm forever before me.' And of this Little One you are holding, I proclaimed, 'I will raise up your offspring after you ... I will establish his kingdom. ... I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to me.' I recognized now that it was Nathan the prophet who was speaking. He went on, 'if it had not been for me, you could not have spoken all those fine words we have just had from you. And now I understand how truly I spoke, beyond my understanding, for this one truly is the Son of God, though

in a sense far beyond any I intended.'

The reverence of the moment was shattered as a new figure emerged from the shadows, and he clearly had no desire to preserve the reverence of the moment. He was rough looking, dusty as though on the road much, rough also when he spoke: 'Well, now that these Johnnies-come-lately have put in their claim for glory by foretelling this new born King, my claim comes before either of them. I was on the scene before Israel entered their land. I am Balaam, the Seer that Balak, king of Moab, called to curse Israel, but God made me to bless them, instead. Of this Child I said, 'I see him, though not now; I observe him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel. Israel will act boldly, and Jacob will rule his foes.' An awkward silence followed: although Balaam seems to have done all that God required of him, he ended up with a bad reputation in Scripture, as all present knew.

The tension was dispelled by yet another figure from the shadows, a figure both majestic and jovial. It was Father Abraham. He looked on all present with amused affection. 'I really don't approve of one-upmanship in spiritual matters, but in all honesty, I need to intervene. With whom can all these promises begin except with me? Before there was an Israel, much less any thought of a "house of David," God said to me, 'I will make of you a great nation. ... In your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing.' This Blessed Child here before us is the culmination of that great promise. As St. Paul will

one day point out, 'The promises were made to Abraham and his descendant. It does not say, 'And to descendants,' as referring to many, but as referring to one, 'and to your descendant,' and that one is Christ the Lord.' Thus testifies both the OT and the NT."

But there was still one to be heard from. From the shadows there emerged one last figure. It was a woman wonderfully beautiful and gracious. All present instinctively recognized her as Mother Eve; she look at all with love, and with goodly humor. All reacted with the reverence she deserved. She said, 'You are all my dear children and you all have a claim of sorts to be at the beginning of the promise. But I am afraid I had the promise before any of you. It's true, it is a little difficult to interpret those words God spoke to the Serpent: 'I will place enmity between you and the woman, between her offspring and hers; they will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.' It sounds like a forecast of perpetual, endless strife, and so it has been. But God didn't intend it to be endless. The 'offspring' did turn out to be just One in whom all would fulfilled, just as Paul said--this Child we all see, is the One to crush the Serpent's head, though at great cost to Himself."

I looked at St. Joseph, knowing there could be no other claimants after Eve. I said, 'This is all very nice and does add up to a homily; it is edifying and instructive. But this is for your solemnity, this was to be a homily in your honor.' He said, "How could anything please a father, even a foster-father more than to hear all these wonderful words

spoken of his Son and all He will do? Nothing could make me happier than to hear my Son extolled as Savior of the world, the One to crush the Serpent's head, to reconcile all to the Father." And here my vision ended.