FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - DECEMBER 18, 2022

Today's gospel introduces one of the other great characters in the story of Christmas - Saint Joseph. Though he plays a critical role in the birth of Jesus, he does not speak a single word in all the gospels. Instead, he is a righteous man who prefers to speak through his actions. Since none of Saint Joseph's words are recorded, let us take some time to look at his actions and how they can give us insight into how to live as followers of Jesus Christ.

The first thing that Saint Matthew tells us about Saint Joseph is that "he was a righteous man." Now, for Jews, being a "righteous man" means being someone who follows the law. in its entirety down to the letter.

When Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant, it is clear to him that he cannot be the father. The Old Testament is clear about what should happen in this situation. In the Book of Deuteronomy, we read: "If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death" (Deut 22:23-24).

But that is not what Saint Joseph does. Why? Because he loves Mary. No doubt he is very hurt,

but that does not keep him from treating her mercifully. Despite he decided to divorce her. That would mean that no one would accuse Mary of being unfaithful when he found out she was pregnant. Rather, expose her he was willing.

Joseph's actions speak loudly to the type of love that Jesus wants all His followers to practice. Jesus came to forgive sinners, even those who put Him to death. He was born so that the mercy of God could be shown to all people.

The holidays can be a painful time for us. So many of us are estranged from family because of past hurts that have built up over time. Following Saint Joseph's example, let's make this Christmas different.

The second thing that Saint Joseph's actions teach us is to be totally committed to doing God's will.

Like all men, Saint Joseph had hopes and dreams for his life. All that was turned upside down when he found out that Mary was pregnant. However, when the angel appeared to him, he was quick to put those hopes and dreams aside to embrace God's will for him. He did as the angel commanded him.

In the Our Father, Jesus taught us to pray, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If

God's will is going to be done on earth, then we must be making His will the number one priority for our lives.

It is so important that, as followers of Jesus, we make God's will the number one priority in our lives. Whatever decisions we have to make - as individuals, as families, and as a parish - it is crucial that we first seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. If we are only trying to impose our own will, we will fail. But if we seek God's will, then we will flourish.

God entrusted His two most precious gifts - Jesus and Mary - to the care of Saint Joseph. Why? Because he was a righteous man who, at the same time, was quick to forgive. And because he was wholeheartedly determined to put God's will above his own. If during this holiday season we can follow Saint Joseph's example of mercy and obedience to God's will, Jesus will be born within us and we will never be the same.