

Prayer for a Feast or Celebration of St. Joseph
or
Prayer for Planning Sessions/Planning Retreats

Opening Prayer

Leader: Let us pray.

All: Gentle Joseph, teach us to quiet our hearts and silence our fears. Teach us to listen, as you did, to the voice of God in the events around us. We ask this with the trust of children, knowing your generous spirit will answer us in abundance. Amen.

Opening Reflection

(The leader or another reader can present this.)

We who share the "Joseph charism" usually think of our patron as the model of cordial charity. True as this may be, when we examine carefully the little that we know of his life, we find reason to claim Joseph as a model of our movement into the future -- a model of how to listen to the Spirit of God in our times.

Faced with the extraordinary circumstances in which Mary found herself, Joseph might have done the "traditional thing." He might have divorced her quietly. Wasn't this what the law and the custom of his culture recommended? But Joseph was not willing to rest merely in the past and the present. The silence and the centeredness of his life allowed him to look for and to listen to the voice of God. And so, God found in him an openness in which to speak in the dream, "Joseph, affairs cannot stand as they have always been. It is time to move forward now. Will you be with us?" To go against the grain of what has been tried and seems to be true is never easy. We have no way of knowing how much personal discomfort, fear of disapproval, or insecurity it may have cost Joseph. How much did he risk in deciding to do what good Jewish men did not do?

The God who is calling us to "the more" looks at our world, our church and our institutions today and says, "Things cannot stand as they have been." But where will God find the open space in which to enter and speak? Will it be, as the poet says,

Where shall the word be found? Where will the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence..." (T. S. Elliot, *Ash Wednesday*)

Or will we be willing to dream and to trust our dreams? Perhaps the most cordial charity of Joseph was that he loved the future of God enough to dream, to attend to the voice of God in the present moment and to move with God. As we who share the Joseph charism move always toward love of God and love of neighbor, can we love enough to ask ourselves?

How can I create enough space and silence in my life to dream and to hear God's word for the future?

(Pause briefly for reflection.)

Moving always toward profound love of God and love of neighbor consists more in letting go than in acquiring more. It calls us at times to forego light and to embrace the darkness. Joseph's life calls us to consider what insecurities, rejection and discomfort we are willing to risk in order to embrace fully in our own lives God's plan of salvation.

Will we be able to love enough to see and hear the dream?

(Pause briefly for reflection.)

Poem

(The leader or a second reader can read this poem reflectively.)

Joseph's Suspicion

The angel spoke and went to great trouble
over this man with the clenched fists:
Don't you see that in every fold
She is as fresh as God's morning?

The other stared at him darkly,
muttering: Well, what has changed her?
Until the angel cried: Carpenter,
don't you see the Lord's hand in this yet?

Because you make boards, are you proud
enough to raise your voice to him
who modestly makes buds and leaves
grow from the same wood.

He understood. And he looked up,
very shaken, to see the angel
who was gone. Then he slowly
pushed off his cap. And sang in praise.

(Rainer Maria Rilke)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray.

All: St. Joseph, our patron and protector, we ask for the courage to lay aside our fears and trust our hopes. Let us see past the walls we build to protect the present. Help us reach beyond this moment to fulfill the dreams which will most benefit our students and our institutions. We ask this, relying on the God who supported you and gave you courage. Amen.

Based on a prayer prepared by Sr. Miriam Therese Larkin, CSJ