

22 December 2013

He appears but says very little. We know him for he is central to our story of salvation. He comes in and out of the Advent and Christmas story but it seems almost impossible to pin him down. If he were alive today, he would make for a fascinating television interview. I am talking, of course, of St Joseph. I have mentioned on many occasions how the bible invites our imagination into the story being told. Mary is a young teenager, perhaps 17 years of age. And by the message of an angel, her life is turned completely upside down. God invites Mary to be part of our story of salvation. Despite a natural sense of fear, uncertainty and anxiety, Mary trusts in God's word and God's promise and abandons her life totally to God's will.

At least Mary speaks. But along comes St Joseph who says very little but accomplishes a great deal. Joseph is a model of fidelity. Just like Mary, there must have been dozens of times when he was left scratching his head trying to work out what all this about. Joseph too must have had moments of uncertainty, desperately hoping that God would choose someone else to have such an active part in the story of salvation. But quietly and gently, with great love and fidelity, with faith and trust in God's word, Joseph continues along the path with Mary that make them such central characters in this great story of birth, this great story of faith, this great story of God coming to visit his people, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Joseph was a man of honour. As if things weren't bad enough, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and Joseph must have thought he was beginning to imagine things. But the dream brings clarity. The word of God brings clarity. The message of the angel brings clarity. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. How many times in our lives have we had situations calling for us to make crucially important decisions? First there is confusion and uncertainty and then we pray to God and the light comes on; there is clarity and then there is calm. Now we have much in common with our biblical characters who entrust their lives to God, who say 'yes' to his word and who go forward with great promise and determination.

I personally have great devotion to St Joseph. I went to two secondary schools called St Joseph; in the seminary, the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny looked after us; my first parish as parish priest was St Joseph the Worker in North Reservoir. In all that time, I have always felt his protection and felt myself called to imitate

his fidelity to the Gospel. He really is one of the great saints of the Church and now on this fourth Sunday of Advent appears as a major character to help us reflect on the call of faith, the call of fidelity, the call to trust in God's word. Even when Mary and Joseph struggled with their faith, they believed. What a valuable lesson for all of us!

Despite the madness and rush of this time of year and endless functions and ceremonies, it has been a real blessing to celebrate the school Graduation ceremonies of St Brendan's and Holy Rosary, their respective end-of-year Masses, honouring the work of our school staff, our wonderful parish staff, participating in the Ecumenical carols with the other church leaders, all these opportunities remind us to be like St Joseph, to be generous, loving and faithful in all that we do, to do so with compassion and commitment, to do it because we love the God who first loved us in Christ. And that is at the heart of our Christmas proclamation 'Emmanuel, God-is-with-us'.