

## HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF ST JOSEPH 2012

Friday, 16 March, 2012

### Readings

2 Samuel 7:4-5,12-14,16

*The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David*

Psalm 88: 2-5, 27, 29

*His dynasty shall last forever*

Romans 4: 13, 16-18, 22

*Though it seemed Abraham's hope could not be fulfilled, he hoped and he believed*

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

*Joseph did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do*

### Introduction

Recently, I was going through some electronic files on my office computer. It struck me that in 2005 and again in 2008 and 2009, my predecessor as Academic Dean presided over Eucharistic celebrations on the feast of St. Joseph, our patronal feast. And now, in 2012, I find myself doing the same. We may be creating a tradition! Somewhere in the future it will be said 'the dean always presides on the feast on St. Joseph'.

I also noticed that my predecessor on these occasions began his homily by noting how little there is on St. Joseph in the canonical gospels. This, in fact, was going to be the starting point of my homily today, but then I feared that some of you who have been around for a while would remember what was said in the past and would then accuse me of plagiarism.

All the same, let it be said again: Scripture does not tell us a lot about Joseph. Yet, what is there is enough to be the basis of meditation and spiritual nourishment. Today's Gospel reading from Matthew's infancy narrative presents us with an invitation and a challenge. We are told that Mary and Joseph were betrothed, in the process of getting married. But before things could be finalized they experienced a crisis; Mary is with child and Joseph is not the father! Joseph decides to call off the whole affair in a quiet way without causing her public humiliation. God intervenes; he speaks to him in a dream. When Joseph wakes up from his dream, he does as the Lord commanded him. Everything has changed.

Notice how dreams play an important role in the narrative. Mary and Joseph were betrothed; they had a dream. They were going to get married, have children and grow into old age together. But then this was not God's dream. God had an even bigger dream for them. In their attempt to fulfill their dream a crisis hits them and through a dream God speaks to Joseph. God asks Joseph to set aside his dream for the dream God has. He does not ask him to suspend it for a short time, but rather to put it aside and to let himself become part of God's dream. "When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do" (Mt1:24).

What is your dream? Are you living your dream or God's dream?

Belief in the significance of dreams is common in many cultures and religions. The interpretation and meaning of dreams has even become a specialized field of study in psychology. In the Bible too dreams play an important role. Basically, dreams may be defined as the semi-conscious activity of the mind. When we dream we are somehow suspended between full consciousness and total unconsciousness. To dream is to have a state of mind without the proper perception of reality. Our dreams are our impressions of the real world of experience. Though we are somewhat aware of what is going on when we dream, we are not fully in control of the experience. Somehow, dreams can be said to impose themselves on the dreamer. Sometimes dreams are about unresolved conflicts, at other times they involve issues that one is concerned with in daily life, yet at other times

they involve deep-seated emotions or desires. In all, however, every aspect of our dreams is an aspect of the dreamer.

The meaning of dreams is not always immediately evident to the dreamer or to others. The material of dreams is like signposts along the road of life. Some are bright and clear; others are completely dark and obscure. They need careful analysis by one properly trained in the science and art of interpreting dreams. I have no such training and skill to interpret dreams. Dreams in the Bible are a means of revelation. I am convinced that our dreams reveal something of ourselves to us and also reveal something of what God is saying to us. Our dreams are a means through which God speaks to us.

Dreams also have healing power. They help us come to terms with experiences and emotions that we find difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with at the conscious level. Dreams can bring healing by showing us what it is upon which we must focus our attention.

What are you constantly dreaming about? What is your dream? Have you ever thought of Mary and Joseph dreaming of getting married and having several healthy children and eventually growing into old age together? That might have been their dream, but was it God's dream too? It seems not! God was dreaming of something much bigger. God was dreaming of making them the parents of Jesus, God made human! Wow! Who but God could have dreamt such a dream?

What did the parents of Jesus think as they watched the infant grow? Could it be true – this, God's son? What about when he was falsely accused and condemned to die? As she stood at the cross, what did Mary think of her dream (Jn 19:25-27)? Shattered, ended... But God had an even bigger surprise for her and for us. Who could have dreamed of the Resurrection?

To live without dreams is to have no vision for life, to have no passion for what we do because dreams spring from the centre of our being and also lead us to the centre. In other words, to live our dreams is to be in touch with our truest selves.

One important aspect to keep in mind with accounts of dreams in the Bible is that in almost all accounts the dreamer 'wakes up', 'rises from sleep'. We cannot live in the world of dreams, we have to come into the land of the living and live our dreams there. Dreams are the motivation, the vision the leads us. They are not and should not be confused for reality itself. Between the dream and reality is a distance to be covered.

At some point, like Joseph, we have to wake up from our dreams. We have to confront reality. And sometimes it is harsh. Before 1994 many citizens of this country had great dreams of what democracy would bring. For many, however, these dreams remain largely unfulfilled. Reality has proved otherwise. Some have given up on the dream of transformation and a better future. This may explain to some extent the widespread violence in contemporary society.

Former president Mbeki once asked: what happens to a dream deferred? Yes, what happens when we are not living our dream? Can we really be happy if we are not living our life's dream? I doubt that we can really be happy in life if we are not living our dream! Do our dreams dry up or do they fester like a sore when they are ignored? Maybe they explode? Our dream is God's dream for us.

As ministers of the Good News we need to help men and women realize God's dream in their lives. We have to be able to give hope even in the midst of despair. Our hope is not based on some political plan or strategy, but on the resurrection. We know that our redeemer lives; he has overcome death. Joseph was a man of faith and he challenges us to make the same commitment.

Remember: if a dream is not worth dying for, it is also not worth living for. What God requires is not that we die for our dreams - if need be, yes – but rather that we live each day for our dreams; that each day becomes a realization of our dream, of God’s dream for us.

Remember the words of that beautiful hymn: The dream I have today, my Lord, is only a shadow of your dreams for me.

May God bless you richly this day and always. Amen

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