

# Fourth Sunday of Advent

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

Pastor – Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Victoria, BC, Canada

---

The sleepless night for the soul of Saint Joseph is a life-learning experience for all of us. Joseph, troubled, lost his sleep; which meant he had lost his inner calm and could find no peace. These are the nights when inner serenity is lost, peace feels distant, and the heart is weighed down by uncertainty.

It was not easy for Joseph to decide Mary's future; thinking deeply, seeking a solution to the situation with Mary without harming her life. The Gospel describes Joseph as a just man; yet justice alone did not make his decision easy. He was torn between the law, compassion, and his love for Mary. Joseph wrestled deeply within himself, even at great personal cost, seeking a way to protect Mary's dignity and life. His heart was restless, his mind burdened, and his spirit searching for the light in the darkness. The positive thing about Joseph was he actively sought God's help in his innermost soul, his *conscience*, even while facing a situation like this. The Church teaches that the *conscience* is a God-given inner sense, or "judgment of reason" that helps us to discern right from wrong; acting as a witness to God's moral law.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§ 1778):

*Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.*



Paragraph 1776 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church also states: “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. ... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. ... His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.”

Dilemmas, uncertainties, puzzling moments, wretched situations of life, darkness, and the bleakness in our spiritual journey can occur in our life, and the example of Joseph in seeking God’s counsel first, teaches us to trust in God’s guidance and to heed our own conscience: which is where God speaks to us.

Saint Augustine viewed conscience as the voice of God informing people of right and wrong intuitively. Saint John Henry Newman's views on conscience follows: “It acts as a ‘messenger’ or a ‘truth detector’ from God, a natural part of human nature that directs the soul toward the divine.”

Like Joseph, making a space for God transforms our thoughts and decisions; making all things new, better, and salvific. It was a totally unbelievable and unreasonable demand, and he could have said a big ‘no’ to the plan. He could have said: “Family, friends, and everyone who knows me will mock and ridicule me, and I will be ostracized!” because according to Jewish tradition, a man accepting a woman in this situation would be seen as going against deeply ingrained cultural norms and religious law; making his decision a rare act of mercy that would invite considerable social and reputational repercussions from his community. Streams of Grace flowed when Joseph gave God authority to take over and control his life. Only with the Grace of God are we able to see everything from a different and divine perspective, rather than a common man’s perspective. Joseph became a different man not by his own strength, but by the grace of God. Grace enabled him

to see beyond human logic and to embrace God's greater vision. Joseph was transformed, choosing *Trust* over *Fear*. Joseph's act of self-surrender and silent obedience to the Divine Plan became a crucial milestone in the Salvation History.

Let us pray like Saint Teresa of Avila: "Lord, grant that I may always allow myself to be guided by You, always follow Your plans, and perfectly accomplish Your Holy Will." And like Joseph, let us listen to the inner voice, our *conscience*; within the 'sanctuary' of our lives, and say 'yes' to the plan God has for us.