## Solemnities of Saint Joseph, Annunciation Have Much to Teach Us

This Lenten Season, we have something a little unique as Catholics: two Fridays where there is not a requirement to abstain from meat.

This past Friday we had a special Mass for Saint Joseph's Day which is actually Saturday, March 18th. Archbishop Hebda issued a decree recognizing graces received from the extraordinary Year of Saint Joseph which we just completed. (First declared for our archdiocese by Archbishop Hebda, and then proclaimed for the universal Church by Pope Francis).

And this coming Friday, March 25th, is the solemnity of the annunciation of the Lord. As this is also a major feast, there is no obligation to abstain from meat. (Found in the Code of Canon Law 1251: "Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.").

While it's entirely up to you if you are going to abstain from meat or not, I'd suggest there's a deeper meaning to be gained from these feasts that make them tie in beautifully with Lent, as both show us so much about how to live as Christians.

For one, both entail trust. Joseph and Mary each have their plans upended. Both are given a message from the angel to not be afraid. And both respond with trust in God's plan, despite knowing there could be consequences for doing so. How often we as humans want to "take the wheel" from God, or have a hard time listening to Him. Or sometimes the message we get isn't one we want; sometimes God says "no" or doesn't seem to answer. But when we trust in God, what amazing things happen. Because of their trust, Jesus was brought into this world and raised in a loving home. And often when we go through a valley in life or something difficult, we may look back on that time as one where God wasn't absent but rather His plan for us was just unfolding. God has so many good things in store for us, and wants to use us as instruments of grace in this world. We may not always know where we are going, but when we trust in God and let Him lead us, like Mary and Joseph we can be instruments of His grace.

Secondly, both Mary and Joseph teach us about service. If you've seen depictions of the Holy Family, you may see Mary and Joseph at work while Jesus as a little child plays, each looking lovingly at the other. In their trust in the Lord, Mary and Joseph were saying "it's not about me" and in their marriage they had a love for one another that reflected the Trinity. How can we also grow in holiness and love for one another, especially are families?

Third, neither one says a whole lot, but let their actions do the talking. Mary has a few words in Scripture; Joseph has none. But how many loving actions must have taken place at the "School of Nazareth" over the course of the 30 years that were not recorded of our Lord's life? Joseph quietly led the Holy Family, taking them into Egypt for safety,

and providing for their needs until he entered eternal life. Mary quietly did so many things too. So we are also reminded through Mary and Joseph that our work matters; not only does it make our world and family better but it makes us better too. When we do simple actions with great love, it teaches our children about love and service and helping one another.

Lastly, Mary and Joseph teach us about selflessness. As little children we are often instructed to say “please” and “thank you” and to share with our siblings, or the less fortunate. We may learn about helping out an elderly neighbor or our grandparents as they age too. Mary and Joseph never put the focus on themselves; again they are there to help one another and raise our Lord and build one another up. How often in our world the emphasis can be on the individual or a person can think the world revolves around them. Just look at kids sporting events, or a customer service line, or maybe your office; we all know people who think they are the only ones that matter. Long before Jesus would wash the feet of the apostles, Mary and Joseph were demonstrating what service is all about.

So yes, these feasts to give us a little mini break in Lent for a celebration. But don’t think of them as a reason to just go out and have a burger. By all means if you are so inclined, have some meat. But these wonderful feasts give us something much better than an excuse to grab a burger. They teach us life long traits that we can use to become saints, so look to Mary and Joseph often. Pray for their intercession. Learn from them. And know they are they to help teach you and me so much about what true love of God and neighbor looks like. With them, say “yes” to following God’s plan for you, and like them grow in that holiness every day.

Have a blessed week as you continue your Lenten journey,

Fr. Paul