

Feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 2007
Homily to the Community of St. Joseph, Toronto
by Fr. Dominic Borg, O.C.D.

The first sentence that came to us in the first reading today said: "The word of the Lord came to Nathan." Many times in Sacred Scripture we find this expression The word of the Lord came to Isaiah, The word of the Lord came to Moses; The word of the Lord came to Mary; to Dominic. The word of the Lord constantly comes to you and to me. And perhaps we too, like Jesus Christ have to find time to sit among the teachers, listening to them, asking them questions, and listening also to their answers. That is what the Gospel said "When Mary and Joseph found Jesus Christ, he was sitting among the teachers listening to them, asking them questions, and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." We too have the Holy Spirit who is our teacher. The letter to the Hebrews says: "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need to listen again to the word of God. You need milk, not solid food, for solid food is for those who have trained their faculties in the practice of the virtues." It is the practicing of the virtues, the example that St Joseph gives to you and to me. He is one of the few people in the Bible who does not say a word. There are other people in the Bible who are mentioned by name, but they do not say a word. There are people in the Bible who say a few words, but we are not given their names, such as, for example when Joseph was told by Jacob to go to Shechem to see how his brothers were doing, the Bible tells us that Joseph came across a man "ish", just a man, and Joseph talked to him and asked him "Have you seen any shepherds here?" And the man answered Joseph, "I heard them saying 'let us go to Dotham'" and Joseph followed what that man had told him, he went to Dotham, and when they saw Joseph coming from afar, the Bible tells us that "they saw him coming from a distance, they said 'here comes the dreamer, let us kill him'". Brothers and sisters, we too can be sitting near each other rubbing shoulders, and yet we can look at each other from a distance. And when we look at each other from a distance the tendency is that we too "kill" each other.

When we begin to know each other properly, then we are in a situation where God will dwell in us. In the Bible, in the book of Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18 we encounter this statement, a statement that all of us should know, but we know it incomplete. The statement is "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." We all know this. But that is only part of it. The sentence is "You shall love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord." That last part is very important brothers and sisters.

Let me tell you this story in order to help you understand the meaning of the statement: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."

There was this man who was sentenced to death. He went to court, and the jury came to the conclusion that he deserved the death penalty. The judge handed him to the king to execute him. This man said to the king "King, I am innocent, I did not commit this crime. I am innocent."

The king told him "The jury and the judge found you guilty."

But the man replied "King, I am innocent, and I have testimony to prove it."
"O yeah, ok. Where is this testimony?"

"King, it is in the other village. Allow me to go to the other village to get it."

"You must think that I am nuts, that I would let you go to another village. You would not come back."

"King, what if someone stays here in my place, will you allow me to go, and if within twenty-four hours I do not return, then that person will die for me."

"Yes, but you would have to find such a friend."

"I know, I have such a friend. Let me go and call him."

He called him, the friend came and this guy explained to his friend that he is innocent, that the testimony is in the other village and that he has to go and get it, but if he is not back in twenty-four hours, he would have to die for him.

The friend said "OK, I will do it."

So, the king said, "take the shackles from this guy, put them on the other guy."

The man left to go to the other village. He found the testimony, the documents he needed, and was on his way back. On the way, he fell prey to a band of thieves. They beat him, they took his horse, they took the satchel with the documents and left him on the side of the road.

When he came to his senses, he saw a farmer coming and he called out to him "please, please, do me this favour. Take me to the square. My friend is there, he is going to die because I was supposed to be back by now."

So this farmer took him to the town. His friend was already on the platform, with the rope around his neck, ready to be hanged. He began yelling "stop, stop, please stop King, I am here."

The King stopped the hanging and said to him "Where are the documents?"

"King, don't you see how I am, they beat me, they stole my horse and took the documents from me. Can't you see the blood all over me, they left me to die, they took everything."

And then he turned to his friend and said "You know, I understand twenty-four hours is up and I have to die."

But his friend said "You are innocent."

"But this is my judgment, you are innocent."

"No, no, the deal was that I die instead of you if you were not back with the documents within twenty-four hours. I am going to die."

And the other said "No, I am going to die."

"No, I am going to die."

When the King saw them there, fighting over who is going to die, he said "Wait a minute. I am going to set both of you free on one condition, that you will make me your third friend."

When God sees two loving each other, He wants to be there. He wants to be in the contract. He wants to be in the covenant. "Love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord." I want to be there. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there present among them." So when he tells us "Love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.", He is telling us that when in the community there is love, God wants to be there. He is there.

Mary and Joseph loved each other, and He is present there. He is present in their hearts. They are in search for Him, and She said "With great anxiety do we search." Notice the words of Mary. She told Her Son, Jesus Christ "Look, your Father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." This is another thing brothers and sisters, when we come in contact with the word of God, we are getting familiar with it in the wrong sense of the word.. You know the saying 'familiarity brings contempt'. We hear words, for example "anxiety" "diligently" "assuming" "yet". "Yet" is such an important word in the Bible, and the word "but", is also very important. Only three letters "yet". If only it is given a lot more to the people, that word "yet". "Do you know computers?" "No, I am computer illiterate" "Do you know computers?" "No, not yet. But I will, I am going to." "Are you a saint." "No, not yet, but I am working on it." Not yet. It gives us confidence. And that is why we find it a lot in the Bible "not yet". "Now he said this about the Spirit ... for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified." "Yet". "Did you do your homework. Yes, but" Ha, ha, but what? That puts the breaks on it. "Yet" releases the power, "but" puts the breaks on it. I am going to do it, "but". And sometimes, we don't do it.

In today's Gospel we have that word "assuming", like "diligently", in the whole New Testament, the word "diligently" only enters twice. "Go and search for him diligently and when you find him, bring me word, so that I too will go and worship him" - Herod. The other place is in the story of the woman who had ten silver coins, and she lost one of them. She searched for it diligently and when she found it, she was full of joy. In the Old Testament, the word "diligently" is extremely common. Usually we find it telling us to observe diligently the commandments. We find it linked with "heed". Take "heed" of these words, observe them diligently, pay attention because in them there is life.

In the Old Testament the word diligently appears very often, as much as we find in the New Testament the word "endurance", to endure, to persevere ... once you make the commitment that you want to serve, you go for it.

We as Carmelites, look at Mary. As soon as Mary said "Let it done unto me according to your word.", the angel departed from Her, and Mary went with haste to be of service to Elizabeth. And now that the elections are coming, the whole community is asking these people to be of service, to render service "oh well then, I am not competent". All God needs is a piece of flesh that will say "yes", that's all you need ... not whether you are competent, or you are not healthy, or you are not intellectual ... if you were approached, there is a reason.

God speaks to us with His words which we find in the Scriptures, with the people who happen to cross our path and He speaks to us through Scripture and also in dreams. He speaks to us in dreams. Joseph had a dream in the Old Testament, he dreamt. He told the dream, and they misinterpreted it, and they wanted to kill him. Joseph, in the gospel of Matthew, had a dream. He had made up his mind to send Mary away quietly, but in the dream the angel of the Lord came and told him something different. Now Joseph had a choice - this is a beautiful encounter that Joseph sets in front of us, a great lesson that I wish that it was incarnate in me. The lesson is this: Joseph found himself in the middle, between what the word of God is telling him, and what other people are going to say. Joseph was going to send her away discretely. When the people are going to see Mary pregnant, they will say that he made her pregnant even before they got married. And this was serious too, because although they were engaged, but before they came to live together, people could have said "this guy really wants to get married, he will even get married to someone who is already pregnant". So Joseph found himself in the situation that either he is going to save himself from what the people might be saying, or risking even his own reputation by obeying the word of God. When he woke up Joseph knew what he was going to do. When he woke up, Joseph did what the angel had told him in the dream. He took Mary to be his wife.

Many times we too find ourselves between these two situations, "Oh, I don't know what people will say, I have to save face." And sometimes, at the risk of shutting our ears to the voice of God, and not to lose face in front of people, we put the words of God aside, so that we can look nice in front of others. But Joseph didn't, Joseph took the risk. He discovered the God of the impossible in his life because the angel told him "she is pregnant with the Holy Spirit". If some came to tell me that, or tell you that, my goodness what would we say ... "this is new, only in America I might say". But Joseph did not say that. You see that the faith of Joseph is not a joke.

The word of God came to Mary, and Mary without questioning, is asking for an explanation. "How could this happen since I do not know any man?" She is asking the angel, 'continue to guide me, because I am at a loss here'. Joseph does not say to the angel 'continue to guide me here, because I am at a loss', no, Joseph waits in contemplation, literally in contemplation. The angel told him "Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." Imagine Joseph, who knew that she was pregnant, 'what do you mean, do not be afraid, I am so hurt with this action'. No, he did not think that, he stayed silent, and because he was in silence, the word continued to unravel in front of him. The words continued, the angel continued to speak to him. 'What happened to her is the action of the Holy Spirit'. And Joseph obediently listened, and suddenly in his contemplation, he meets this God of the impossible. He met him on a different level than Zechariah and that of Mary our Mother.

Zechariah too believed in the God of the impossible. If he had not believed, he would not have been praying that his wife would have a child, but when the angel came and told him "Zechariah, your prayer has been heard", his answer was "impossible". He is praying to the God of the impossible, but he does not believe that the God of the impossible is going to do this for him. This is like the centurion. When Jesus Christ told him "do you believe that I can do this", the centurion said "Yes Lord I believe, help me in my unbelief." 'I believe that you have the power to resurrect someone from the dead. I believe that you have the power to heal someone who is sick. But I don't believe that you are going to do it with my son. Help me in my unbelief.'

The same it is with Zechariah. Zechariah is challenging this God of the impossible. Part of him believes because he is praying for it, and if you don't believe, you don't waste your time. He was Jewish, and the Jewish people say "You pray to God for healing, and then go and find a doctor." And that is because God is going to help the doctor. He is going to give him the capacity and knowledge he needs to diagnose you properly. They say "you pray for work, then you go and look for a job". Do everything as if everything depends upon you, and do everything as if nothing depends upon you. Zechariah prayed. He believed in the God of the impossible, but he entered into an argument with Him, not so with Joseph. Joseph was silent.

I am sure that Albert Einstein would have given the Nobel prize to St. Joseph, because Albert Einstein said that example education is the best education. Joseph speaks to us with his example. He doesn't say a word in the gospel. His silence is so profound that you cannot grasp it in words. When he woke up, he took action. And God speaks to us in dreams too. It is in the Bible. Jacob dreamt, and Joseph dreamt in the Old Testament. You see also the wife of Pilate. She ran to Pilate and told him "have nothing to do with this guy, he is innocent. Wash your hands of it." She had a dream. And Pilate, afraid of what the people would say, contrary to St. Joseph, he gave in to the people. First he told them "This man is innocent, I am going to release him." But the people began to scream and shout and he was conditioned by them. "If you release this guy, you go against Caesar, we have no king but Caesar." And Pilate was conditioned. Not Joseph. Joseph is not conditioned by what people would say. He is there with Mary struggling toward Jerusalem.

You and I too travel with Mary, like Joseph, and it helps that we allow Mary to speak for us. That's what Joseph did. "Assuming" - there is that word assuming again. You remember I told you before, in the

New Testament the word assuming only enters twice. It enters here, in Luke, "assuming that Jesus was with them, they stopped to look for him, and he was not there." Sometimes we too, assume that when we are going to come for the elections, there are going to be quite a good number of people who are going to offer their service and volunteer to render three years of service - assuming - "but he was not there." They had to journey back to Jerusalem, and after three days they found Him, but in the meantime they were searching quickly with anxiety. You and I too sometimes assume that Jesus Christ is on our path, until we are questioned. We are challenged and we quickly enter into a crisis, forgetting that the crisis is nothing more than the battlefield where God is going to come to show His power.

The other place we find the word assuming is in the gospel of John. Mary of Magdalen, is in search of Jesus Christ Assuming that the man was the gardener, she said to him "Sir, if you have taken away from here, tell me where you have laid him, and I will go and bring him back." "Assuming him to be the gardener." Many times you and I encounter people and we assume them to be the gardener, the people who steal Jesus Christ from us, the people who steal our peace. Sometimes, with the attitude and the behaviour of your husband or your wife, you assume that he is the gardener ... 'my goodness, he has the capacity to steal Christ from me,' and there it is, Jesus Christ inviting you for conversion. Because, if you really believe in Jesus Christ, if you really believe in God, you know that this husband, this wife, with all their defects, this is the best husband for me, the best husband in the world for me. He is not the best husband in the world, God forbid, just as you are not the best wife in the world, but she is the best wife for this man, and he is the best husband for this woman, because God always gives us the best. That is why, when you come with a dilemma, and God asks tells you to go ahead, 'don't tell me to go ahead, tell me what is your way to do it, I want you to do it because you always have the best for me.' God always gives us the best.

Here we see another beautiful lesson on "assume". Joseph becomes the carrier, carrying God's kindness, like any other human being. Do you remember when we were young, they taught us this. This was in Malta, but I asked the teachers here in Canada, and it seems that it is a universal doctrine that they taught us. They had this question and the answer. "Why did God create you?" "God created me in order to love Him, to serve Him, and after my time in this world, I go to enjoy Him forever in Heaven." That is what they taught us, is it not? It is true, and it is not. God created us to communicate His kindness to others. That is why God created us. When He infused His breath in us, it is the Heshed. It is His love. When He infused His breath, what did we do? We sucked it in. But if you suck the breath in, and you don't exhale it, you will kill yourself.

Man has the capacity to turn love into hatred, into selfishness. He has the power to turn love, which is altruism ("He did not look to His own interest but to the interest of others."), into selfishness and self-centeredness. We were created to inhale and exhale. To inhale God's love, God's kindness, and to exhale it through our actions, through our words to our way of thinking. That is our mission, to manifest God's kindness everywhere, at all times and in all circumstances, so that people will understand the meaning of those words. Heshed ell, co hion. And not only the kindness of God is all day long, but it is exactly under our nose. The Jewish people, when the feast of Purim arrives, have an expression, they call it Heshbon Hanevish, personal accounting. To look at your life, examine your conscience, your actions. To respond to the call. Am I being self-centered? Am I being afraid? Do I hear that beautiful Al hera, fear not? It is I that am going to go ahead of you. Do we look at St Joseph faced with so many impossible situations? A woman carrying a child - he is going to marry Her - this child is the Son of God - I have different names for this child and then the angel comes and tells me "call Him with this name". Then he has to run with Mary and the child to Egypt, the child is about to be born, and there is no place for Him ... so many situations... and when we look at him, he doesn't give you the impression that he is panicking. Instead he teaches us that if we want to hear the word of God, we have to listen. St John of the Cross said that God spoke in silence ... the Word that is spoken in silence can only be heard in silence. Scripture and prayer help us to create a silence in our heart so that the Word of God will be

coming carnate in us. It gives us the power to overcome the impossible. The psalmist says "With him on my side, I can climb any wall." "He who called me is faithful," St. Paul tells us. He who called you is faithful and He will do it. He began this good work within you, He Himself will bring it to completion.

We learn from St Joseph to be flexible to God's direction without questioning. Why did you place me in this community? Why are we in this situation? I am sure that God is going to provide, and He will provide, He always does, but at the same time it helps that we show our disposition too, and then we leave the elections in His hands. But, we have to dispose ourselves, we have to because if we continue on with always the same people, then one day we are not going to have these people here, and what will we do? I am sure that these people will step in if need be, but if there is an empty space, it is a sign that God is going to tell them "you step in". But he is also saying to us to step in.

So I encourage you brothers and sisters, not to be afraid. There are these titles, President, Master of Formation. For me, the most important is Master of Formation, the person who is giving Formation. The unity and cooperation between the Master of Formation and the President is very important, because if it is not there we can create division, and then the community begins to see the division and the community begins to question things. Unity. "Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est." Where there is charity and love, where there is unity, God is there.

So, Mission Impossible of St Joseph. Are we not Carmelites? St Teresa says, there was no grace that she asked him that he did not do it for her. He is the saint of the impossible, and now that we are cornered, we refer to him and ask him for help.

I encourage you to look at this saint today. It is not a coincidence that God is speaking to us with this event. I hope that after Mass there will be some of you who will offer yourselves for this service. I hope that God speaks to you in your dreams, allowing St Joseph to continue to teach us with his beautiful example, being silent, and with this example he says "Let it be done to me according to your word." Mary said it with Her words and Her example. St Joseph speaks it with his silence and his example. So whether you hear God or not, the example is clear. "You call me Master and Teacher and you are right. Yet here I am as one who serves. And if I, your Master and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." To serve, it not a choice, it is a call. It is a call to serve. Mary says, "Here I am."

As you know, there are two kinds of people, those who say "Ah, there you are." They want something from you. And others who say "Here I am" reporting for service. I hope we hear more "Here I am." than "There you are."