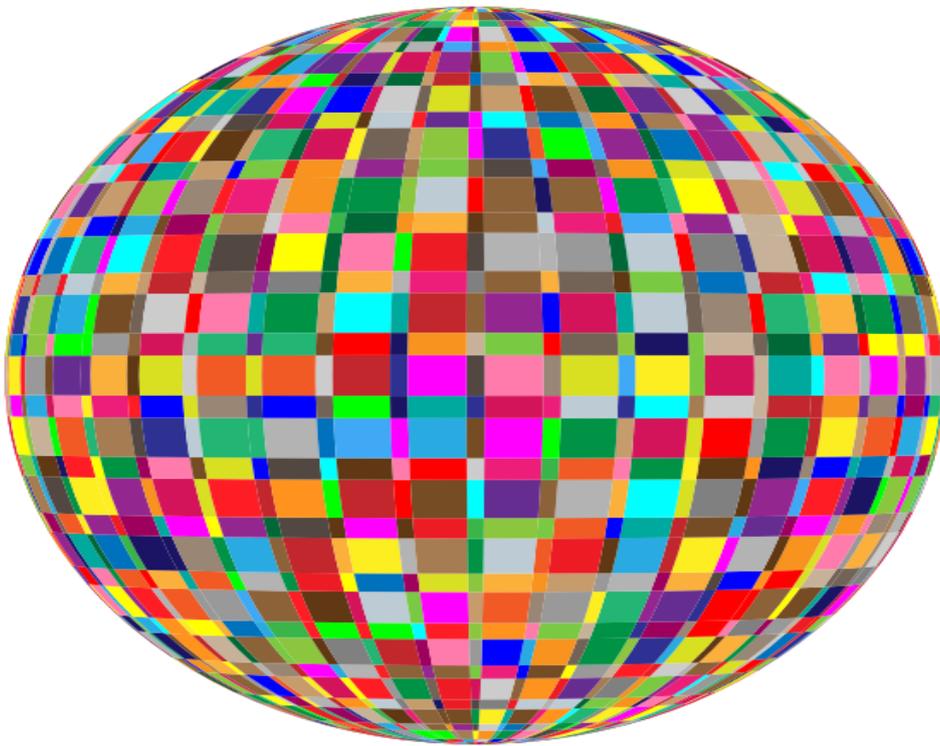


Mission in Ministry 2021: *Spiritual Reflection,*

“Saint Joseph the Spice of Life”

Knock Shrine-Ireland



Living in this age of utilitarian values we are led to view things from a narrow and selfish perspective. This applies not only to our use of the earth's resources, but sadly it can even apply to our relationship with people. An example of these attitudes has become apparent during the current pandemic. The rich nations of the developed world have tried to secure all the vaccines to the detriment of poorer countries. The head of WHO put it very succinctly when he said, “the rich countries are fighting over the vaccine cake while the poorer countries are denied even access to the crumbs”.

Saint Joseph was certainly not utilitarian as he practiced simplicity of faith with a generous heart. He continually reached out to others with an open heart and did not count the costs. He had a quiet heart of action. He was a man of integrity and embodied the simplicity of living faith.

It seems ironic that this year of pandemic is dedicated to Saint Joseph, who has to a large extent been marginalised within the history of the Catholic Church. Having been pushed almost into invisibility, titles like Guardian of the

Universal Church, Protector of the Church, Splendour of Patriarchs etc. add to the irony. These titles are far removed from the simplicity of Saint Joseph. Titles such as these suggest remoteness and detachment. They are hollow and lack awareness of the human soul. They are accolades which resonate with those who invented them, those who live deep within a hierarchical bureaucratic world.

Saint Joseph for me is “the spice of life” as a person, who simply practiced integrity committedly everyday. He allowed inner faith to evolve in his life and in his response to God. Saint Joseph is the truly silent figure of scripture. The gospel does not record a single verse attributed to him. However, as a man guided by integrity he responded and lived his life as mission beyond words in love and service.

Saint Joseph as “the spice of life” responded to what was before him. He fulfilled his calling by faithfully and unquestioningly obeying the commands of God. He accepted responsibility for his life and actions. In simplicity Saint Joseph did what he had to do, he silently responded to his spiritual calling. There is a learning there for each of us as we respond to our calling. Do we respond to what is before us in our mission in ministry today? Do we see what is before us or are we entrapped in the regrets of the past or floating in the mist of the unfulfilled future? Saint Joseph always lived in the present, in the now of mission and responded to the present in integrity.

Saint Joseph lived a spirituality of simplicity. This same approach was adopted by Jesus when he began his public ministry. Jesus saw, He reached out, He touched, and He gazed upon the crowd and responded to what He saw. It is impossible to respond unless we see. Jesus followed the example of Joseph in noticing what was before him and in responding. This simple practice of integrity sustained Joseph and allowed him to be the spice of life. Joseph allowed those on the fringes of society to dream. Do we allow others to dream that are on the fringes of our Society? Do we engage in marginalising others who don't share our views or dreams? Are we inclusive like Saint Joseph?

Pope Francis tells us that Joseph may have been “in the shadows”, but we can help bring him to the fore by allowing his spirituality of love and service beyond words to grow and thrive. Let us not lose the essence of Saint Joseph in a sea of meaningless and obscure titles and an artificial spiritual grandiosity. Let Saint Joseph become visible in the Church by emulating his simplicity and his integrity.

The apparition at Knock took place in 1879 when our Lady appeared with Saint Joseph and Saint John the Evangelist and the Lamb of Sacrifice. It is the only major apparition in which there was no speech or any message given. The purpose of the apparition was to show solidarity with a broken people and to listen to their cries.

Saint Joseph as ever stood with those marginalised on the fringes of life. He understood that spirituality is a way of living. He understood that spirituality is beyond words. Spirituality permeates the core of our human being; this affects the way we perceive the world around us. Spirituality affects the choices we make. It is reflected in all our actions. Saint Joseph embraced life through his gift of integrity. We imitate Joseph by allowing ourselves be the spice of life in our response to others.

The key to our lives should be simplicity and integrity. The essential components to spirituality are attending, listening and integrity. Saint Joseph realised that “humility” is the art of listening to God, listening to others and listening to self. Humility involves the rejection of attempting to control. Attentive listening is the most humanising act leading to humility.

Saint Joseph accepted God’s challenge. He knew obedience simply means to listen attentively. He treasured in his heart an open-ended spirituality. He realised that spirituality must touch everything in one’s life because if it doesn’t, it touches nothing.

Saint Joseph as the spice of life leads us through integrity, to a place of simplicity where we can accept the will of God in our lives. Saint Joseph opens the way to true humility. Saint Joseph asks us to be open to the will of God in our lives by responding to what God puts before us.

How can we practice integrity in our lives as Saint Joseph did? How can we begin to practice the spirituality of seeing? How can we be the spice of life in our mission in ministry today? How can we practice the art of integrity through sharing life in abundance in our mission in ministry in 2021 and beyond?

Saint Joseph pray for us, Saint Joseph pray for us, Saint Joseph pray for us.

Denis C Hartnett mhm
Mill Hill Missionaries
Knock Shrine-Ireland