

Do Not Be Afraid, looking upon Joseph and Mary as Models of Faith

When reading the gospels for the Solemnities of Joseph, Husband of Mary and the Annunciation of the Lord, a common phrase that one reads is “Do not be afraid.” There seemed to be uncertainty on the part of Joseph and Mary, especially when they each were confronted with a request that appeared to be improbable. They most likely were taking into account the social situation of their lives, that is, the mores and the roles of men and women in their Jewish community. These requests would have gone against the grain of society at that time. Therefore they had to be reassured that saying “Yes” would lead to some good in their lives. When the angel said, “Do not be afraid,” it appeared to be the reassurance they needed. But more importantly, I believe that it was their lives of faith that contributed to their willingness to follow through with God’s requests. Joseph and Mary had great trust in God’s providence. And it had to be their deep faith that enabled them to have this trust even in times of uncertainty about their future.

It is also true for our Marianist Saints, especially our Blesseds. These men and women lived during times of uncertainty and upheaval, The French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and the Nazi Regime. They had to discern and wrestle with what God was calling them to in pursuit of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. No doubt they had some fears about what was being asked of them. But their faith commitments gave them the strength to turn their concerns over to God’s Divine Providence. No doubt, they must have looked to Joseph and Mary as prime examples of faith to assist them in their discernment and wrestling. I can imagine they regularly heard the words “Do not be afraid” in their prayers.

A couple of questions, then, are, can we follow the examples of Joseph, Mary, and our Marianist Saints when we are presented with a choice that can be difficult in our lives? Are we able to listen to the angel saying, “Do not be afraid?” Maybe looking at some quotes from our Marianist Saints can assist us.

Blessed Chaminade:

“Let us ask him (St. Joseph) for his protection, and to obtain for us the virtues which so wonderfully marked him during his life, . . . his prompt obedience, absolute and always constant to the will of heaven, . . . the holy prudence he showed in carrying out heaven’s commands; his exactitude in fulfilling his duties.” (Paragraph 429, William Joseph Chaminade: Marian Writings, Volume 2, Marianist Resource Commission, Dayton, OH, 19809, page 158)

“Since he had striking proofs every day of her great virtue, he could not conceive a suspicion against her. But as he knew nothing of the mysterious operations of the Most High, he resolved to put her away privately. . . Then an angel revealed to Joseph the ways of God, and he was only too happy to stay with his spouse and serve the mother and child.” (Paragraph 442, William Joseph Chaminade: Marian Writings, Volume 2, Marianist Resource Commission, Dayton, OH 1980, page 168)

Blessed Jakob Gapp:

“I consider myself as still belonging to the Society of Mary; I renew my vows and offer myself up through the hands of our heavenly Mother to our dear Lord. Please excuse any annoyances that I might have caused you. I have suffered difficulties, but now I am very happy. I think that I have become holier in this difficult time.” (8/13/1943 letter Fr. Jakob Gapp wrote to Fr. Franz Jung, Superior General, before his execution. See Blessed Jakob Gapp, Marianist, by Josef Levit, SM, Servant of God Series, North American Center for Marianist Studies, Dayton, OH, 1998, page 109)

Vénérable Marie Thérèse De Lamourous (through the words of Joseph Stefanelli, SM):

Yet Marie Therese was not satisfied with her rejection of the proposal. Had she not, during the terrible years of the Reign of Terror, offered herself unconditionally to God? Had not Chaminade, her director, pressed her, even from Spain, to total detachment from her own natural desires? Had he not also told her it was about time to ‘do something’ with her life? Had she not been told often enough that she did not have a vocation to the Carmelites? Did not Chaminade’s own position now tell her that perhaps this urgent invitation was indeed what God was asking, . . . that the Spirit of God was at work?” (See Mlle de Lamourous, Joseph Stefanelli, SM, Marianist Center for Marianist Studies, Dayton, OH, 1998, page 99)