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Annunciation Church, Shumway, Illinois
24 December 2008

The Nativity of the Lord
At the Vigil Mass

Dear brothers and sisters,

As we wait here in vigil in the darkness of the night, we "know that the Lord is coming to save us, and in the morning [we] shall see his glory" (Exodus 16:6-7). We await the birth of the one who is mightier than the last of the prophets (cf. Matthew 3:11); we await the birth of "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

This period of waiting is one of joyful expectation; it is the culmination of the season of Advent, a blessed and holy time. It is a time of deep and profound silence in imitation of Saint Joseph.

Joseph's role is too often passed over in our thoughts. Let us, then, turn for a moment toward this holy man, "who lived with unique intensity the period of expectation and preparation for Jesus' birth."¹ If we look to him, we will learn how to prepare ourselves for his birth.

When the angel of the Lord said to him, "do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into home," Joseph offered neither objection nor question (Matthew 1:20). Zechariah, the father of

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus* Address, 18 December 2005.

John the Baptist, doubted Gabriel's announcement of John's conception; Mary asked Gabriel for clarification; Joseph accepted as his duty and privilege the task entrusted to him: "She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). It is his silence in the presence of the mystery of Christmas that particularly strikes us.

Too often silence is seen today as a sign of confusion, weakness or loss, but this is not the case with Joseph. His "silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart and which guides his every thought and action."² His silence is a sign of his knowledge, strength and the gift he has received.

It is a silence thanks to which Joseph, in union with Mary, watches over the Word of God, known through the Sacred Scriptures, continuously comparing it with the events of the life of Jesus; a silence woven of constant prayer, a prayer of blessing the Lord, of the adoration of his holy will and of unreserved entrustment to his providence.³

It is a silence born of awe and wonder, one that we would do well to emulate.

Indeed, before so great a mystery as the birth of the only Son of God, of God made man, what else is there to do but kneel down in humble and silent adoration? What words could possibly

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

be uttered in the presence of the Divine Child? For this reason that ancient and beloved hymn sings,

Let all mortal flesh keep silence
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth
our full homage to demand.

This is the mindset of the one who awaits in silence, with Blessed Joseph, the birth of the Christ Child.

In these last few hours before the birth of the Messiah, let us heed the plea of our Holy Father:

Let us allow ourselves to be "filled" with Saint Joseph's silence! In a world that is often too noisy, that encourages neither recollection nor listening to God's voice, we are in such deep need of it... [L]et us cultivate inner recollection in order to welcome and cherish Jesus in our own lives.⁴

Let each of us this night approach the manger of Bethlehem in humble silence, ready to adore the Holy Infant when he is born.

Amen! A merry Christmas to you all!

⁴ *Ibid.*