

Greetings to you! Today is Labor Day or May Day and so we remember Joseph the carpenter. We give thanks to God for all the workers around the world as we set apart this day honoring those who work. Joseph was a carpenter by profession and carpenters were usually very hard working people and more so when electronic equipment was not available for them. Joseph is mentioned in Matthew, Luke and John and in Mark Jesus is referred to as the 'son of a carpenter'. Joseph is only mentioned in the birth and childhood stories about Jesus. Matthew gives the most detailed information, recounting that when Mary was betrothed to Joseph (1:18), she was found to be pregnant, and Joseph, being a "just man and unwilling to put her to shame," was going to divorce her (1:19), when an angel appeared and told him that the child was conceived of the Holy Spirit (1:20). When Joseph awoke, he took Mary as his wife (1:24).

Joseph was the husband of Mary and the legal father of Jesus though not the biological father. When Joseph knew that Mary was pregnant he did not want to divorce her publicly so that she would not be put to public disgrace. Matthew records for us that Joseph was a righteous man - one who was right with God by keeping all the just requirements of the law and one who was right with all his neighbors. The righteous behavior of Joseph stands out clearly when he is genuinely concerned about Mary when he finds out she is pregnant though they have not been married. The angel of the Lord reassured Joseph that the baby in Mary's womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that Joseph should accept her. Joseph was willing to obey God as he heeded to the instruction of the angel and took Mary home. The two things that stand out about Joseph was that he was righteous and obedient. The challenges of his life to us are to see whether we too are righteous before God and others and whether we are obedient to God.

Secondly, we see Joseph the carpenter as a worker. Joseph was a carpenter by profession and the people from his own hometown find it difficult to believe in Jesus. Therefore they ask "isn't this the carpenter's son?" Joseph was someone who was used to hard work as a carpenter using all his energy to cut the wood and having an eye for detail and measurements. He was someone who did not shirk away from manual labor. Joseph in many ways was reflecting the image and character of God as a worker. Work is part of God's plan for each one of us. However because of the fall, work has become toilsome and painful.

Work has to be done as an offering to the Lord. Wherever God has placed us we need to make sure that we do our work to the best of our ability to make sure that it is a pleasing offering to God. Work should not just be used for climbing the next corporate ladder or how to make much more money. Work has to always be seen as part of God's delegated responsibility to human beings.

The third thing we see about Joseph is that he was a person in full communion with God. We see the presence of God with Joseph right from the beginning. The angel initially reassured him to take Mary as his wife because what she conceived was from the Holy Spirit. He was told he would have a son and to name him Jesus because he would save people from their sins. He was later on warned by another angel of Herod's plan to kill Jesus and asked them to move to Egypt. In all this we see that Jesus was in constant communion with God.

The challenge for us this morning is how do we treat our work? Do we work only when our bosses are watching over us or do we work as though it is an offering to God? Work is a God given responsibility to each one of us. God himself is a worker and therefore working is part of what it means to be part of God's image and likeness. On this Labor Day/ May Day we give thanks to God once again for the gift of work that he has given to each one of us. May we as his children always give of our best wherever God has placed us.