

ADVENT SUNDAY IV "A"
DECEMBER 21/22, 2019

The 1952 movie *The Quiet Man*, featuring Iowa native John Wayne as Sean Thornton, begins with Sean leaving his home in America to return to his birthplace in Ireland. After accidentally killing an opponent in the boxing ring, Thornton decides to leave America and, hopefully, buy his family's homestead and live a "quiet life" in his native Ireland. In doing so he runs afoul of Will Danahar, who long coveted the property. Things become complicated when Will's fiery sister, Mary Kate, begins a romance with Sean and Will refuses to hand over her dowry. Of course a physical fight ensues, but by his restraint Sean is able to settle the matter with Will and marry Mary Kate.

What has this to do with the liturgy today? A central character in today's liturgy is St. Joseph. This is the only Sunday in the three year cycle that Joseph figures prominently. In fact, apart from mention again in St. Matthew's account of the flight into Egypt to escape the massacre of the infants by King Herod and St. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple 40 days after his birth, and the account of his parents finding him in the Temple after being separated from them during the Passover celebration at about age 12, we hear nothing more of Joseph. While Mary does speak occasionally in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, no words are ever uttered by Joseph. Yet Joseph, I believe, is equally a model of faith and discipleship on a par with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Joseph is the Scriptures "*Quiet Man*."

Like Sean Thornton, Joseph was a man of great physical strength. Being a carpenter he would have employed it for arduous work of lifting and loading logs, cutting and planing the logs into board lengths, framing buildings and assembling furniture. But Scripture, especially our Gospel reading today, focuses on Joseph's real strength—his quiet faith, his firm adherence to the message of God given him in a dream and his unquestioned readiness to, like Mary, let God's will in him be done.

Today's Gospel is the conclusion of the opening of St. Matthew's Gospel, to use a contemporary example is the "Ancestry.com" genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham and

ending with Joseph. One of those ancestors is the patriarch Jacob's youngest son, Joseph of the multi-colored coat fame, who experienced God speaking to him in dreams and who became the savior of the Hebrew people in Egypt.

While the story in the Gospel lays out the annunciation of God's plan of human salvation to Joseph in a dream, and Joseph's (like Mary's) immediate response, I suspect the reality may have been a bit more complex. Like Mary, Joseph may have well wondered, "Why me?" and "How can this be?" and "What's my life going to be like if I say 'yes' to this?" Joseph's "yes" did cost him—no doubt the tongues of the town gossips of Nazareth wagging about Joseph accepting Mary as his wife after her "shame" and supposed fornication became public when the law would have given him the right to turn Mary out and have her stoned to death for her sin. Then there was the journey to Bethlehem during the late pregnancy of Mary and the birth of the promised child in a barn. How would he care and provide for both Mary and the baby as a homeless family? Then shortly afterward Joseph must lead his family as immigrants to a foreign country to flee a government sponsored policy of persecution and death. Where would he find work, housing, and food for his family in this foreign land? Then, some years later, following another dream message, emigrating from Egypt and returning the family home to Nazareth again. As father, it was Joseph's primary public responsibility to instruct his son in the faith and religious traditions of Judaism by taking him to the local synagogue on the Sabbath. Through it all, Joseph, like Mary, would have to utter his quiet "yes" again and again, relying on nothing more than his trust that the message of God he had received in a dream through an angel would be true to his word. Joseph, the quiet man, lived a life of quiet strength of faithfulness to God. While a model of faith for all of us, in particular I commend St. Joseph to all the men of the parish as a mentor.

Saint Joseph, quiet man of heaven, intercede with your Son, Emmanuel, "God-with-us" to give us the strength to, like you, say "yes" to God's call and the quiet sure strength of faith to carry it out in our daily lives as you did. Amen.

*22 December, 2019
Father Jim Secora*