

Column031923

Companions on the Journey

March 19, 2023

Dear Friends,

Today is the date of the annual feast of Saint Joseph, husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus. You all know the story. He was betrothed to Mary and the archangel Gabriel came announcing to her that she was to be the mother of the long expected Holy One of God, the Messiah. We know him, of course, as Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. Joseph decides to bow out of this relationship quietly. If God has chosen Joseph's intended to be the mother of the Messiah, then Joseph gets the message and is ready to move on.

But God does not want Joseph to move out of the picture. God wants Joseph very much to be in the picture. But not in the way that Joseph thought his relationship with Mary would proceed. But Joseph is neither the first man nor will he be the last man to whom something very unusual has happened right around his wedding day, an even that will change everything.

I have seen a couple get married even after they learned of the presence of a very virulent cancer in the spouse to be. I have seen tragedy strike in the form of an accident which leaves the injured party paralyzed for the rest of their life. Everything that was going to be now has suddenly changed and now a whole new attitude and a very fresh approach is called for. And I have seen, with the grace of God, couples rise to the occasion but in a way vastly different from what they thought they were entering into.

I remember Father Bill Atkinson, an Augustinian priest, who taught for over thirty years at Monsignor Bonner High School. While an Augustinian seminarian he was in a sledding accident that left him a quadriplegic. Usually this kind of paralysis would disenfranchise such a man from being ordained because he could not serve in priestly ministry. But the Augustinians decided that they would persevere because they believed he had a calling to serve in the priesthood. They organized classmates and other Augustinians to help him with every aspect of his life from his most personal needs to his public ministry. He learned how to flex his neck muscles in such a way that they could send an impulse to a motorized wheelchair, and he could maneuver the halls of school.

There were students at Bonner who volunteered to help him with everything from preparing his classes to marking his papers. He carried a full teaching load for all those years. He had a van rigged to his abilities and could drive. He was a good priest. A holy priest. So holy in fact that the cause of his canonization has been introduced and accepted by the Congregation of Saints in Rome. He needs two miracles. If you have an illness that needs a miracle, pray to him for his intercession.

Bill Atkinson was like Saint Joseph. He did not speak a great deal and we have none of Joseph's words in the Scriptures. But somehow, we manage to have a sense of the man. Who he is. How he acted. What he did and what he did without. Pray to him. Do you need help in becoming a good man? Pray to him. Ask his help. Do you need to find a spouse who can be your Joseph or Joseph for your daughter or granddaughter? Pray to him. He is quiet. But he had his dreams and God rewarded him by placing him in such an influential role in the raising of Jesus as a young lad and then into adult manhood. Pray to Saint Joseph for the virtue of purity (A truly pure heart), a caring soul, a steadfast faith.

Saint Joseph stay with me living; stay with me dying. Yes. Joseph. And thank you for giving us the Lord Jesus as did your beloved spouse, Mary.

Peace,
Msgr. McHenry