

Message for Thursday, March 19, 2020

Today is St. Joseph's Day, also called the Feast of St. Joseph, in the Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. Today those faith communities celebrate the faithful husband of Mary and step-father of Jesus. Not surprisingly, today is also Father's Day in many predominantly Catholic countries, such as Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

What a cruel irony then, that today our UCC Lenten Devotional, ***Deliver Us***, highlights a scripture passage that finds Joseph frazzled and a bit befuddled after searching high and low for the young Jesus before finally "finding" him in the temple:

When his parents saw Jesus [at the temple], they were astonished; and his mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety." Jesus said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Parent's house?" Luke 2:48-49 (NRSV)

That sounds like a pinch of, "I can't believe you couldn't figure this out," and a dash of "I know you're not my real father anyway." Ouch! It's easy to sympathize with Joseph in this story. Many of us have been brought up short in an encounter with a precocious youth, but then I started to see this story in a different light. Joseph might have said, "No, I'm not your real father, but I thought you were lost and I wanted to make sure you were safe. I thought you might be afraid and I wanted to comfort you. I thought you might be lonely, and I wanted to let you know we would be here with you." In other words, I started to see this story in the context of our "limit your gatherings and keep your social distance" world.

It's in the spirit of Joseph on his feast day that we begin this ministry of trying to maintain a sense of community in a time of social isolation. No, we're not your real kin, but we're your brothers and sisters just the same. We want you to feel safe and comfortable and to know that we're here and thinking about you even if we can't be with you. We'll try to write you every day, just to remind you.

*Gentle Jesus, if we're not able to go to your Parent's house, will you meet us where we are? And please give strength and courage to Italian fathers on their Father's Day. Be their strength, and ours, as we weather this storm. Amen.*

God bless you.

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