

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here in Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Professor Francis Clooney, Parkman Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School. Please rise as you are able and body and spirit for our responsive reading found in your black Psalter, Psalm 91. Psalm 91, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

Congregation:

"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence."

Congregation:

"He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day."

Congregation:

"Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Congregation:

"They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

Congregation:

"Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Francis X Clooney S.J.:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Francis X Clooney S.J.:

Today, in my Roman Catholic tradition, is the Feast of Saint Joseph. Hence, this gospel reading from Matthew, "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Her husband-to-be, Joseph, was a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace. So he planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.' And when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took Mary as his wife. He had no marital relations with her until she had born a son, and he named the boy Jesus."

Joseph is a remarkable figure in the Catholic and Christian tradition, a figure who appears in just about every church. There's a statue of Joseph somewhere, a known figure who speaks no words in the New Testament. He is there, but he's silent. He is the worker. He is the carpenter. He's the defender and protector of Mary and then of Jesus, always slightly to the side and slightly in the background. He's faced with challenges even in the little reading that we heard today. He's a good man, a pious man. And the woman he's about to marry, he finds that she is pregnant already before they are together. And he thinks of sending her home quietly, but he has dreams. And the dream says to him, "Do not put her away. Take her." And he accepts this fact that he cannot understand and takes Mary into his own home.

He's forced by the census of the Romans to travel with his pregnant wife to be married. They find their way to Bethlehem. And like many of people throughout the ages, there is no place for them to stay. There is no inn. There is no home. There are no friends. And they end up moving into a stable. And as we all know, the baby is born in a manger. The homeless Jesus, cared for by his father, Joseph, no room in the inn. And then Herod decides to kill the baby and sends his soldiers to slaughter all the children under two years of age. And Joseph is told in another dream, "Take the child and His mother and flee." And how many migrants and refugees have fled in our time and place? "The violence is coming, run off in the night, leave before you get killed." And Joseph takes Mary and the baby and flees into the desert, and by tradition, goes all the way to Egypt.

And so they live as foreigners in a foreign land. They don't know the language. They don't know the culture. And yet Joseph holds them together and keeps them as one. Hardly anything else is said about Joseph in the gospels. Again, he speaks no words. We learned later on that he was a carpenter. He worked with his hands. And yet, in some ways, the church has, throughout the tradition, seen him as a model because he's always on the edge. He's always the person who doesn't speak on his own, but he is always near to the Lord. He is there with Jesus as he grows up. He shows him how to be a boy, how to

be a man. He's there with Mary, his wife, silent, reliable, working with his hands, always in the right place when he is needed. He has been an attractive figure throughout the ages.

We know that Teresa of Avila, when she was seriously ill early in her life, she was cured in part by praying to Saint Joseph. And she was convinced, and she says this to her sisters again and again, "When you are in trouble, when you are on the edge, pray to Saint Joseph, and he will answer you." Inspired by the words of Teresa, Dorothy Day, when she founded the Catholic Worker, she announced that the first house of the Catholic Worker would be Saint Joseph House. And apparently, when she was helping people find their way in New York City looking for a place to stay, she would say, "As we walk around the streets of the Lower East Side, let's keep praying to Saint Joseph. And if we don't find the place, we'll pray louder. And if we don't find the place, we'll pray louder and louder because Joseph will have to answer us and find you a place. And if you're an unwed mother, Joseph knows what that's about. And if you're persecuted and a migrant, Joseph knows what that's about."

So Dorothy Day, again and again, says, "If you want to live in the realities of our troubled world, there is Joseph to help us." The liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, a great figure still living in Latin America, writes a book, Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society. And I think the example of Joseph, to draw this to a close, is really an example for us that we can be like that, that we may not be God, we may not be the mother of God, we may not be center stage, but in our own way, doing what we can, having no eloquent words of our own. We are there when we are needed. We are serving the people and people in trouble. I'll conclude this little reflection with a prayer from a missionary, Constantine Beschi, who was in South India in the early 18th century. Somehow, he managed, about the Joseph who spoke no words, to write a poem of 4,000 verses. And I will not read all 4,000 verses to you. I'll read three of them as a prayer.

Even when he was young, in wisdom, Joseph surpassed every silent sage, that all might experience the fruit surpassing every other. He spoke a word sweeter than the finest music, more lovely than beauty itself. Such was his eloquence in what he did. And his heart was a compassion, rare even among ancient ascetics. He did good for everyone in this world, the earth, and sea. Even to those who acted cruelly toward him, this good man always gave assistance. Love is the true home for those truly alive. For those without love, there is nothing but body sure to die, so he thought. Joseph became a safe haven, full of joy and love, a help to all those who suffer in this world. Saint Joseph, we pray this day that in our troubles, our own troubles, the troubles of our neighbors, the troubles of the homeless, the troubles of the migrants, the troubles of unweighted mothers, that you may be with us, helping us to do our own work, working with our hands in our best own way, as you did so long ago. Saint Joseph, pray for us. Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

All who are able, please rise and let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, saying...

Congregation:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now, let us sing together hymn number 302, My God, I Love Thee, Not Because, found in your hymnal.

Choir:  
(singing)

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Congregation:  
Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:  
Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:  
Thanks be to God.