

Our joyful Christmas celebration is followed by the threat of political leaders. Unjust, genocidal violence is implemented upon the people of Israel. The Holy Family flees to a foreign land. Today the Gospel describes a story of immigration, violence, genocide and blood. As John said in his Gospel, "(The Word) came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept Him." The gift of Christ is, from the very first, resisted and rejected violently. Unfortunately, some people in our world still believe that war, violence, genocide, hatred, ecocide, and death, are the proper responses to all our problems. The Roman King Herod and all the powerful people in Jerusalem were troubled when they heard what the Scriptures had said about the New King. Herod believes in the prophecies and orders a bloody massacre of all male babies in the area. This is just one of the thousands of horribly and racist attacks ordered against vulnerable people down through the ages.

Ironically, in our current world, some Christians who read the Bible and believe in the prophecies contained in it also promote and justify all kinds of violence against others to keep their social, political or economic powers protected, to maintain the order of a nation, and to silence the voice of those who have different ideas. Why? "(The Word) came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept Him."

So what is the proper human response to a world broken by hatred, violence and fear? A week ago, The Church called us to reflect on Joseph, the righteous man, who chose to love Mary, and ignored the official laws and prescriptions by which Mary must be condemned to death. Today, again, the Church calls us to ponder about St. Joseph and his mission as the protector of Mary and Baby Jesus. Joseph points the way. Joseph is totally obedient. In a dream, the angel gives specific instructions, and Joseph obeys what God commands him to do. He takes the child and his mother and flees to Egypt, and there, he is supposed to await more instructions. Joseph obeys God. The Holy Family goes to a foreign country where people speak different languages and have a different culture. They become refugees, immigrants, like many of our brothers and sisters in this parish are. In another dream, Joseph will be asked to go back and make a home in Nazareth.

So, what does all of this have to do with us? We can focus on silent and obedient Joseph. He obeys God's Word. He didn't understand why innocents were condemned to unjust death. He had never been to and knew nothing of Egypt. Maybe he had plans to settle down elsewhere other than Nazareth. But Joseph obeys. He trusts God's Word. He trusts that even though the news is sad and very bad, even though he has no power to control or influence bloody world events, even though he is vulnerable to the machinations of these evil powers, Joseph trusts. He knows that somehow, somehow, God is at work behind the headlines. Joseph obeys out of a quiet conviction that God would somehow make a way when things in life seem to have no way. Unfortunately, we still have fearful forces threatening people in our world. We have bad news coming from all the corners of the world. And Joseph, without saying a single word, becomes a great example for those of us who believe that in the midst of so much injustice and suffering, God refuses to abandon us to our own devices: We are actually to live with obedient trust as Joseph did.

We have many people in this community who, like Mary and Joseph, have left their lands, and come to the United States of America, seeking better conditions in life. Each person has a story. Each person has a dream. They cook, wash dishes and clean in restaurants. They work hard in construction areas, or in the fields picking the crops. Some of them are an integral part of this community of St. Gabriel. I invite you to pray for them. I challenge you to hear at least one person telling you his or her story. A huge majority of immigrants here in America are fleeing the wrath of contemporary Herods. Immigrants will not disappear from the face of the earth: With the many kinds of violence against the vulnerable and the challenges of climate change, many people are actually forced to leave their lands and rebuild their lives in different places. And here in America, we can make a huge difference in both ways, by becoming new versions of King Herod, or by being obedient to what God commands us to do in our families, in our communities and in the world.

Joseph teaches us today, that when we obey God's Word, we can make a huge difference in our families and in the salvation of others. But the Gospel also tells us, that when we fear to lose our privileges, we can become like King Herod. May we all in our silence, follow the example of Joseph. May the leaders of nations help us build up societies based on justice, brotherly love, and mercy. May Jesus, Mary and Joseph, intercede for our families who go through so much fear and rejection right now.